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State Patronage of Burmese Traditional Music

Gavin Duncan Douglas

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree: Ethnomusicology

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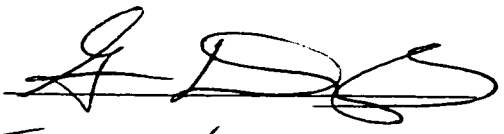
Signature 

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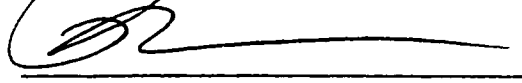

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Abstract

State Patronage of Burmese Traditional Music

Gavin Duncan Douglas

Chair of the Supervisory Committee: Associate Professor Ter Ellingson

Ethnomusicology

In the past decade the ruling junta of the Union of Myanmar has begun several large-scale projects aimed at preserving cultural heritage and forging national unity. These include; the formation of the University of Culture (offering degrees in music, theatre, and sculpture), the genesis of an annual performing arts competition, and the implementation of a standardization project designed to unify and notate a five hundred year old oral tradition. Each project enjoys ample government funding and significant attention in the state press at a time when Burma (Myanmar) is suffering great economic hardship.

This dissertation examines these cultural projects in light of the present dictatorship's quest for legitimacy. It will be shown that this state patronage is used to

further certain national and international political ends and only partially for support of the tradition and its musicians. Multiple and contradictory perspectives of professional musicians, some of whom benefit from the above projects and some of whom are marginalized, will be addressed revealing a patronage system that is radically changing the traditional music of the country.

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This project would not be possible without the support and encouragement of numerous people. Though the influences of many friends and colleagues can be found in the following pages I take full responsibility for any errors or omissions found in this dissertation and also for the conclusions drawn.

I would first like to thank the Ford Foundation for their support with a Northwest Consortium research grant with which I conducted most of my fieldwork.

I am in debt to many friends and colleagues throughout the United States, Canada, and Burma for their support and encouragement. Thanks to Bill Galloway, Mark Renner, Jamie Cunningham, Kym Belden, Jennifer Leehey, Martin Platt, Jen Kulik, Rob MacNaughton, James Whetzel, Amy Lindsey, the dissertation support group of Laurel Sercombe and Steve Nickerson, the students of Mus 445—Music of Burma, and ethnomusicology students at both the University of Texas and the University of Washington, Rick Heizman for many introductions, and the SEASSI Burmese classes of 1996 and 1997.

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My teachers in Burma taught me more than I could ever include in a dissertation. Their patients with my foreign ears and willingness to share their personal experiences with me made this work possible. Thanks to Sandaya U Yee Nwe, Hne U Mya Gyi, Saung Saya Gyi Inle Myint Maung, Sein Kyaw Kyaw Naing, Saing Saya U Tun Kyi, Sandaya U Hla Htut, and U Tin Yee. My largest debt of gratitude in Burma goes to Gita Lulin Maung Ko Ko and his family without whom my understanding of Burmese music would be a fraction of what it is. U Ko Ko and Daw San San Myint graciously invited me into their home and gave me a family.

Other thanks go to the many musicians and music scholars that I recorded, videotaped, interviewed and played music with: U Tin Ngwe, U Khin Maung Tin, U Wan Tin, Ko Tut, U Zaw Win Maung, Sein Ko Lay, U Soe Ngwe, U Tun Myint, Dr. U Tin Maung Kyi, Daw Yi Yi Than, U Ba Teh, Gita Net Than U Ohn Lwin, Zawgyi Pyan U Maung Hla, Ko Kyaw Myo Naing, Mandalay Sein Kyaw Sin, Sein La Myein, Ko Nyunt Win,U Hla Sunn, Yangon Sein Ba Maw, A-1 Soe Myint, Tin Tin Myat, Sein Kyauk Sein, U Thein Han Gyi. Other friends contributed enormously to my enjoyment and understanding of Burma: Ko Aung Soe Min, The Family of U Aung Pe, The Family of Ko Myat Min, Ko Moses, Ko Su, all my friends and family at Ruby Inn, and special thanks to Ko Du for his invaluable assisstance and friendship. Additionally, there are

many individuals that I met in Burma who offered valuable insights into the realm of musical politics. Many of these people shall remain unnamed to protect their identity though their willingness to talk with me was greatly appreciated. Thank you.

The molding of this work into the present dissertation was accomplished under that guidance of Ter Ellingson, Charles Keyes and Philip Schuyler. I express a warm thanks to each for their unique contributions and encouragement and for pushing me in valuable directions that I would not have pursued alone.

My largest debt of gratitude goes to the unremitting support of my family. Burma is a long way from southern Ontario, yet the encouragement from my parents and siblings to pursue my goals was unending. My grandmothers, despite their unfamiliarity with things Burmese, were always encouraging and unconditional in their support. They passed away while I was working on this project and it is to them that this work is dedicated.

Dedication

To Janet Duncanson and Marion Douglas

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION:

POLITICAL CRISIS AND STATE PATRONAGE OF TRADITIONAL MUSIC

> For, indeed, what are a man's political activities but the expression in action of his ideas of the past?
> H. G. Wells
>
> Politics means your everyday life... It is how you eat, sleep, work and live, with which politics is concerned. You may not think about politics. But politics thinks about you.
> Aung San

Since the early 1990s, Burma's[1] military dictatorship has invested an unprecedented amount of energy into reviving and supporting the traditional arts of the country. While the country struggles with numerous crises—including near economic collapse, numerous civil wars in the borderlands, a massive drug problem, and a popularly elected leader kept under house arrest and denied recognition—the

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[1] After the 1988 demonstrations the ruling generals renamed the country Myanmar. The name of the country has been highly contested and many within the pro-democracy movement ask that the old name "Burma" be used. In recent years the confusion surrounding the political meaning of either of these

government has instituted many projects designed to revive traditional culture and recreate a particular, government-sanctioned, view of the past. Through these projects, Burma's classical music tradition, with roots in the pre-colonial royal court, has assumed a prominent position in Burmese cultural identity politics. This project asks: why has this government, near universally regarded as illegitimate, gone to such great lengths to revive selective traditions from the royal court? How does government patronage of the arts in general, and music, in particular, further the goals of the ruling junta? In exploring these questions I will also reveal some significant changes that Burma's music culture is presently undergoing. While career opportunities for classical musicians are more plentiful than in years past, the level of direct government involvement and control of that music has also grown.

BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

Since the popular people's uprising of 1988, Burma has struggled for financial and political stability. The democracy summer of 1988, when students, monks, and civilians took to the streets to demonstrate against their dictatorial government, was a reaction to numerous economic and social problems brought forth by the Ne Win regime of 1962-88. These demonstrations were a response to a serious decline in

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names has become increasingly complex. While I use the term "Burma" predominantly, I imply no

education, infrastructure and skills which had resulted in a fall from one of the most promising and prosperous of the post-colonial Asian nations to a 1987 classification by the United Nations as one of the world's ten least developed countries (LDC). As tensions rose throughout the summer martial law was declared on August 3, 1988. Several days later, on August 8 1988, students, monks and civilians initiated a national strike to demand political change. Their request for democracy was answered by the military regime with numerous killings and mass imprisonment.[2] While failing to overthrow the regime, the uprising did precipitate a very public crisis of legitimacy that forced the ruling generals to reevaluate their position. To resolve this crisis, the army promised a democratic election in May of 1990.

Hubristically overestimating their own popularity, the ruling generals of the National Unity Party held the election as promised, but only won ten seats against the 392 seats[3] procured by the National League for Democracy (NLD) led by Aung San Suu Kyi, despite her being held under house arrest for several months prior to the election. Desperate to retain control, the army stalled the transfer of power to the NLD and eventually determined the need for a new constitution prior to any change of government. They announced the formation of a National Convention at which hand-picked members would write the new constitution. Today, the National Convention remains stalled with a new constitution incomplete and the army still in control. Aung

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specific political agenda.

San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest in 1995, yet since that time, her movement inside the country has been highly restricted.

Throughout this project, I will not attempt to document these atrocities or re-interpret this crisis, but rather I intend to explore the ongoing establishment and re-creation of legitimacy and authority. Specifically, I wish to show how this legitimacy is procured through music. Traditional music is directly associated with the authority of the royal court. Selective revival of this royal court culture in the present day recreates this historically situated power for use in contemporary politics.

Discussion and analysis of Burma's military rule, the subsequent uprisings of 1988, and the present political tensions are documented in many well-researched reports. Most notable among these are recent volumes of academic articles including *Burma: Prospects for a Democratic Future* edited by Robert I. Rotberg (1998), *The Challenge of Change in a Divided Society* edited by Peter Carey (1997), and *Burma: Political Economy Under Military Rule* edited by Robert H. Taylor (2001), as well as the Open Society Institute's journal *Burma Debate* and a multitude of journalist publications most readily found on BurmaNet News www.burmanet.org/. The Burmese government's own interpretation of recent political history can be found on the Union of Myanmar website at <www.myanmar.com>. In particular, the

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[2] Estimates range from 1500 to 6000 people killed.

government perspective on many controversial political topics can be found in the on-line newspaper *The New Light of Myanmar* www.myanmar.com/nlm/, and in a monthly journal, *Myanmar Perspectives* www.myanmar.com/gov/index.html.

Over the past thirteen years the military regime has tenuously retained power despite multiple small uprisings within the country and overwhelming condemnation by the international community. The ruling junta, known as the SLORC (the State Law and Order Restoration Council) until 1997, when they changed their name to the SPDC (State Peace and Development Council), has managed to retain power despite an obvious crisis of credibility. Where then, do these rulers obtain their authority? To what do they refer as the source of their legitimacy? The SLORC/SPDC regime is unable to claim support through the populace at large according to the results of the 1990 national election, they are necessarily reluctant to make direct public associations with the Ne Win regime of 1962-88 from which they received their training, and they are even incapable of appealing to the founder of the Burmese army and engineer of Burmese independence, General Aung San, the father of NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi.[4] How, then, have they retained power? How have they managed to create,

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[3] 82 percent of the seats.

[4] Throughout the dissertation I frequently refer to the "SLORC/SPDC" regime as one body, since many of the policies and personnel have been continuous. Singular reference to the "SLORC" or the "SPDC" will refer to the government at a specific time; before or after Nov 1997.

establish, and maintain their positions of power? Though much of this control has been maintained through military force much has been asserted in a subtler, hegemonic manner. Those that hold power do not necessarily hold authority. The Burmese regime holds power, but yet also has gone to great lengths to establish authority.

Authority and legitimacy are established in a multitude of ways in political systems throughout the world. Music and traditional arts are always socially and politically situated, and Burma/Myanmar is no exception. This project will explore the relationship between musical practice, state patronage and the creation and manifestation of political authority. The effects that such patronage bears on performance practice and transmission within the music tradition will also be addressed. Since 1993 the ruling government of the Union of Myanmar has created several projects designed to reinvigorate patriotism, unify the country, and ultimately establish and maintain their right to rule. Included in this political strategy is a tremendous amount of attention directed towards traditional music and arts. Various newly developed projects include a national performing arts competition, a university of traditional arts, notations of the traditional musical repertoire, new museums, academic conferences on traditional culture, revivals of festivals, reconstruction of historic landmarks, and a wealth of others. All of these phenomena enjoy a patronage unparalleled in 20th century Burmese cultural politics. Why, at a time of intense political crisis and economic insecurity, does this threatened government institute a multitude of projects designed to celebrate traditional culture? What end do projects

such as these serve? How do these projects simultaneously facilitate both a subjugation of the masses and the construction of authority for those in power?

This inquiry into state patronage of music and its role in national politics will focus on three new cultural projects that are of great significance to the music tradition, all of which were initiated in the early 1990s. Each of these undertakings is designed to increase the national and international profile of Burma's traditional music within tightly controlled parameters designed by the top leaders of the military regime. These projects, consequently, have far reaching effects on the music culture of the country, on how musicians live and work, and on how the tradition is interpreted. The three projects that concern this study include a national performing arts competition drawing thousands of contestants and hundreds of judges from throughout the country, patronized daily by multiple personnel at the highest levels of the government and heavily documented in the national news media. Secondly, the creation of the University of Culture, offering degrees in theater, music and sculpture has a similar nationalist agenda. This university has prospered at a time when post-secondary education in the country has been in crisis. A third project that intersects with the above two in numerous ways is an ambitious endeavor to standardize and notate the entire repertoire of orally transmitted classical and modern classical songs. This project aspires to create definitive song versions of a varied oral tradition and document each in Western staff notation.

In the minds of some people, these projects are resurrecting the beauty of the royal court; for others, they are destroying the very essence of that heritage. These projects, variously interpreted and contested by the multiple groups of people that interact and engage with them, have multiple meanings. The appropriation of salient and powerful symbols that run emotionally deep throughout the public are ultimately effective for the commandeering of tradition and the establishment of political influence. Rulers, musicians, and the public at large each orient and define themselves with, against, and through different understandings of tradition. Tradition here is something negotiated and created, as multiple social forces within Burma/Myanmar reach toward a modern and developed nation, albeit with very different ideas of what form that should take. This project seeks to answer how this is possible through music and what are its effects. Why is traditional music central to the nation-building project of the SLORC/SPDC government? Why is it more central now than fifteen years ago? How do rulers empower themselves through a symbolic association with traditional culture? And how do the above projects serve to organize people?

ARRIVING IN THE FIELD

During my first visit to Burma in January of 1998, I was struck by the types of performance opportunities available, and also the types that were not available, to musicians and audiences. Public concerts of Burmese classical music alone are rare. Live performances are, rather, most often part of theatrical events, *pwes*, that combine music with dancing, acting, singing, and comedy in a full multitude of artistic forms. Such events are most commonly found at any of the many festivals, where all-night-long variety shows are held amidst vendors, games, rides, fortune-tellers, and food. To appeal to a contemporary audience, these types of performances include modern-day 'International' music styles, and tend to avoid the austere classical traditions drawn from the court. Performances of the courtly classical music, on the other hand, will most likely be found in small, intimate house gatherings of limited size.

In recent years, public opportunities for classical performances appear to have grown, as sponsorship of national television and theatrical events has increased. Post-1988 Burma has also increased its number of musical and cultural ambassadors as troupes of musicians and actors are frequently being sent throughout Asia on goodwill missions. Tours to the West are slowly increasing but are still rare.[5]

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[5] The last full *saing waing* musical troupe to travel in the United States was led by U Sein Chit Ti in 1977. Visits from solo musicians and dancers or very small troupes have occurred several times since the early 1990s.

Incumbent on many of these artists and performances is a nationalist patriotism that permeates all of the new ventures. According to the state press, the primary duty of all artists is to foster national patriotism. This responsibility is often framed as a cultural defense against dangerous incursions from the West. The following excerpt drawn from an article entitled "For Enabling Youths to Appreciate Myanmar Performing Arts" written by government journalist U Pe Than, is taken from the Sunday Supplement of the English language daily, the *New Light of Myanmar*.[6] It is representative of daily articles, editorials and features that highlight the role of artists in the construction of the nation state. This particular piece is directed at the education of Myanmar youth.

> ...Today, it is necessary for defense capability to be dynamic and national solidarity must be strong as required in defending the mother nation. Likewise, it is specially necessary in the cultural sector to have a strong cultural immunity and to be able to prevent infiltration of alien cultures. Only when patriotic spirit and national pride is dynamic and high, and only when national prestige and tradition can be preserved and safeguarded will it be possible to truly serve the national interests of the entire Myanmar people.

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[6] The *New Light of Myanmar* is an English-language version of the Burmese-language daily *Myanma Alin*, and has a circulation of approximately 24,000. With the exception of slightly more international coverage it is quite similar in style and content to *Myanma Alin*. The online version <www.myanmar.com/nlm> is abridged, yet retains many articles intact. These newspapers are government controlled with strict censorship laws (see Allott 1994, Allott 1993). Though critiques of

> In this context, all artistes are to strive hard collectively by means of our own immune system of Myanmar artistry so that Myanmar society is not infiltrated by decadent music called culture based on vagabond individual wandering ways and wanton alien customs and modes of dress that are trying to enter by business doors and cultural doors.
>
> —*The New Light of Myanmar* November 15, 1998

Articles like the above appeared daily in newspapers and magazines throughout my stay, and forced from me many questions about the role of tradition in the nation's politics. What was the nature of this relationship between tradition and politics such that tradition is called upon as a form of national defense?

The research for this project was undertaken during two trips to Burma in 1998 and 1999. During my stay, I lived primarily in Rangoon, and occasionally traveled upcountry to Mandalay, Taunggyi, and other places accessible to foreigners.[7] During my first visit, I worked most closely with the eminent composer and pianist Gita Lulin

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activities and other news items are rare, these newspapers do give some impression of the government line on various events as well as different propaganda techniques (see Chapter Two).

[7] Though the government is slowly opening up various parts of the country, travel outside of the central core (Rangoon-Mandalay-Pagan-Taunggyi) is somewhat restricted.

Maung Ko Ko, or U Ko Ko. For a period of three months, I met with U Ko Ko on a daily basis, at which time he taught me the basic theory and history of Burmese traditional music from his perspective. Much of my study at this point was concerned with learning how to differentiate various genres and key pieces of the canon. He also shared with me many of his own experiences of working as a performing musician and composer throughout the past fifty years. During this visit, I also spent a great deal of time in recording studios watching and videotaping various traditional music activities being recorded for movies, television, or state projects.

I returned later that year for a ten-month stay, whereupon U Ko Ko introduced me to several established musicians, with whom I then studied. I proceeded to engage in private lessons for several months at a time on the *pattala* (xylophone) with Sandaya U Yee Nwe, *hne* (oboe) with U Mya Gyi, *saung* (harp) with Inle Myint Maung and *patt waing* (drum circle) with Sein Kyaw Naing. While studying multiple instruments does not lead to excellence on any of them, this method exposed me to multiple teaching styles and multiple interpretations of the same pieces. The traditional body of classical songs or *thachin gyi*, literally 'great songs' was canonized during the last royal dynasty, the Konbaung dynasty (1752-1885).[8] The texts of these song have been organized in multiple collections known as the *Maha Gita* and every student of the classical tradition will learn many of the same pieces. Learning

the same songs not only on different instruments but also from various teachers gave me insights into the varieties within the tradition and the amount of variation possible within a single piece in the oral tradition.

Having lessons with different teachers also gave me the opportunity to become familiar with many of the country's leading musicians of the past forty years. With the exception of Sein Kyaw Naing, all of my teachers were over fifty years of age, and had a wealth of experience to share on musical life in Burma over the past several decades. These perspectives were shared in both formal and informal interviews during the course of my stay. Striking to me in these interviews and during my lessons was the abrupt change that the music culture was experiencing as a result of this new patronage. The national competition was offering valuable exposure to musicians who could potentially gain recognition from winning an event, while the University was now offering opportunities for further study and employment and the standardizations, while not yet completed anticipate a strange new conformity. My teachers were all judges at the national competition; several were professors or lecturers at the University of Culture, and held seats on the standardization and notation committees. Discussing the competition and the university with older musicians gave great insights into musical life prior to the SLORC/SPDC government's

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[8] Also known as the Alaungpaya dynasty after its founder King Alaungpaya (1752-1763) (see Cady

rise to power and the creation of these new institutions. Additionally, studying multiple versions of the same pieces of music taught to me in many different ways provided a greater understanding of variation within this tradition. Pieces of music rarely sound the same when played by different performers or even in different performances by the same artist. Indeed, as will be explained in Chapter Five, it is this variation itself that has been central to sustaining the oral tradition for many centuries. The variation in this tradition highlights, in vivid ways, the tensions that arise when this oral tradition is codified and transcribed into musical notation. It also sheds insight into how this music is changing by way of certain political behaviors.

My research is supplemented by interviews with many other musicians, visits to music schools and the performing arts competition, and a close monitoring of the state press's orientation to "traditional" culture. If universities, competitions and musical notation are new phenomena to which musicians are adapting, how is the tradition changing to these new opportunities and new political demands? Or, more specifically, how are individual musicians adapting to these changes? While I did not intend to study music's placement in the nation's politics the ubiquitous presence of the state in musical matters was difficult to ignore. Many of the opportunities for a musical career, exposure or performance in present day Burma are state encouraged or

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1958, Hall 1945, Phayre 1883 for a description of this dynasty)

controlled. Participation in the nationalist agenda of these projects can develop one's career in certain rewarding directions. Avoidance of them, or resistance to them, can conversely deny a musician his or her livelihood.

My interviews and conversations with people and musicians were problematic for a multitude of reasons. Political resistance and criticism of the state by civilians has frequently been punished with job termination, imprisonment, or worse.[9] Overt political resistance has often been ruthlessly dealt with. In several cases I resisted asking certain political questions, and many of my interviews were conducted in such a way as to avoid overt discussion of political. Consequently, many of my conclusions on the adaptive strategies of musicians and the impact of these projects are my own. Though a study of musical resistance to the agendas of the state would be fascinating and, indeed, necessary, this work concentrates primarily on the state use of music and musicians, and comparatively little on the resistance to that use by practicing musicians.

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[9] Evidence of the 'state of fear' that citizens of the country have lived under can be found in the works of Allot (1993), Aung San Suu Kyi (1991), Fink (2001), Lintner (1990), Singh (1989), Skidmore (1998), and Smith (1991, 1992, 1996, and 1999).

DISSERTATION OUTLINE

I begin this dissertation with an exploration of authority and legitimacy and by asking how political legitimacy and authority can be created through music and traditional culture. In Chapter Two, I draw from recent work by Gustav Houtman (1999), in which he discusses the government's abandonment of the national hero Aung San shortly after the 1990 election. Aung San, as the engineer of Burma's independence, has long been the most recognized and lauded of Burma's heros. His founding of the army, gaining trust of the ethnic minorities in the Panglong agreement,[10] negotiation of freedom from the British, and his martyr-making political assassination made him the most potent political symbol of independent Burma. His daughter, Aung San Suu Kyi's 'accidental'[11] participation in politics after the 1988 uprising led to a repositioning of Aung San's image as the symbol of Burmese nationalism. Both the army and Aung San Suu Kyi appealed to Aung San as the source of their legitimacy. By early 1990, Aung San, whose symbolic value pointed more towards his daughter than the army, began disappearing from the state press. His image on the country's currency and throughout government offices was removed, and by 1996 was no longer present in several grade school Burmese history texts. It was at this time that many of the culture projects began. Traditional culture of the

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[10] See Silverstein 1993.

Burmese court, prior to the arrival of the British, is now the source of the dominant political symbols in the country. Chapter Two will explore this new symbolism, its substance and its efficacy.

Chapters Three through Six will focus on the three ethnographic sites that form the basis of my research. The Sokayeti Performing Arts Competition, discussed in Chapter Three, was started in 1993. It is a huge festival of traditional performing arts held every October/November in Rangoon and features singing, dancing, composing, instrumental and theatrical performances. Drawing contestants and judges from throughout the country, the structure of this event models the ideally integrated nation. Representation from each of the ethnic states and divisions is amply proclaimed on the official media. Ethnic minority participation in this event is central to its organization and its press coverage. The Sokayeti competition will also be discussed as a performance space for the governing generals to 'perform' or display their power and authority. Press coverage of the national competition pays relatively little attention to the musicians, while the daily presence of the ruling generals, as chief patrons, is stressed. The Sokayeti competition, thus, serves as a model of the ideal state. It provides an opportunity for the ruling generals to theatrically display the "material embodiment of political order," or "an image of...the universe on a smaller scale" (Geertz 1980: 13).

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[11] Aung San Suu Kyi returned to Burma in 1988, amidst the pro-democracy uprising. to nurse her sick

Chapter Four reflects on the role of the University of Culture in this national blueprint. Constructed in 1993, the university offers undergraduate degrees in music, theater (including dance), and sculpture, and has ambitious plans for growth. Music schools and conservatories have been preset in Burma since the 1950s; yet the university plays a somewhat different role in today's cultural landscape than did the conservatories (such as *Pantera Kyaung*) in the past. This university was actualized at a time when many of the post-secondary institutions were closed down due to student led pro-democracy demonstrations. It nonetheless flourishes with full enrollment; and although the economy is unable to sustain multiple performers or educators, each of the graduates from the University of Culture is guaranteed a future job. The University of Culture is claimed by the government to be the first of its kind in Southeast Asia, and is a role model for other ASEAN nations to follow, despite the fact that multiple state schools of the arts exist in Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia.

In both Chapters Five and Six, I will be concerned with the musicological and sociological issues surrounding the standardizing and notating of the traditional and modern-traditional songs. Chapter Five explores the traditional oral transmission of Burmese traditional music. Here I will provide a description of some transmission practices and how they have dealt with some specific characteristics of the tradition. In particular, an autochthonous oral notation system called *pazat saing* that allows for the

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mother. She originally had no intention of participating in state politics.

verbal communication of two melodic lines provides insights into how the tradition has been maintained orally. Other local attempts to notate classical songs will also be addressed. Chapter Five will conclude with a discussion of the introduction of Western staff notation to Burma. Chapter Six discusses the present notation projects that are being set to print in Western "International" notation. In this chapter, I will explore some of the different problems that authors have encountered when translating Burmese music into Western notation, and the subsequent distortions to the music that result. Several specific pieces from the classical and modern classical canon will be addressed with particular reference to the personal politics behind each notation. Inquiry into the personal accounts of the musicians charged with this task will reveal further complications to the interpersonal problems associated with standardizing the tradition. Despite the attempts to unify and standardize these notations, an unconscious resistance to this conformity is displayed as each individual assigned to the project employs different conceptual and physical tools to carry out the assignment.

Present day Burma offers a unique perspective on the tensions between tradition and modernity found in many developing countries. The degree to which the Burmese government is upholding the traditions with aggressive militancy is rarely matched throughout the world. This study of Burma's state patronage provides an opportunity to simultaneously explore the forces of modernization and the compulsions toward preservation of an established "great" tradition. Additionally,

this study will provide insight into the dialectic between political performance and musical performance, between the establishment and maintenance of power and the symbolism of cultural heritage.

CHAPTER II

CULTURE AS NATIONAL DEFENSE: CULTURE PATRONAGE AND THE QUEST FOR LEGITIMACY AND AUTHORITY

...a world of appearances trying to pass for reality
Vaclav Havel[1]

There is... no simple progression from "traditional" to "modern," but a twisting, spasmodic, unmethodical movement which turns as often toward repossessing the emotions of the past as disowning them.
Clifford Geertz[2]

Myanmar traits had the ability to endure all the attempts of the British to destroy them for years countable by more than one hundred. Myanmars could restore their ancient usages no matter how the British had tried to overwhelm Myanmars...

In this way Myanmar's noble traditions of possessing patriotism could be expressed. History can't be hidden, withheld, concealed or destroyed. Likewise, Myanmars' patriotism and nationalism can't be downgraded, destroyed or concealed. This is the historical record of the long existence Myanmars' nationalism.
The New Light of Myanmar[3]

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[1] Havel 1991: 135
[2] Geertz 1973: 319
[3] Maung Saw Tun, *New Light of Myanmar*, 14 February 1999.

INTRODUCTION

Why, in the past few years, has 'traditional culture' become so central to the governing of Myanmar? Why, since the early 1990s, have multiple cultural projects begun, each granted with generous state funding and media attention the likes of which have never been seen before? What are these projects and what do they have in common with each other? How are they socially positioned by various agents (the people, the state) in Burmese culture, and how are they being used by the military leaders as a means of asserting and building their authority?

This rise in traditional court patronage follows immediately on the heels of a recent repositioning of the nation within the global socio-economic arena. The popular peoples' uprising of 1988, while failing to overthrow the military regime, did precipitate a shift in ideology on the part of the government away from the xenophobic policies of the Burmese Way to Socialism (1962-1988), a Marxist-socialist ideology that strove for self-sufficiency and autonomy, and towards increased economic relations with other nations.[4] As Ne Win stepped down in July of 1988 amidst this revolution, power was handed to

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[4] For a description of the Burmese way to Socialism and military rule under General Ne Win see Callahan (1996), Lehman (1981), Selth (1998), Silverstein (1977, 1997), Steinberg (1982), and Yawnghwe (1997). Taylor (1983, 1987, 1998). See also the Burma Socialist Program Party's own manifesto *The System of Correlations of Man and His Environment* (BSPP 1963).

the much despised Sein Lwin[5] who was to head the new government. By September, however, the State Law and Order Restoration Council had assumed power with a noticeably different strategy. From that moment forward the government of Ne Win, the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP), seemed to disappear without a trace. Little mention was made thereafter of the 26-year-old military-socialist regime and their national ideology. During my stay, I never witnessed a single public reference to the old General. The military's divorce of its own history and ideology, an ideology on which it had ascended to power and claimed the right to rule, is a puissant indicator of the legitimacy problem that has beset the SLORC/SPDC government. Thirteen years after that fateful summer of 1988, General Ne Win is still believed by many to be very active behind the scenes, with strong influence on the policies of the present rulers. Many of the presently-governing Generals are thought to be consulting Ne Win on a regular basis and certain Burma watchers believe that political change will come only when the ninety-one year old passes away. Ne Win and his BSPP government are, however, absent from the state press, even as the regime propagates the virtues of their ruling council and the Tatmadaw (armed forces), and stresses the continuity of their traditions.

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[5] Sein Lwin was also known as "The Butcher of Rangoon," as he was responsible for many of the massacres of August 1988. He only remained in power for a short time before he was replaced by General

DRAWING FROM THE PAST

The 'traditional culture' that the present regime emphasizes appears to reflect a shift in the source of political legitimacy; a shift from the immediate past of the Ne Win regime to an ancient past of the royal dynasty. Due to the economic mismanagement of the BSPP, the SLORC/SPDC government was forced after 1988 to greatly increase trade with countries throughout the world, opening doors to both tourists and businessmen, and releasing the country from its previous self-sufficiency agenda. Such a renewed emphasis on 'traditional culture' as reflected in these projects points, on the one hand, to a necessary cultural defense that resists foreign cultural influences accompanying investment, trade, and tourism. Blue jeans and rock music are readily available now in the urban centers, and necessarily challenge the local traditions. The increase in culture-maintenance projects establishes the regime as protectors of national identity warding off the immoral intrusions of foreign culture. On the other hand, as the outwardly 'new' regime is ideologically rudderless, having out of necessity publicly ignored their most recent history—both its figurehead, Ne Win, and its ideology the 'Burmese Way to Socialism'—new foundations of authority and legitimacy must be claimed. "Traditional culture," found in religion and the arts is central to this new foundation. "Traditional

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Saw Maung.

culture," as a collection of rich political symbols, is now one of many hegemonic apparatuses used to spread the convictions of the new government.

Exploring a government's assertions of authority and legitimacy, and how those assertions are represented, is an appropriate prelude to investigating the symbolic purposes which performing arts are often made to serve (see Fulcher 1987: 47, Guy 1999: 508-9). How is this connection made between authority and tradition, and how is it central to building a national culture? The problem of making national culture is one of not only forging a national identity, but also of imbuing that identity with such an aura of factuality that it appears to be real, unquestionable, and as an intrinsic element of personal identity (Anderson 1983, Foster 1991: 236). Central to our concerns here are notions of truth and history.

Political truth must be constructed. As Foucault describes, a sense of a "régime" or "general politics" of truth constitutes those culture-specific views of the world, redundantly legitimized and justified through socio-cultural structures, symbols, and other expressive forms, which enable us to discriminate right from wrong, good from bad, and the real from the illusory (Foucault 1984: 73). Stuart Hall (1979, 1986, and 1991a) and Raymond Williams (1977), drawing from Antonio Gramsci's portrayal of hegemony (Forgacs 1988), reveal the centrality of controlling various truths in the quest for legitimacy. They are, thus, useful in understanding the agenda that this 'new' government

has practiced since 1988. A new ideology has become necessary to replace the bankrupt old one. As Gramsci and his followers assert, for a dominant group to sustain power, it must create alliances establishing its social authority by winning the approval and consent of subordinate groups and the public at large. Such winning of consent of subordinates makes authority seem a natural, legitimate social reality (see Foster 1991: 246, Hall 1979: 332, Hall 1986: 14, Hall 1991a, Hebdige 1979: 15-16, Williams 1977: 108-114). Important in this understanding of hegemony is the approval granted by the subordinate groups and the efforts undertaken to win this approval by those in power. The consent given, on the part of subordinate groups, reveals that hegemony is relational as well as oppositional. It is an active reciprocity between dominant and subordinate. In the present Burmese case it entails a reciprocity of nation-building symbols between those governing the state and the individual citizens. The maintenance of hegemony depends upon the "continual reproduction of dominant interpretations of social reality as cultural truth" (Hall 1986: 393) and the constant re-enactment, re-assertion, and re-creation of that cultural truth. By this reading, hegemony is not monolithic and faceless, but rather "multifariously encountered" a "lived experience," it focuses upon the human contribution to state and identity construction (Buchanan 1995: 384).

In recent years many ethnomusicologists have described the political uses of music in hegemonic terms. State appropriation of traditional forms for political legitimacy is found throughout the world, and has been an important focus for modern enthomusicological work by numerous scholars. Exemplary resonances with the SLORC/SPDC uses of traditional culture can be found in other dictatorial or politically-challenged states, as seen in the writings of Michael Bakan for Indonesia (1998, 1999), Donna Buchanan (1995, 1996) and Timothy Rice (1996) concerning Bulgaria, Nancy Guy on Taiwan (1999) and Mercedes DuJunco on China (1994) as well as other non-ethnomusicological works such as John Pemberton's work on Indonesia (1987, 1994). Emergence into the market-oriented global ecumene has created crises of political legitimacy for each of these states as traditional forms of authority are to be balanced with globally accepted[6] or 'modern' forms of legitimacy. On the one hand reviving tradition(s) may promote an ideology of a national cultural identity, based on the concept of a cultural heritage. On the other, it must accommodate to external influences aspiring by implication to modernization and change.

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[6] Such as a democratically elected government.

BURMA'S LEGITIMACY CRISIS

Political legitimacy may be defined as the belief in the rightfulness of a state, in its authority to issue commands, such that the commands are obeyed not simply out of fear but because they are believed to have moral authority (Barker 1990: 11). Subjects under such legitimate authority believe they ought to obey. The legitimation of power relies on the conviction of the governed that their government is morally right and they are duty-bound to obey it. In the absence of such conviction there can only be relations of power, not of authority, and political legitimacy will be contested. An appeal to the heritage of the nation, in particular a pre-colonial heritage is one way in which the present government portrays the idea that they are working in the people's interest. The present dictatorship has gone to great lengths to move beyond relations of coercive power with its people (obviously displayed in 1988) to a relationship of accepted authority; and many of these new projects can be seen in this light, as an attempt to establish their moral authority, their moral rightness in the eyes of the Myanmar populace.

SLOGANEERING

As one enters the country one is immediately bombarded with state propaganda on huge billboards situated at busy street corners stating the objectives and duties of the

citizenry. All newspapers and magazines, by law, contain lists of the state objectives. This list, reproduced below, is ever-present on the front page of the daily newspapers and is frequently cited and referred to in political speeches and public events.

Four political objectives

- Stability of the State, community peace and tranquility, prevalence of law and order
- National reconsolidation
- Emergence of a new enduring State Constitution
- Building of a new modern developed nation in accord with the new State Constitution

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Four economic objectives

- Development of agriculture as the base and all-round development of other sectors of the economy as well
- Proper evolution of the market-oriented economic system
- Development of the economy inviting participation in terms of technical know-how and investments from sources inside the country and abroad
- The initiative to shape the national economy must be kept in the hands of the State and the national peoples

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Four social objectives

- Uplift of the morale and morality of the entire nation

- Uplift of national prestige and integrity and preservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage and national character
- Uplift of dynamism of patriotic spirit
- Uplift of health, fitness and education standards of the entire nation

These slogans, mottos, and lists of objectives are found throughout the country,[7] and are a constant reminder to all civilians of the propinquity of the government. This aggressive sloganeering campaign began in September 1989 (Houtman 1999: 67), immediately after the uprising, but has deep roots stretching back to the 1950s (Callahan 1998: 49). The overwhelming presence of these slogans cannot be overemphasized, as they are constantly visible and audible in public life. They are omnipresent, and further the impression that the eyes of the government are watching all citizens at all times, thus contributing to the frequently discussed 'State of Fear' in the country.[8] One of the more common billboard slogans is labeled the 'People's Desire,' a list of four resolutions that appears daily in the *New Light of Myanmar* as well as other newspapers and magazines[9] in both English and Burmese:

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[7] Particularly on street corners and on heavy-traffic intersections.
[8] See Aung San Suu Kyi's *Freedom From Fear* (1991)(Aung San Suu Kyi 1991). See also Martin Smith's *State of Fear: Censorship in Burma* (1991), and Monique Skidmore's *Flying Through a Skyful of Lies: Survival Strategies and the Politics of Fear in Urban Myanmar (Burma)* (1998).
[9] "(P)rint-houses have found some consolation in resisting this imposition of sloganeered unity by leaving the page on which the quotes occur uncut, so that the page cannot be turned and the slogans cannot therefore be read; a small excusable 'binding error' in a totalitarian State" (Houtman 1999: 67)

People's Desire

- Oppose those relying on external elements, acting as stooges, holding negative views
- Oppose those trying to jeopardize stability of the State and progress of the nation
- Oppose foreign nations interfering in internal affairs of the State
- Crush all internal and external destructive elements as the common enemy

Much of this sloganeering emphasizes the role of the citizen, cooperating with the Tatmadaw (armed forces), in maintaining Burmese ways and unifying against 'the common enemy,' be it internal or external to the state. The 'people's desire' in particular serves to build a paranoia[10] and a fear of all things 'non-Myanmar.' Implicit in these desires and objectives, framed as the will of the people, is a message emphasizing the preservation and the maintenance of stability; national unity must, at all costs be guarded against 'stooges' or those challenging the state.

There is no public dialogue on crucial ideas concerning unity or progress, and no opportunity to counter the messages put forth through the state propaganda. Rather, these signs and lists assert a common will (an assumed common will), and an expected

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[10] See Gravers 1999.

cooperation with those in power. Key also to all of these proclamations is the unquestioned unity established between the Tatmadaw (armed forces) and the people.

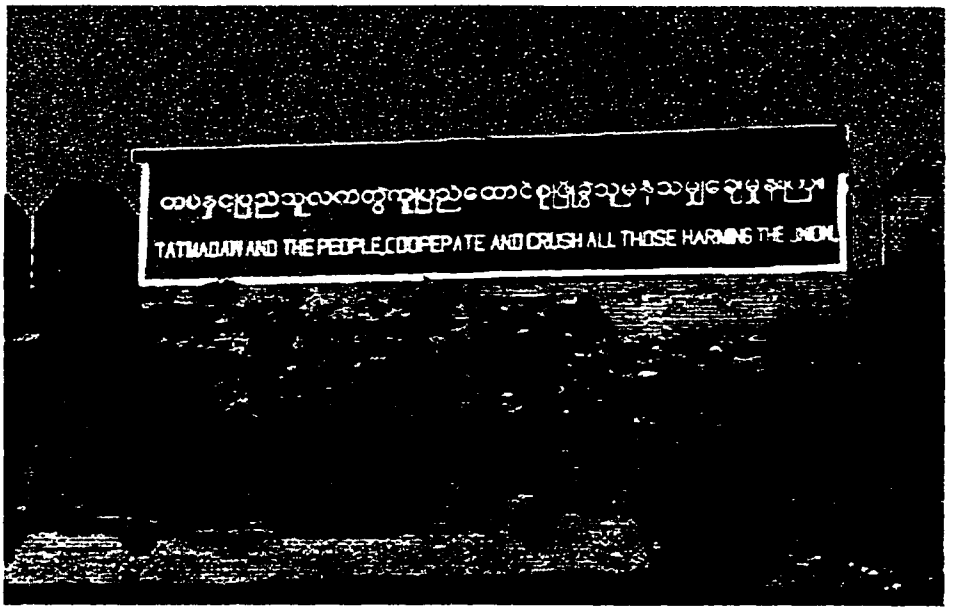

Figure 2.1: The Tatmadaw and the People Coopepate (sic) and Crush all those Harming the Union, billboard on Mandalay Palace wall.

Through some of these slogans we see the importance of national traditions, used to ward off the encroaching West and international interference. Subtly proclaimed in these ever-present aphorisms is the assertion that enemies of the state are not true Burmese citizens. The unity of the state and the people, found in their common traditions, vis-a-vis internal or external destructive elements (foreign powers or those

challenging the government), is what will lead to the peaceful and prosperous modern developed nation.

Indeed, this notion of 'traditional culture' has been one of the primary technologies of power for the regime. Yet, there has been no pubic discourse about what this tradition is, and what "traditional culture" comprises. Despite this lack of dialogue, or rather because of it, abandonment of tradition and heritage has been the primary mode of attack on those opposing the government, and in particular on Aung San Suu Kyi.

The following cartoons published in the *New Light of Myanmar* during my stay reveal the uses of 'tradition' in fighting political opponents. Cartoons like the ones below were found on the back page of the national newspaper every day.[11] In recent months (since October 2000) the direct attacks on Aung San Suu Kyi have stopped as dialogue (publicized as 'secret talks') has resumed for the first time in five years between the rulers, particularly Secretary-1 Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt[12] and Aung San Suu Kyi.

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[11] Political cartoons are used by both the regime and pro-democracy activists to metaphorically articulate what often cannot be said. For a discussion of cartoons as political commentary see Jennifer Leehey's "Message in a Bottle: A Gallery of Social/Political Cartoons From Burma" (1997).

[12] Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt, as Secretary-1 of the SPDC is officially third in command on the council behind Senior General Than Shwe and General Maung Aye. Despite this he is the most publicly visible of the top three generals and many believe that he holds the most power. Secretary-1, as the principle force behind many of the state's culture patronage projects, will be addressed further in later chapters.

At the time of this writing Burma watchers are anticipating some shifts in the power structure of the SPDC. Senior General Than Shwe (the chairman of the council) is planning on retiring soon leaving

During my stay, however, abandonment of traditional culture was the primary rhetorical charge the dictatorship used to fight Aung San Suu Kyi in the press in an effort to influence public opinion.

Figure 2.2: Here Aung San Suu Kyi, having abandoned her traditions by marrying a foreigner and living abroad, has returned and now speaks a distorted history. Suu Kyi's marriage to British scholar Michael Aris was frequently lampooned and, because of this, she was frequently accused of 'marring her lineage.' New Light of Myanmar, 16 May 1999

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behind him a potential power struggle between Lt. Gen Khin Nyunt, the most publicly visible of the rulers

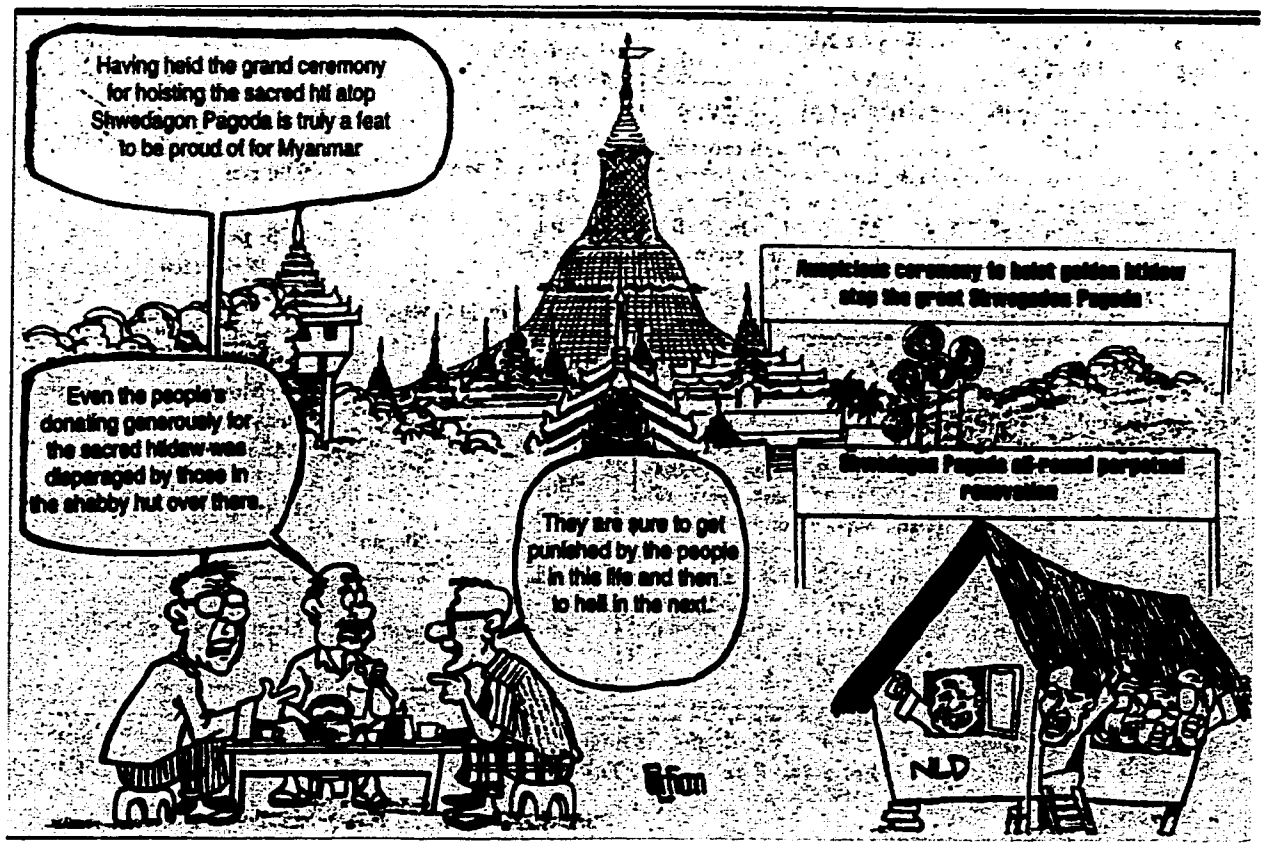

Figure 2.3: Here Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD (National League for Democracy) are admonished for not participating in the renovation and re-guilding of the Shwedagon pagoda, a State sponsored heritage project. New Light of Myanmar, 29 April 1999.

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and long time head of military intelligence, and Gen Maung Aye, leader of the army.

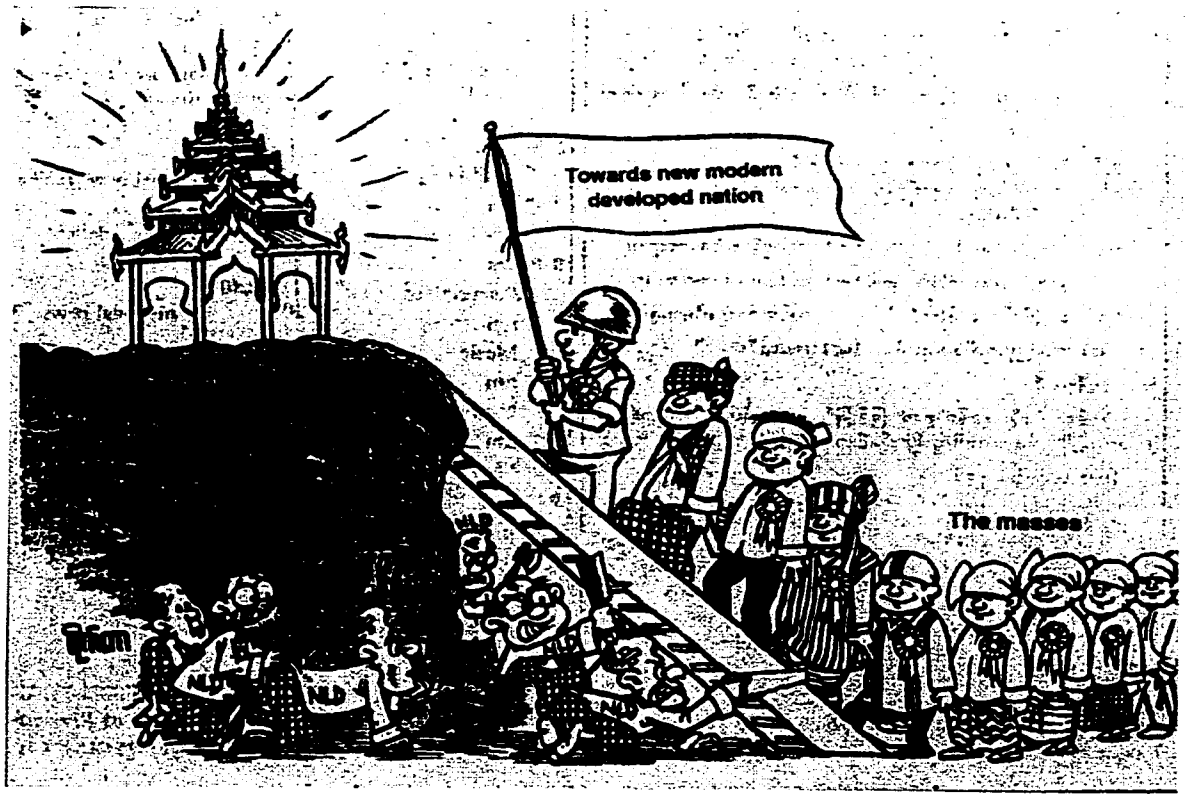

Figure 2.4: All citizens (and all ethnic nationalities) are led by the Tatmadaw (armed forces) towards the new 'modern, developed' nation, represented here by a Buddhist pagoda, simultaneously representing the monarchy, while the National League for Democracy attempts to foil the progress. New Light of Myanmar, 3 January 1999.

Amateur poetry is regularly used in this campaign to wed non-traditional ways to the 'enemy of the state.' Poems, like the following are printed in the *New Light of Myanmar*

several times a week. National unity and love of country demands that those abandoning traditional culture be driven out.

Let's drive her out, friend

*Friend
You know and I too know it
What kind of woman she is
With a kick leaving the country
Urging sanctions on our economy
For power she is craving
The nation she is insulting

*Friend
You know and I too know it
What kind of woman she is
With a kick leaving the country
Trying to drive our nationality
Into servitude again as a colony
There is nothing to wonder
She wants to serve foreigners
Her own lineage she did mar
Wants all others to be like her
Evil heritage against tradition
To obliterate our kith and kin

*Friend
You know and I too know it
What kind of woman she is
With a kick leaving the country
Yet ten of the men follow her
Clinging to skirt hems they are
Turning backs on patriotism
For slavery under colonialism
They do so willingly and eagerly
How will be written their history

*Friend
You know and I too know it
What kind of woman she is
With a kick leaving the country
To such a person as she be
Nothing left but say "Get out!"
We all have to drive her out.

Su Naing Thu
New Light of Myanmar, 6 November, 1998
(my emphasis)

Even faceless tragedies and social concerns such as the growing HIV/AIDS epidemic are framed as 'foreign' and counter to Burmese traditions. Importantly, it is Burmese cultural traditions that are able to defend against them. The following editorial excerpt from the *New Light of Myanmar* reflects the importance of indigenous cultural traditions and reveals their direct relationship to health and well being.

> ...For young people especially those in the school-going age the safest way to prevent HIV/AIDS is abstinence from premarital sex. Virginity is still valued in our society and sexual promiscuity is not socially acceptable. By encouraging our young people to maintain our traditional values and cultural norms and promoting the adoption of good morals and character, we can support the young people to refrain from high risk behaviors. ...As Myanmar is an overwhelmingly Buddhist country, everyone is familiar with the five precepts and is expected to uphold them. Among them two have a direct influence on behaviors associated with HIV/AIDS transmission. A good Buddhist is expected to refrain from taking any intoxicants whether in the form of alcoholic beverages or narcotic substances; and to refrain from adultery and promiscuous sex. Acceptance of these religious edicts can and should be encouraged among the people, whether in the formal school settings or among the community for out of school young people, as part of our efforts to control the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Preserving the cultural and social mores such as the maintaining

of faithful monogamous relationships in marriage is important for prevention of HIV transmission.

New Light of Myanmar Tuesday, 1 December, 1998

Such articles, cartoons and poems are representative accounts of how the regime forefronts 'tradition.' Tradition is absolutely essential to maintaining peace, stability, health, religion, happiness and unity throughout the country.

AUNG SAN AS POLITICAL SYMBOL

In modern Burmese politics, legitimacy is still linked to the national independence struggle. The independence movement, however, is crucially linked to the political importance of General Aung San. Political legitimacy, Houtman has argued, has depended on who could claim the heritage of Aung San (1999: 15-36). It is through Aung San that modern Burmese ideas of nation, nationhood, unity and democracy have been translated. In Aung San's short life (1915-1947) he accomplished numerous feats that have contributed to his importance as a national symbol. He was an influential student leader[13] in the 1930s as Burma's independence struggle took on a decisive form in the Dobama

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[13] The young Aung San and other friends set up a communist study group to read political literature and make plans about how to achieve independence. Many other students and intellectuals in the colonial period also looked to foreign literature for clues as to how to overthrow colonial rule (Fink 2001: 183).

Asiayone movement.[14] He was the founder of the modern military Tatmadaw (army) that assisted the British in pushing out the Japanese.[15] He was the only leader capable of uniting the ethic minorities in the crucial Panglong agreement that preceded independence.[16] He negotiated independence from Britain after World War II, establishing January 4, 1948 as the day Burma would be free from colonial rule. Finally, he, and many of his cabinet members were assassinated on July 19, 1947 on the eve of national independence. This last event, his martyrdom, has made him a supremely important political symbol over the past fifty-three years to which all leaders have had to appeal (or at least confront) for their own legitimacy.[17] Prior to 1988, Aung San's portrait was ever-present in government buildings and on the country's currency, and his name was bestowed on stadiums, buildings, playing fields, parks, schools and roads throughout the country.

The return of Aung San Suu Kyi to Burma in 1988, and her subsequent or 'accidental' involvement in the democracy movement, led to a struggle over the rights to

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[14] See Silverstein (1993), Maung Maung (1962) and Khin (1988).
[15] In 1941 Aung San and twenty-nine colleagues (the Thirty Commrades) secretly trained with the Japanese on Hainan island. Despite this, Aung San realized soon after Japanese occupation that independence would not be granted from the Japanese. With Burma's independence his top priority Aung San join the British forces in pushing out the Japanese.
[16] The Panglong agreement united several of the larger ethnic groups (with the exception of the Karen) with the express purpose of sheding colonial rule. For several minorities (Shan and Karenni) this agreement guaranteed the option to break away as an autonomous state ten years after Burmese independence. This option was never recognized.
[17] See Aung San Suu Kyi (1991), Maung Maung (1961) and Silverstein (1993).

Aung San's name. Who could claim his heritage, the ruling Junta or his daughter? Public opinion swelled in support of Aung San Suu Kyi as placards with her father's photo were ever-present during her early campaigns of 1989. "To countless thousands at her rallies, she was the reincarnation, the reimbodiment of her father, who had picked up his fallen standard and was destined to complete his work" (Silverstein 1993: vii). In the months before the 1990 election, Aung San Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest and the results of the May election were not honored. In the years following, Aung San, in name and image, has slowly disappeared from the state press, from the political speeches that call for national unity, from the posters in government offices, from the national currency,[18] and from many history books. In the state press his name has even been excised from his daughter as she is referred to by the regime as "Suu Kyi," "Mrs. Aris,"[19] "The democracy princess," or other denigrating names, but never as Aung San Suu Kyi.

With Aung San's name central to the democracy struggle led by his daughter, the SLORC regime lost one of their most important political symbols and sources of legitimacy. Aung San's double role, on the one hand, as representative of the emergent indigenous government and, on the other, as representative of the protesting students

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[18] One remaining bill, the one kyat bill, retains Aung San's picture. The one kyat bill is the lowest denomination, worth approx. 1/7 cents US$. Many of the new bills are adorned with state buildings and a gaurdian chinthe lion, an image found at the gates of many Buddhist stupas.

against illegitimate foreign regimes, caused the SLORC regime inheriting power from Ne Win to rethink the way it positioned itself in relation to political heritage. This re-evaluation has led to a quest for legitimacy from other sources rooted deeper in Burma's past, namely the 'traditional culture' of the monarchs before the arrival of the British. The monarchy and ancient traditions appears to have taken the place of General Aung San.

With the military moving away from Aung San, effectively re-assassinating him, they have set in motion a process of what Gustaaf Houtman has called 'Myanmafication.' Myanmafication "took the place of Aung San's heritage, involving the renaming of the country to reflect Burman pronunciation and the re-enculturing of its peoples" (Houtman 1999: 10). The regime has substituted Aung San with Myanmar culture. The irony of this Aung San amnesia and substitution with formalized 'traditional culture' and symbols of the monarchy is compounded by the fact that Aung San himself strongly argued against reserving a central role for either 'culture' or 'religion' (see Silverstein 1993: 5).[20] Aung San is rarely mentioned in unity speeches given by Senior

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[19] "Mrs. Aris" refers to the Western practice of a woman taking her husband's name (in this case, Michael Aris, her husband). In Burma, women and men retain their birth names and do not change them at marriage. Such a label attempts to portray her as a foreigner, i.e., traitor.

[20] Aung San writes: Politics, then, is quite human! It is not dirty. It is not dangerous. It is not parochial. It is neither magic nor supersitition. It is not above understanding... They say politics is religion. They say these all in contradiction with each other in one and the same breath. Politics is religion! Is it? Of course not. But this is the trump card of dirty politicians. In this way, they hope to confuse and befog the

General Than Shwe and Lt. Gen Khin Nyunt on Union Day or Independence Day; instead, the "preservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage" is found in his stead.

The presentation, representation, and patronage of 'national culture' has taken on many forms as legitimacy through it is sought for the ruling generals. I deal with three of these projects in Chapters Three, Four, and Six, namely, the Sokayeti Performing Arts Competition, the University of Culture, and the standardization and notation projects. This appeal to 'national culture' and the immense surge in cultural projects, however, is also presented in quite a multitude of other forms, including religious patronage, restoration and renovation of historic and religious monuments, academic conferences and papers on the importance of traditional culture, revived festivals originally held for the king, cultural performances, new museums, and a wealth of other encouragements to all varieties of art (sculpture, painting, film, literature, etc.) and other codifiable abstractions of 'culture.'

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public mind, and they hope to slur over and cloud real issues. Theirs is the way of opportunism, not politics. Religion is a matter of individual conscience while politics is a social science... If we mix religion with politics, this is against the spirit of religion itself, for religion takes care of our hereafter and usually has not to do with mundane affairs which are the sphere of politics. Politics is frankly a secular science. That is it. (Silverstein 1993: 95-96)

LEGITIMACY THROUGH "TRADITIONAL CULTURE"

Verification of political power through the arts is certainly not new to Burma. Ne Win's new government, shortly after 1962, also commandeered the traditional arts to reinforce its legitimacy, though to a much lesser degree. Ne Win's legitimacy, at least immediately after the 1962 coup, was not questioned, as he was replacing the failed leadership of U Nu. Smith has noted that "the basic problem was not loss of legitimacy but failure of leadership," and thus, Ne Win's takeover, in terms of legitimacy, was "relatively simple" (1965: 311). Despite this, as Alton Becker observed, the Burmese army adopted the traditional arts as a means of asserting its right to rule. "The Burmese army, when it took over powers from U Nu's government for the first time, presented itself through the theater, seeking legitimacy via the only one of the two traditional mediums it could control" (1974: 163). The theatre and the *sangha*, the order of Buddhist monks, were (according to Becker) the two most important social institutions through which people make sense of the world.[21] "These two institutions kept Burmese culture alive during the colonial period; it was here that the Burmese identity survived—Burma's history, music, even language. Theatre was a source of knowledge about who one was, how one could act, and what the world, beyond confusing daily

experience, was like" (1971: 86). Shortly after the coup, however, Smith noted a shift in Burmese ideology. For the first time a new national political 'ideology' was replacing 'tradition' as the way of legitimating the government (Smith 1965: 311-13).[22]

Though the ideology of the Burmese Way to Socialism failed in practice, legitimacy questions were not as pervasive in the public consciousness (en masse) until the 1980s. With the fall of the BSPP and the transfer of power to the SLORC, the ideology was bankrupt and "tradition" was now needed.

PATRONAGE PROJECTS AS POLITICS

One of the requirements of a disciplined democracy, toward which the SPDC government ostensibly aspires,[23] is that it must be in line with historical traditions, customs, and cultures of the nationality.[24] This resonates with the second of the propagated Four Social Objectives, namely, the 'uplift of national prestige and integrity and preservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage and national character.' What these

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[21] For insights into the centrality of theater in Burma see Sein (1965), Singer (1995) and Scott (1910).
[22] See also Houtman 1999: 81.
[23] Though military dictatorships have been ruling the country since 1962, 'democracy' at least rhetorically, has always been built into the objectives toward which the country is aspiring.
[24] Though there are many 'cultures' and 'nationalities' in the country, objectives of the nation are usually framed as singular.

'historical traditions' are and what the 'culture of the nationality' is, are not questions that are open to public discourse and debate. There is little or no dialogue that contests what Myanmar tradition actually is. Nonetheless, the SLORC/SPDC government has set out on an aggressive culture-promotion campaign that is unchallenged on a public level, though aggressively contested privately. The following pages discuss a few of the myriad of patronage projects currently assailing Burmese society. This 'totalising patronage' (Schober 1995: 308) reaches into many corners of Myanmar culture, projecting a particular image of Burmese culture, history, and religion. In essence, the modern, technocratic elite employs patronage of traditional culture to consolidate its hegemony and compels a large segment of its population to participate in a celebration of 'Myanmarness.' The totalising patronage of the modern nation-state co-opts for political purposes the religious, historical and cultural sentiment of the Burmese.

1—BUDDHIST PATRONAGE

State patronage of Buddhism, and the relationship between rulers, kings or generals and the *sangha* (the order of monks), has been one of the most researched areas

in Burmese studies.[25] The pervasiveness of the religion throughout the country, with upwards of 80% of the population practicing Buddhists, makes it a primary source of cultural authority. The saying "To Be Burmese is to Be Buddhist" (see Bechert 1984) articulates the prominence of religion in Burmese daily life. Though Buddhism has always been a valuable source for legitimation of Burmese kings and governments, it has also proved to be divisive, as excessive patronage by the state of Buddhist practices has tended to alienate the non-Buddhist minority groups found primarily amongst the Kachin, Chin and Karen ethnicities. Since the early 1990s, Buddhism has become one of the primary vehicles for legitimation of the regime. In the past, an individual king through his singular patronage would acquire legitimacy. Today, patronage accrues legitimation not to an individual but to a class of civil and military elites that constitute the governing body of the nation state (Schober 1997: 242).

Juliane Schober's recent work on the SLORC's patronage of Theravada Buddhism speaks directly to many of the same concerns of acquiring political legitimacy through facets of Burmese culture. In 1994, the SLORC held a series of elaborate rituals involving millions of people, both citizens and foreigners, paying homage to the Chinese Tooth

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[25] An important introductory list of state/ religion scholarship in Burma would include; Aung Thwin (1983, 1998), Ferguson (1978), Gravers (1996), Mendelson (1960, 1975), Maung Maung (1980), Smith (1965, 1978), Taylor (1987), Tin Maung Maung Than (1993) and Von der Mehden (1968). Other research in Thailand speaks to many of these same relationships (Durrenberger 1996, Ishii 1986, Keyes 1993, Keyes 1994, Reynolds 1991, Reynolds 1978, Smith 1978, Suksamran 1993, Tambiah 1976, Tambiah 1978).

Relic. This relic, on loan from China, was processed throughout the nation's territory for forty-five days. As this Buddhist relic moved through the country, multiple rituals occurred to both venerate the relic and celebrate its government patronage. Schober's work "examines the contemporary social and political realities of the state rituals and modern Buddhist nationalism to illustrate competing visions of authority in Myanma[26] and among transnational communities" (1997: 219). Central to her analysis is the transformation of 'root metaphors' (from Turner 1974: 29) and ritual service in cosmological Buddhist contexts "into the symbolic currency of a modern, secular state that seeks to obligate the periphery to the hegemonic center in a variety of public social domains" (1997: 219). "Root metaphors," self-certifying myths sealed off from empirical disproof are, Schober finds, powerful tools for asserting contemporary political legitimacy. Again, Schober has noticed that these rituals take place in a crisis of authority where a new source of authority had to be found. The progress of the Sacred Tooth within Burma created a 'field of merit'[27] offered to the citizenry by the state and, thus, a source of political legitimacy separate and "distinct from merit making patronage of the *sangha*" (Schober 1997: 219). Participation in these events endows social actors with

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[26] The Myanmar press often (not always) drops the 'r' at the end of 'Myanmar.' There is no 'r' sound amongst most centrally located Burmese speakers and acts here as a marker of the falling tone. There is no lexical difference between 'Myanmar' and 'Myanma'

charisma and historical events with significance beyond the immediate contexts of cultural performance. The state seeks to project to both its citizens and outside observers a vision of Buddhism in which the state, *sangha*, and laity speak in a single voice. As Buddhists they are emphasizing righteousness, scripturalism and morality, but beyond the religion, in the world, the emphasis is on national unity. Voices that disagree with this project and its execution, and with many of the others noted below, remain silent and enjoy no representation in the state media. Much like the performing arts competition discussed in Chapter Three, the Tooth Relic processional of 1994 enjoyed immense media coverage in the *New Light of Myanmar*, "exceeding at times more than half of the print space" (Schober 1997: 225), indicating the enormous investment of resources and symbolic capital by military leaders, institutions and personnel.

Patronage of Buddhism accomplishes several state legitimizing ends. The establishment of political power by association with spiritual power is seen in the never-ending pictures and articles of the top generals leading many ritual processions and blurring the boundaries between the religious world and the political world.[28]

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[27] Religious merit or kama (karma) is gained in a multitude of ways in Burmese Buddhist practices. Offerings given to monks, pagodas, or institutions that maintain the religion are the most common 'fields of merit.'

[28] Certainly parallels can be found throughout the world, as heads of state associate themselves with spiritual truth. Vaclav Havel writes in reference to Byzantine theocracy and the Czechoslovakian state that "(t)he principle involved here is that the center of power is identical with the center of truth...the highest secular authority is identical with the highest spiritual authority" (Havel 1991: 130).

Additionally, this religious patronage paints a historical continuity that remaps centuries of Burmese history culminating in the present. This long-standing legacy is fully realized only now, and is seen "as a culmination of Burmese royal lineages—beginning with the emergence of the first Burmese empire during Anawratha's reign (1044-77)...constructing both Buddhist and Burmese historical paradigms for SLORC's ritual patronage" (Schober 1997: 235). Here again the nation is built with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which—as well as against which — it came into being (Anderson 1983: 12). Finally, the procession of the relic throughout the country maps this historical legitimacy onto a physical geography as the imagination of nationalist culture through mytho-historical events is superimposed on the entire populace. Indeed, this is how Benedict Anderson (see Anderson 1983: 37-47) has imagined nations as myths and histories becoming mapped onto places. In this case the mapping is accomplished initially through the procession itself and secondly through the media that unites all in relation to it.[29]

Another recent development in the patronage of Theravada Buddhism in Burma is the opening of the International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University in 1998. This new University, with striking parallels to the University of Culture discussed in Chapter Four, is located on Kaba Aye Pagoda road on Dhammapala Hill, Rangoon, beside

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[29] Print gives a new "fixity to language" which helps to build "that image of antiguity" so central to the subjectivity of the nation (Anderson 1983: 44).

a newly constructed pagoda that houses a replica of the above mentioned Chinese tooth relic.[30] This university, one of the largest of the Buddhist patronage projects, caters primarily to non-Burmese students of Theravada Buddhism and, thus, gathers further legitimacy from outside of Burma's boundaries. The primary medium of instruction at the university is English; and Bachelor, Master's, and Ph.D. degrees are offered with focus on Pariyatti (scriptural learning—with several departments for certain areas of the scriptures)[31], Patipatti (practice)[32], and Missionary works.[33]

Opponents of this project claim that the university is nothing more than a scheme to promote heritage and they castigate the unimpressive accomplishments that the University has, thus far achieved.

> While construction of new edifices continues, the number of students has dropped from around 100 during the first year to half that at present -- the majority in fact being Burmese monks wishing to study in English -- the remaining handful consisting of students from the region, particularly Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. This must be a disappointing development for the

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[30] The Relic was bombed on 25 December 1996, killing four people. It is believed that this bombing was designed to insight friction between Myanmar and China, an ever strengthening political and military alliance that students, ethnic minorities, and other Asian nations have found troubling. These relationships between religion and state have ramifications far beyond Burma's borders.
[31] Vinaya, Suttanta, Abhidhamma, Buddhist Culture and History, Pali Studies, Myanmar Language
[32] Dhammanuloma, Samatha and Vipassana
[33] Comparative Studies of Religions, Missionary Works, Research, Foreign Languages and Translation.

> institution's architects. According to one ex-student: "They really want white men. Last year there was an Australian monk and one day they came with a camera and video and took more than 200 photos of him to use in newspapers and magazines. Now he's gone to Thailand already." Complaints include that teaching is purely by rote, that students' passports are retained to prevent them from leaving the country before completing the course or traveling without approval and that mail is inspected and some students have been subjected to interrogation. (Burma Issues 2000: 5)

2—RESTORATION, RENOVATION AND EXCAVATION

Apart from Buddhism, culture has never had a particularly high priority for the government except as a political issue to assert a 'Burman-ness' distinct from foreigners. While important moments of resistance to the British colonial powers were motivated through cultural movements, such as the 'footwearing controversy'[34] of 1917-19, by and large culture has been a peripheral political tool. In the name of Buddhist impermanence, pagodas and palaces have indifferently been allowed to fall into ruins without regard for their upkeep. The new regime has embarked on restoration, renovation and excavation

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[34] One of the most important movements against the British (1917-19) was articulated through the 'shoe' question. The Shoe Question involved the protest against European disregard for Burmese culture and Buddhist religion articulated through the wearing of shoes within the precincts of temples and pagodas. It became a powerful symbol in the beginnings of Burma's national freedom movement (see Bechert 1984).

projects designed to 'save' and preserve historic and religious sites throughout the country. However, there is no motion to make substantive studies of culture (or cultures) in Burma. In fact, the financing of studies that could raise contrary perspectives to those of the state, is politically undesirable.

In July 1993, the SLORC established the Central Committee to Preserve National Heritage on the instructions of General Than Shwe, with Secretary-1 Lt. Gen. General Khin Nyunt as Chairman. Parallel committees for preserving National Heritage have been formed at state, division and township levels (see Houtman 1999: 96). Since this time, aggressive efforts to excavate and rebuild historic landmarks have been undertaken.

There is little debate, even within the regime, about the nationalist purposes behind such heritage projects. The Department of Archeology of the Ministry of Culture has as its responsibility "the presentation and preservation of Myanma cultural heritage" (Nyunt Han 1997: 156). In a paper given at a 1996 symposium on Socio-Economic Factors Contributing to National Consolidation, U Nyunt Han, the Deputy Director General of the Department of Archeology, and a nationally recognized scholar, highlights the contributions to national consolidation that the reconstruction projects bring. Emphasizing some of the political objectives of the state, Nyunt Han gives evidence of the "(t)asks to uplift dynamism of patriotic spirit, uplift of national prestige and integrity

and preservation of cultural heritage which will contribute towards national consolidation." (Nyunt Han 1997: 156)

An excerpt of his list of reconstruction and preservation tasks is followed by an account of the inspiration that such endeavors will instill in the Myanmar populace.

> *a) Reconstruction of Myanansankyaw Shwenandaw*
> ...In the hearts of Myanmar nationals, the spirit of patriotism and the awareness that they had once lived under their own sovereignty independently and that they must protect their independence, will be aroused by seeing the reconstructed palace and this will, in turn contribute to national consolidation (Nyunt Han 1997: 157).
>
> *b) Reconstruction of Maha Atulawaiyan Kyaungdawgyi in Mandalay*
> ...All the nations can take pride in the reconstruction of this magnificent Kyaungdawkyi. It also displays the skill and talent of the Myanmar, thus promoting patriotic spirit, which in turn will create national consolidation (Nyunt Han 1997: 157).
>
> *d) Excavation and reconstruction at Kanbawzathadi Palace Site*
> ...By studying the reconstructed Kanbawzathardi Palace of King Bayinaung, patriotism will be aroused in Myanmar nationals, which in turn will contribute to national consolidation (Nyunt Han 1997: 158).

Figure 2.5: Excavation (foreground) and reconstruction (background) of Bayinaung s Palace in Bago.

f) Restoration and Renovation of Pagodas in the Cultural Zone of Bagan

...By restoring the ancient pagodas at the cultural zone of Bagan in time, preservation of ancient cultural heritage and buildings, which have nearly collapsed, will have been done in time. The cultural heritage of Bagan concerns the cultural heritage of the entire nation. By donating and taking part in the preservation work of Bagan cultural heritage, the entire nation has also shown national consolidation (Nyunt Han 1997: 159).[35]

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[35] The restoration of the Bagan (Pagan) archeological zone is a particularly contentious issue, as many feel that these projects are destroying one of the richest archeological zones in all of Southeast Asia.

Figure 2.6: Newly painted Buddha image in Pagan

A wealth of other renovations throughout the country are framed as merit-making and culture-preserving efforts in the state press. Others who feel that true heritage is being destroyed, however, silently lament these projects.

Figure 2. 7: Mandalay palace, a monument to the Burmese monarchy, has been meticulously restored, yet remains empty save for occasional tourists.

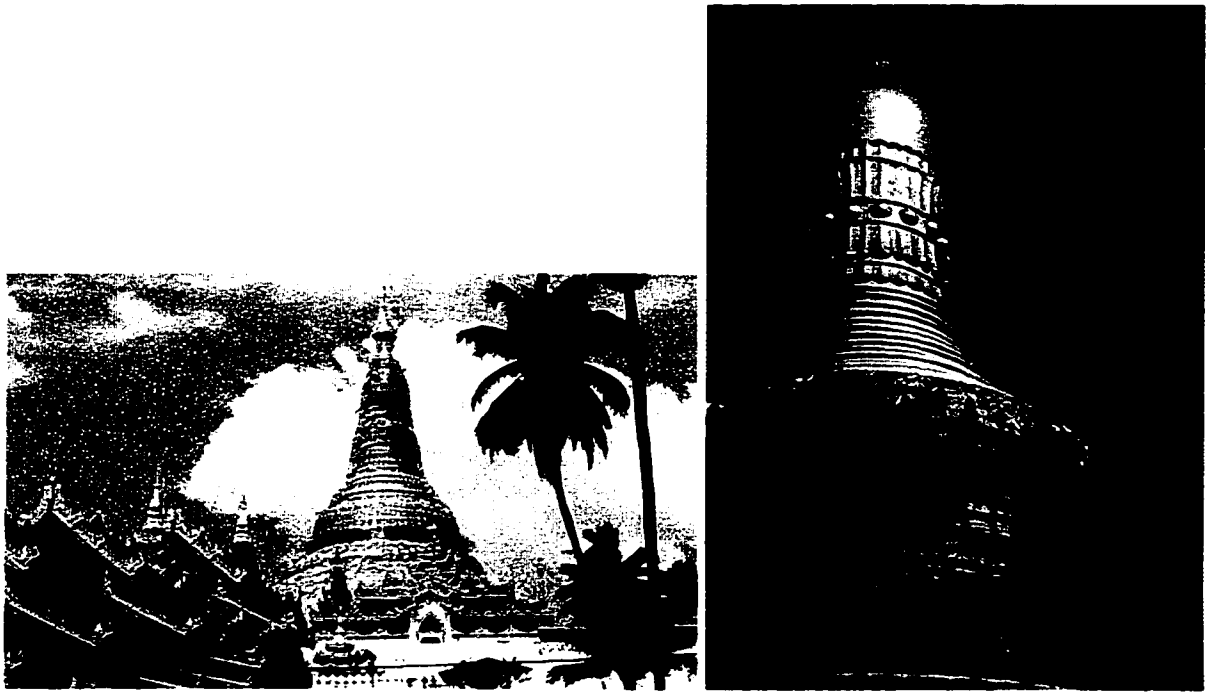

Figure 2.8 and2. 9: Renovations and re-gilding of the Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon (left) and the Shwemawdaw Pagoda of Bago (right).

3—SCHOLARSHIP

Several recent symposia have been sponsored by the regime to gather academics to further legitimize these projects. Two notable academic conferences include the 1996 *Symposium on the Socio-Economic Factors Contributing to National Solidarity* (OSS 1997), held in October of 1996, and another concerning *Human Resource Development and Nation Building in Myanmar* (OSS 1998), held in November of 1997. These conferences, sponsored by the Office of Strategic Studies, a branch of the Ministry of Defense, draw together the country's leading scholars, many of whom are involved the very production of these projects. Each of these scholars relays how the national interests are being furthered by each of these projects.

The inclusion of scholars in the nation building project is important. As Hobsbawm claims, the production of knowledge plays a central role for states in their invention of national traditions (Hobsbawm 1983). Indeed, the social sciences themselves arose as servants to modern states, as intellectuals in all societies are the guardians of cultural truths. "'Truth' is centered on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it...it is produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, media)" (Foucault 1984: 73). The academy is an important site at which truth

and power intersect (see also Bourdieu 1990a: 146) and, thus, where authority can be created.

While there seems to be little in the way of critique of government patronage in these papers they do offer some assistance in understanding the regime's rationale. Apart from the daily media and monthly magazines, the published papers of these two conferences are some of the scant resources that discuss the pre-conceived building of the nation. With limited discussion of alternate viewpoints or critiques of the damage or manipulation of culture that is underway, the scholarship found in these papers offers little more than an affirmation of the SLORC/SPDC's vision. Although they are framed as academic papers, not one article in either of the conference publications refers to any other related scholarship (Burmese or foreign) or appeals to or creates any theory or ideology that organizes the culture re-construction in any abstract way. Each paper, grouped under rubrics such as education, health, culture, archeology, etc., does little more than to list the virtues of the new projects funded by the state. These symposia, thus, seem to operate as little more than 'technologies' of power for the state (Foster 1991), reasserting the government line without question. In Chapter Four, I will attempt to show that the role of education at the University of Culture similarly operates as a tool of the state with little interest in problematizing what Foucault calls "a 'regime' of truth" (Foucault 1984: 73).

The above citations of U Nyunt Han concerning the pagoda restoration projects, as well as the titles of many of the papers,[36] suggest a somewhat closed academic culture rife with political slogans akin to, and offering little more than, the billboard campaigns and newspaper crusades mentioned above. Furthermore, the opening and closing address by Secretary-1, Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt, at both of these conferences attests to the lack of autonomy that scholars (and government Ministries of Culture, Education, Health, etc.) have. Here Khin Nyunt, in his opening address for the Symposium on the Socio-Economic Factors Contributing to National Solidarity,' proclaims the three aims of this intellectual gathering.

> The first is to underscore the point '*The strength of the nation lies only within*' in the government's endeavours for national consolidation. The second aim for holding the Symposium is to be able to get the ideas, outlook and opinions of intellectuals, technicians and experienced persons to contribute to building the nation and to create opportunities for them to be able to work for the nation in any role that is their lot. It is, in other

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[36] The titles of several of the papers found at these gatherings reveal their interests and concerns. From the 1996 conference, *Symposium on the Socio-Economic Factors Contributing to National Solidarity*, the papers include: "National Approach to Human Resource Development in Myanmar"—U Tun Shwe; "The Role of Science and Technology in Human Resource Development in Myanmar"—U Kyin Soe; "Myanmar Culture, Human Resource Development and Nation Building in Myanmar"—Dr. Khin Maung Nyunt. And from the *Human Resource Development and Nation Building in Myanmar* symposium the following year; "The Role of the Education Sector Contributing to National Consolidation"—U Myo Nyunt; "The

> words, opening the way for the people to be able to cooperate for the welfare of the nation and the people with genuine goodwill without being influenced by others as the task of nation building should not be left as something to be done only by a particular individual or an organization. The third aim is to nurture the ability to appreciate and properly exercise the democratic way, suited to the nation, purely Myanmar and orderly, for the peaceful, modern developed nation which we are building. Government departments and officials concerned alone will not be able to manage to do their work to perfection; there will be strong as well as weak aspects and so, opportunities have been created for giving and receiving constructive criticism among own selves for the good of one's own country and people. I would like to request the experts and experienced persons to help achieve these aims through discussions (OSS 1997).

Military intelligence[37] behind the Office of Strategic Studies, convenes and controls such 'academic' work. While offering insights into the government agenda, the documents resulting from these conferences are full of slogans and unsubstantiated assertions, and "contain very little serious and honest analysis of Burma's situation" (Houtman 1999: 58).

Role of The Health Sector Contributing to National Solidarity"—Dr. Hla Myint; "The Role of the Cultural Sector Contributing to National Consolidation"—U Nyunt Han.

[37] See Andrew Selth's "Burma's Intelligence Apparatus" for a discussion of Khin Nyunt's military intelligence (Selth 1997).

4—REVIVAL OF FESTIVALS

Since 1990, several ancient festivals and competitions have been revived. Most officially celebrated of these are the Traditional Regatta Festival and the Traditional Equestrian Festival. Each of these festivals is ostensibly restored from annual festivals that celebrated the monarchy. The Regatta Festival, held in November/December reenacts the historic event of King Thayawaddy's grand naval expedition to Dagon. Though traditionally re-enacted on the Irawaddy river (where the historic event occurred) it has been relocated to the calmer, yet urban waters of Kandawgyi Lake just north of downtown Rangoon (see Khin Maung Nyunt 1996). U Nyunt Han's celebration of this event is documented in his paper, "The Role of the Cultural Sector Contributing to National Consolidation," from the 1996 National Consolidation Symposium.

> "The Myanmar Traditional Regatta is celebrated not only as a festival but also with the objective of reviving Myanmar traditional festivals and nurturing union spirit and hereditary pride and courage. The contestants achieve success in the traditional Regatta only when they can maintain their physical and moral strength as well as perseverance and unity. Celebrating the traditional regatta will foster tenacity, industry, perseverance and unity among the national races" (Nyunt Han 1997: 169).

With much the same regal spectacle, the Traditional Equestrian Festival attempts to revive the glories of the former dynasty.[38] Again, U Nyunt Han; "During the reign of ancient Myanmar kings, military heroes displayed their skills in horse riding, and use of lances and javelin at the equestrian festival watched by the king himself... By reviving such equestrian festivals, youths of today will emulate the prowess of Myanmar heroes" (Nyunt Han 1997: 170). Additional festivals established since 1990 include the Traditional Bullock-cart Race and Cattle Show and the Rural Art and Craft Exhibition.

Each of these revived festivals aims to inculcate the youth with various Burmese values chosen by the state and directly associated with a royal past. A selectively chosen history of the royal court is central to the modern-day Burmese identity that is being constructed by the SLORC/SPDC government.

5—FILM AND OTHER EXPRESSIVE ARTS

In addition to the music projects, to be discussed in the coming chapters, funding and encouragement of a multitude of arts projects was augmented in the early 1990s. With the intention of garnering recognition abroad, "Myanmar Culture Troupes" have been sent on state-sponsored artistic goodwill missions to China, Japan, and India as well

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[38] Some fear that these celebrations are, literally, a move in the direction of restoring the monarchy.

as to England, France, and Russia. Most prominent in the state media are the goodwill missions that have traveled to other ASEAN countries. Artistic relations established with each (or any) of the ten ASEAN nations are loudly proclaimed as examples of regional unity and cooperation. Other national entertainment displays include dance troupes of the department of Fine Arts participating in annual festivals (including the above Regatta and Equestrian festivals), celebrations (such as the Tooth Relic Procession), competitions (Sokayeti Performing Arts Competition and the Myawady Anyeint theatre competition) as well as public performances on state holidays (Independence Day, Union Day, Tatmadaw Day, etc.).

Regardless of their medium, all artists throughout the country are admonished to join the common mission proclaimed in the ever-present state objectives. Most specifically, the two state objectives, "Uplift of national prestige and integrity and preservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage and national character" and "Uplift of dynamism of patriotic spirit," are regularly directed at artists who are then encouraged by the state to take up the national banner and to realize these objectives.

An example of this can be found in the Myanmar film industry. Proceedings of the Myanmar Motion Picture Academy's annual awards ceremony (called, of course, TThe Academy Awards") were announced in the *New Light of Myanmar* on the day following the event. The current situation in the film industry was reviewed by the

Minister for Information, Maj-Gen Kyi Aung, at the presentation of awards. Excerpts from the newspaper's account of his findings reveal the pressures that artists suffer to join the national cause:

> On a positive note he observed that film artistes of the new generation have been enthusiastically taking part in nation-building endeavours, true to the traditions of their forebears who had actively striven in the national cause all along in the people's struggles for regaining Independence from the yoke of colonialism and in the on-going endeavours to safeguard this hard-won national Independence.
>
> He stressed that the State Peace and Development Council would carry on with the nationalist responsibility of sustaining the already-achieved State stability and peace and already-achieved economic progress and improvement in the people's living conditions, as resolved by the mass meetings of the people expressing the wishes of the masses, in keeping with the 12 political, economic and social objectives.
>
> The Minister called for more active efforts of the film artistes through participation in the forefront for successful implementation of the national responsibilities.
>
> It is expected that the film artistes who love the country and the people and possess national outlook beyond their personal successes will respond to the call of the Minister, and strive to contribute their best in the national cause of building a peaceful, prosperous, modern developed

nation, even as they endeavour, all in unison, for further development of their industry.

"Call on the Film Artistes to Serve the National Cause"
New Light of Myanmar, Friday Jan 1, 1999

6—MUSEUMS AND THEATERS

To accompany many of the above-mentioned projects, a long list of National, State and local archeological, natural history, and cultural museums, as well as performance theaters, have been constructed by the SLORC/SPDC regime. An edited list would include the Bagan Archeological Museum (1995), the Pakhangyi Archaeological Museum (1992), Hantharwaddy Archaeological Museum in Bago (1991), Innwa Archaeological Museum (1994), Sixth Buddhist Synod Sacred Museum (under construction), the Yangon National Theatre, a gift of the People's Republic of China, completed in (1990), the Upper Myanmar Theatre Mandalay (1992) and the Padonmar theater in Sanchaung Township,Yangon (1990). Additionally, there are new museums found in each of the seven states. "Indeed the idea of museums has now caught on so well that Pagan is characterized as 'a living museum' and there is even the 'Drug Eradication Museum' in the Shan States that opened on 22 April 1997 and is supposedly a 'popular tourist site for the Chinese" (Houtman 1999: 94).

Most celebrated of all the new museums is the new National Museum in Rangoon, completed in 1997. This new endeavour is the flagship symbol of the SPDC-envisioned "peaceful-integrated-nation," which embodies the two culture-based social objectives of the state.

> The National Museum preserves and safeguards the ancient cultural heritage which reveal, and are indications of the country's prestige and course of history. As such the National Museum may well give reason for a heightened national pride and spirit to all the country's citizens. At a time when the country is striving to build a new modern and developed state after laying down the political, economic and social objectives, the systematic organization and establishment of the National Museum may be considered as, in a way, implementing the national objective (U Aung San, the Minister of Culture, quoted in Houtman 1999: 92).

Despite the present fetish for national museums and other codifications of historic and traditional culture, not all museums preserve the required views of history. Just north of the Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon, a discerning eye will find the recently closed (mid 1990s) Martyrs Museum. This museum, dedicated to the heroism of Aung San and his martyred cabinet members, has been neglected; and like other aspects of the independence hero's persona have fallen from the grace of the present government and similarly from tourist maps.

7—ETHNIC MINORITIES

While the ethnic minority situation in Burma is extremely complex[39] and beyond the scope of this project, short references to several projects designed to include the 'nationalities' under the umbrella of unity will be mentioned. Cease-fires procured with many of the ethnic insurgent groups have given the regime license to claim that peace and stability have been achieved.[40] With the intent of drawing the minorities into the new Myanmar ideology, multiple enterprises have been designed to 'promote national consolidation.' A glance at one of the state museums displays a rhetoric of diversity, yet with common goals and aspirations; all nationalities working towards a peaceful and developed Myanmar. While the 135[41] ethnic minorities are frequently mentioned in the state press, are found frequently on stages doing national dances, and are rhetorically applauded, they are always cloaked under the banner of national unity. Their identity is always filtered through state projects with the overwhelming message of unity.

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[39] For a discussion of the complexity of the minority situation see Carey (1997), Ling (1988), Rajah (1988, 1998), Renard (1988), Silverstein (1997), Smith (1995, 1997, 1999) and Taylor (1982).
[40] Several Karen insurgent groups remain fighting in Eastern Burma. Having begun shortly after independence, the civil strife with the Karen make for one of the worlds longest-standing wars.
[41] '135' is the number of ethnic nationals that live in the country, as frequently claimed by the SLORC/SPDC government in the state press. As a complete census has not been conducted in the country for several decades and officials have not revealed how this number was derived (or are unable to), I use this number somewhat ironically.

The following photos, taken at the Shan state museum in Taungyi, reflect the officially-sanctioned style of 'ethnic nationality' display. Here we see diversity on display yet the voices of the ethnic minorities themselves is difficult to discern. We see inclusion, but little participation. As Stuart Hall asserts in his explanation of hegemony, we find "a collective will (constructed) through difference" (1991b: 58).

Ozi ensembles consisting of ozi (goblet drum), gong(s) and cymbals are prevalent at festivals throughout the Shan states. There are many types of ozi drums, and each ethnic minority has adopted certain stylistic shapes, sizes and colors. Prominently displayed along one wall of the Shan State museum can be found a collection of instruments from several different ethnically tagged ozi ensembles. Though the display announces the difference, at least in name, the overwhelming message appears to be one of similarity, rather than one of variance. In this museum display, participation is marked; difference is not. Ironically, the music generated from these drums, which is unavailable to the museum patron, does not reveal the same message. The upbeat danceable Shan ozi style contrasts markedly with the serene processional style of the Danu.

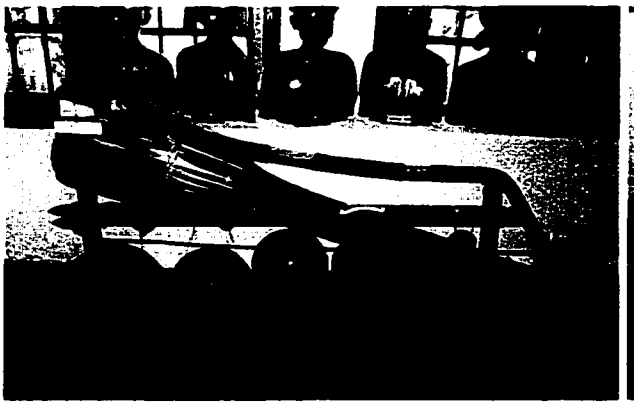

Figure 2.10: Shan Ozi (note the carvings in the backround; busts of each of the local nationalities)

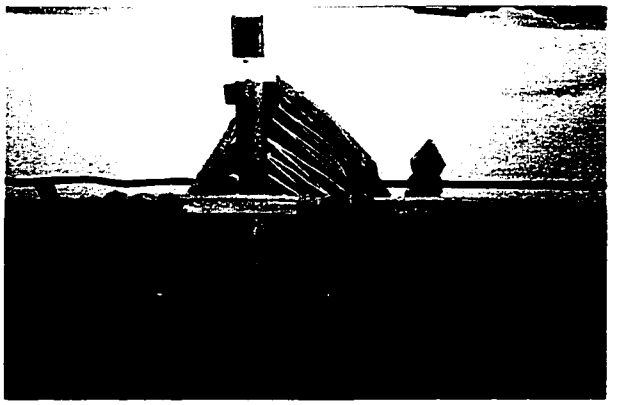

Figure 2.11: Palaung Ozi

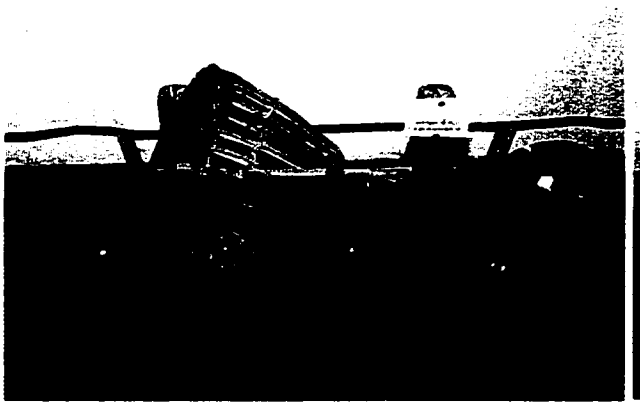

Figure 2.12: Taimao Ozi (Pa-O)

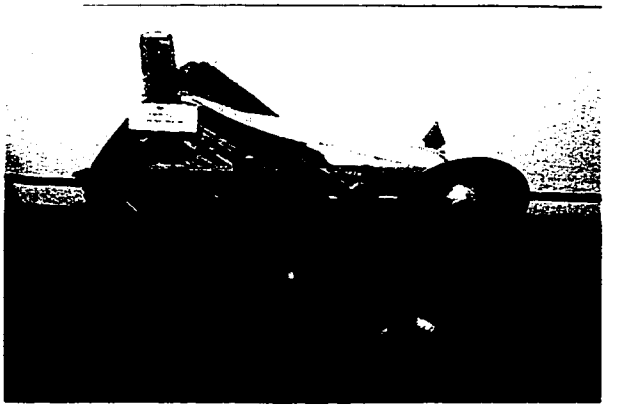

Figure 2.13: Danu Ozi

We can see in the national paper, The *New Light of Myanmar*, a similar dissolving of difference and the emphasis on unity above all.

> In interviews with the media soon after exchanging arms for peace, the brethren groups agreed that they shared the same views, same causes.

> There were differences of opinion, and once these were narrowed down and the differences removed, there was unanimity that peaceful coexistence was a dream they and the Tatmadaw has (sic) shared.
>
> Rivers bridges, roads connected and shortened, all infrastructures improved, people everywhere enjoying the fruits of peace are the best proof that when there is mutual understanding and national solidarity, success is never far away.
>
> "National Solidarity," *The New Light of Myanmar*, Tuesday 25 May, 1999

In addition to museums in each of the states, a new university called the University for Development of National Races was opened in 1991. Constructed in the 1970s, it was given university status in 1991. To glance at the stated objectives of the university, an emphasis on national pride and union spirit is pervasive; indeed, this is what a good education appears to be comprised of. However, in the stated objectives for this university, comparatively little concerns education.

Objectives of the University for Development of National Races

(1) To strengthen the Union Spirit in the national races of the Union while residing in a friendly atmosphere and pursuing education at the University;

(2) To preserve and understand the culture and good traditions of the national races of the Union;

(3) To promote the spirit of desiring to serve in order to raise the standard of living of the national races;

(4) To raise the quality of leadership and efficiency in carrying out the development of the national races;

(5) To infuse the spirit of desiring to carry out works of research with a view to the success of the measures for the development of the national races;

(6) To produce good education personnel who are free from party politics and who are of good moral character;

(7) To keep alive and promote the spirit of desiring to preserve the causes of non-disintegration of the Union, non-disintegration of national solidarity and perpetuation of sovereignty of the State.

(see www.myanmar.com)

All state representations of the ethnic minorities are framed in terms of the interests of the state. As seen in the above examples of museums and universities, as well as daily 'culture shows' on Burmese television, which depict ethnic minority communal dances and costumes, there is little participation in the creation of these media by the ethnic representatives themselves. Though their inclusion in the government's national

project is prominent (discussed further in Chapter Three), their agency behind it is minimal.

8—OTHER STATE PROJECTS

A short list of some other state-sponsored projects include a national sports day held on January 11, started in 1995, an annual chinlone[42] competition, and various academic committees, including the Committee for the Compilation of Authentic Data of Myanmar History (CCADMH), the Myanmar Historical Commission, a committee for the Construction of a Myanmar-English Cultural dictionary, and the "Office of Strategic Studies" from which the above two conferences came. It is also interesting to note a revival of traditional medicine. With very few traditional medicine clinics existing in the country in the 1980s, by 1998 there were three traditional health hospitals and 178 clinics (Mya Oo 1997). Further explorations would undoubtedly reveal more state projects that reach into all corners of Myanmar life.

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[42] Chinlone, the national sport, is traditionally played with six players in a circle who pass a cane ball between them with the use of only select parts of the body (feet, knees, ankles). Variants of the game are found in Thailand, Malaysia and China.

THE HIGH VISIBILITY OF THE PATRONS

Pervasive in the state media documentation of these projects and sponsorships is the visibility of the ruling generals. Regular accounts in newspapers and on the daily television news will show the leaders of the SLORC/SPDC regime offering donations to monasteries, overseeing construction projects, managing renovations, visiting museums, attending festivals, etc. While offering little content analysis, the state media consistently prioritizes the patronage over and above the event or project. Again, as Schober has noted (1997) patronage accrues to the group, the governing body of generals, not just to an individual.A random sample of headlines taken from the *New Light of Myanmar* on-line <www.myanmar.com/nlm> for the week of Apr 8, 2001 elucidates this point.

Modern patriotic police force to be established to serve public interest, Senior General Than Shwe inspects training schools in PyinOoLwin

> Yangon, 8 April—Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Than Shwe yesterday morning inspected training schools near Zibingyi Village in Pyin-OoLwin Township and Medical Research Department (Upper Myanmar) near Sitha Village and gave guidance.

Secretary-1 and wife attend Myanmar-Japan cultural exchange dance show

Yangon, 11 April — Myanmar-Japan cultural exchange dance show and Myanmar-Japan souvenir (sic) festival sponsored by Myanmar-Japan Friendship Association was held at the National Theatre on Myoma Kyaung Street in Yangon this evening, attended by Secretary-1 of the State Peace and Development Council Lt-Gen Khin Nyunt and wife Dr Daw Khin Win Shwe.

Senior General Than Shwe attends opening of Shwe Ceti Home for the Aged in Kyaukse

Yangon, 12 April-State Peace and Development Council Chairman Defence Services Commander-in-Chief Senior General Than Shwe and wife Daw Kyaing Kyaing attended the opening of Shwe Ceti Home for the Aged in Kyaukse this afternoon.

Secretary-1 and wife enjoy Maha Thingyan Festival on Atet Day

Yangon, 16 April—Secretary-1 of the State Peace and Development Council Lt-Gen Khin Nyunt and wife Dr Daw Khin Win Shwe this morning joined in Myanma traditional Maha Thingyan Festival at the pandal of the Ministry of Home Affairs on Atet Day.

Given the overt attempts to legitimize themselves via monarchical and religious symbols, questions arise concerning kingship aspirations of particular individuals in the regime. Are they literally trying to rebuild a monarchy with one particular general

eventually ascending the throne? Intellectuals in Burma hold the view that Ne Win himself has searched for evidence that he is of royal blood, and that he brought forward the Mandalay historian U Maung Maung Tin in the hope that he would prove his royal heritage as being derived from the Prince of Prome. This blood-line style heritage is also aspired to by the band of generals in power, and their Myanmafication is in part at least an attempt to legitimize themselves as appropriate inheritors of royal power. As yet, however, no individual member of the regime has dared to come forward and personally claim royal heritage. Not at least while Ne Win is alive (Houtman 1999: 94). Despite this Lt. Gen. Khin Nyunt, the most public of the generals appears to be playing a king-like role in many of his public appearances. This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

CONCLUSIONS

The aggressive program of cultural construction (Handler 1984, Hanson 1989) and tradition invention (Hobsbawm 1983), combined with the contiguity of the ruling generals, manufactures a new type of legitimacy for the SLORC/SPDC government.

Each of the above projects places the idea of Myanmarness deep into the past, a past that predates Aung San Suu Kyi, Aung San, and the British colonials. This is an

imaginary past comprised of peace and prosperity throughout the kingdom and undisputed monarchical authority. These projects draw attention away from not only the important political symbols of the country's recent history, including Aung San's Independence, the 1988 uprisings, and Aung San Suu Kyi, but also away from the political issues that these people and events so powerfully symbolize.

While some attention is paid to the ethnic minorities some authors feel these projects are little more than further Burmanization and hegemonic control wielded from the Burmese power centers. Burmanization imposes Burmese culture upon the entire body of citizens. Gustaaf Houtman has referred to some of these state projects as projects of Myanmafication. As desperately needed government reforms are being postponed, all that has taken place so far is the re-enculturing, or Myanmafication, of the country. "This is an attempt to revive selected aspects of culture perceived as necessary for a new Burmese polity to play a role in the modern world. This project in today's world, however, rather than delivering freedom, is purposely engineered to imprison its people" (see Houtman 1999: 40).

Indeed the debate over the term "Myanmar" or "Burma" is indicative of this agenda. While some authors have observed this change as suggestive of cosmetic reform, (Smith 1991a: 2) others, such as Houtman, claim that the name changing throughout the

country is "unambigious Burmanisation" (Houtman 1999: 43, 53) that overrides all other grass-roots variation in the many languages present throughout the country.

This "Myanmafication," and monarchy rebuilding, appears to accomplish several present-day political goals that re-establish (or at least attempt to) the legitimacy and the authority of the present dictatorship. Firstly, these projects, as national symbols and icons, respond to the loss of Aung San from the national symbolism and replace him with other symbols; symbols that are still strongly heartfelt by many Burmese nationals. Secondly, with the necessary surge in foreign presence (both in personnel and in goods) that increased economic relations brings, these projects are attempting to ward off such influence and protect the country against foreign values.[43] Finally, each of these projects contributes to the discrediting of political opponents of the regime, most notably Aung San Suu Kyi, but also foreigners and foreign governments (in particular those from the West that have imposed economic sanctions). By portraying themselves as guardians of every citizen's heritage and simultaneously painting Aung San Suu Kyi as a traitor and a foreigner, the generals attempt to discredit her voice[44] and establish their right to rule.

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[43] There is a strong belief amongst the regime that foreign meddling was instrumental in the 1988 uprising.

[44] In mid 1990s, as Aung San Suu Kyi was under house arrest and the press was daily barraging the public with accounts of her betraying the people and losing her traditions, she began writing her now well-known *Letters From Burma* (Aung San Suu Kyi 1997). Many of these letters, describing festivals and daily life in Burma (and not politics), appear to be combating this idea that she is out of touch with her culture. Ironically, these letters, now collected in a book, are not legally available inside the country.

In the chapters that follow, I will turn to Burma's music culture and ask how it conforms or resists this SLORC/SPDC traditional culture agenda.

CHAPTER III

THE SOKAYETI PERFORMING ARTS COMPETITION: A MODEL OF THE IDEAL NATION

> Listening to music is listening to all noise, realizing that its appropriation and control is a reflection of power, that it is essentially political.
> Jacques Attali[1]

> Competition is perhaps the predominant mode of social interaction in modern capitalist societies.
> Veit Erlmann[2]

> The state is invisible; it must be personified before it can be seen, symbolized before it can be loved, imagined before it can be conceived.
> Michael Walzer[3]

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the first of three areas of state patronage, the annual performing arts competition. Other state patronage projects that have direct impact on Burma's music culture include The University of Culture and the standardization and notation efforts; these will be dealt with in Chapters Four, Five, and Six. The Sokayeti[4] music competition has become a site wherein various aspects of Burmese identity are

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[1] Attali 1985: 3
[2] Erlmann 1996: 224
[3] Walzer 1967: 194

explored, invented, articulated and contested. Since 1993, the Sokayeti performing arts competition has been held every October or November in Yangon/Rangoon. The competition is roughly divided into four divisions: singing, dancing, composing and performing (instrumental), with additional theatrical productions of classical plays and marionette (yokthe) shows. There are over one thousand contestants participating in a multitude of categories based on age, ability, sex, instrument, song genre and dance genre.[5] The competitions have had an increasing number of contestants each year, and, receive greater and greater amounts of media attention.

The sixth annual competition,[6] held in October of 1998, was spread over the four largest venues in the city and lasted two and a half weeks, running from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. each day. The competition is energetically profiled in the state media and is patronized daily by the several of the ruling SPDC generals. These government patrons command such a degree of attention that the political agendas behind the competition are unveiled and give rise to different tensions regarding the place of the competition in present-day political culture. The high visibility on the state media of the SPDC's top generals attending various competition events gives rise to questions regarding the multiple purposes that this competition serves to the musicians, the ruling government and the

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[4] Sokayeti competition (အဆိုးအကးအရေးအတီးပြိုင်ပွဲ) 'so'=to sing, 'ka'=to dance, 'ye'=to write, compose, 'ti'=to hit, to play (a musical instrument).

[5] These various style or genre categories are divided into male/female, 5-10, 11-15, 16-20 age groups, amateur, student and professional categories.

[6] There has been a consistent increase in the level of participation of contestants, audience members and media attention each year (See *The New Light of Myanmar* online at www.myanmar.com/nlm/).

public at large. How does the overt nation-building symbolism of the event interfere with the stated goals of developing talent and preserving tradition? Conversely, how do objectives of developing talent and preserving culture interfere with the goals of developing powerful national symbols? If all the media attention is focused on the patrons, with comparatively little regard for actual participants, are the subjects of the competition the competitors or the patrons? Is this contest about reviving Burmese heritage or defining and creating a modern Myanmar nation state? Or, is this contest about personifying the imagined state in terms of its 'leaders'?

The annual Sokayeti performing arts competition can be interpreted in a multitude of ways, some more sanctioned than others by the regime. The competition is organized in such a way that critical engagement by the public with music history and with traditional culture at large is highly restricted. Quality assessment and evaluation of talent is kept under the control of a small number of officials and away from the public. Simultaneous with this is an aggressive media campaign, unavoidable in the urban centers, that advertises the competition to the public. The form of the competition and the media's coverage of the event reflects numerous ways in which the government is employing this event to affirm and expedite its agenda of national unity, respect for authority, protection from the encroaching West, and the establishment of political legitimacy. The prominence of governing generals, ethnic minorities, political ministers and children on the state media's coverage of the competition, and the comparative

paucity of musicians, reflects the degree to which, and the style by which, the music tradition is integrated into the governing practices of the present military dictatorship.

The roots of Burma's present political problems are many and varied. Two of the longest-standing concerns for the country are rooted in the role that ethnic minority groups should take in the modern state (see de Silva 1988, Lieberman 1978, Silverstein 1980, Silverstein 1997, Smith 1995b, Smith 1996, Smith 1999) and the questionable legitimacy of the ruling generals (see Alagappa 1995, Mendelson 1960, Pye 1985, Suksamran 1993, Taylor 1998, Yawnghwe 1995). These two issues will be explored in my reading of the Sokayeti competition. The high profile of the Sokayeti competition gives opportunity to examine the performance and ritualization of state certified ethnicity and political legitimacy. How do those in power build political legitimacy through the competition?

COMPETITIONS AS FIELDWORK SITES

Why competition? What role do competitions play in the formation and maintenance of a music culture or of a political culture? In his monograph on South African *isicathamiya*[7] performance Veit Erlmann writes "competition is perhaps the predominant mode of social interaction in modern capitalist societies" (1996: 224). If

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[7] A South African, group vocal genre.

Burma is not (or is not yet) a modern capitalist society, how does the introduction of the Sokayeti competition in 1993 correlate with the recent opening up of the country to foreign investment and the international repositioning that the SLORC and SPDC have attempted? What elements of this competition are shared with other national competitions, and what are unique to Burma?

While competitions have been present for hundreds of years in Burma, both formal and informal, the Sokayeti competition takes a place in the country's music culture unlike anything prior to it. Earlier competitions could be found throughout various villages and cities or within the confines of the court itself. Though local prestige could be earned by performers at these competitions, the value of the event, as both entertainment and symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1977: 171-83), was limited to local audiences. The Sokayeti competition is the first competition to attempt a fully national and inclusive celebration of "Myanmarness" through music. Representatives from each of the seven states and divisions are all ideally present in any event portraying a model of the integrated nation sharing common values. These common values, rooted in a shared history, with representatives from all corners of the country speak to nation building strategies via musical practice.[8]

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[8] Several other national culture competitions have been instituted and serve similar (though less publicized) roles of interest to the state, including an annual Anyeint theatre competition, a Chinlone (the national sport) competition and a marching band competition.

Musical competitions have long been a rich site for the ethnomusicologist who, attempting to understand the social meanings of a given music, is able to find a wealth of information, resources, performances and informants in one central locale. The framing of the event within a larger community (a community beyond the musicians themselves) reveals much in the relationship between musicians and their audience and between musician. Competitions are arenas whereby issues of musical quality, style, professionalism, and other values are brought to the fore. They are productive areas for comparing and contrasting different versions of pieces, different styles and different assessment strategies while performers, adjudicators and audience opinions and reactions can be assessed.

Competitions are also fields for musical analyses of a different sort, in which power relations between various groups are made manifest. Recent ethnomusicological work by Tom Turino (1993), Veit Erlmann (1991, 1996), and Michael Bakan (1998, 1999) finds in the competition a platform for the negotiation of political and social identities and for the establishment and display of social and political power. Here we must recognize, as much recent ethnomusicological literature does, that music does not simply "reflect" pre-existing cultural structures, but rather musical performance is a social activity through which culture is created, negotiated, and performed (see Seeger 1987). Music performance does not simply reflect political identities and power relations it builds them.

Each of the above authors articulates a strong connection between the music competition and the creation of a modern nation state. Key here is the negotiation of the tradition from which the participants (performers as well as patrons) draw their material. Nationalism is understood, as Anderson writes, "by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which — as well as against which — it came into being" (1983: 12). In the revival, recreation and reinvention of heritage, powerful symbols are invented and negotiated for use in nation building (Hobsbawm 1983).

Competitions can become an arena for the symbolic establishment of ethnic alliances and social unity (or at least the appearance of such) that serve the nation-building interests of the state. Witness Erlmann again:

> Of particular interest in the South African context was the tendency among nation builders, community leaders, and ethnic authorities to invoke images of traditional social and cultural cohesion when they wished to mobilize the "masses." The earlier history of black popular culture in South Africa offers a wealth of examples of how black nationalism and ethnic alliances were frequently constructed and contested in the sphere of popular performance (Erlmann 1991: 180).

The invocation of traditional images to 'mobilize the masses' would appear to be relevant beyond the South African context. Tom Turino, in his work with the migrant workers in Conima, Peru, finds similar attempts to revive tradition and culture for use in state construction. State-sponsored competitions in Peru attempt to construct and control images of highland Peruvians and articulate displays of cultural difference, thereby projecting the idea of national unity. "At different times, and for different historically specific reasons, the Peruvian government has taken an interest in Andean performing arts as part of its efforts to forge hegemonic links with the peasantry and highland migrants" (Turino 1993: 226, see also 231).

Recent work by Michael Bakan in Indonesia (1998, 1999) finds various competitions intermeshed with national politics. The Gamelan Beleganjur competition becomes a site for negotiating the conflicting space between tradition and modernity, whereby politicians and political parties create their own identities, their own relations with the modern world and their own local histories. In modern Indonesian politics, claims Bakan, the negotiation of tradition and modernity is paramount to controlling power. So rich and salient is the Beleganjur Competition that it must be appropriated by those attempting to establish a sense of political legitimation and authority, conveying this usurped power as something natural (Bakan 1998, see also Bakan 1999: 224-232).

In each of these works, notions of tradition, heritage and cultural identity become inextricably enmeshed with notions of ethnicity, community and national development. "Traditional culture and performance, in the overwhelming consensus of opinion, are

necessary correlates of social development and modernization" (Erlmann 1991: 180-181). There are many parallels between the previously mentioned competitions and my observations of the annual Sokayeti competition its media coverage.

THE COMPETITION

In late 1998, I witnessed daily, the 6th Annual Sokayeti Performing Arts Competition and its representation to the public via the state media. I further studied the state media coverage of the 7th and 8th annual competitions.[9] I will begin my description of the Sokayeti competitions with an excerpt from an address given by Secretary-1 of the State Peace and Development Council, Lieutenant-General Khin Nyunt during the opening ceremonies.

> I send my greetings to all ministers, deputy ministers, heads of departments, special guests, diplomats, all judges and competitors with wishes for all to be ones that uplift national culture while promoting national pride and integrity. Myanma Traditional Cultural Performing Arts Competitions are being held on a grand scale every year so as to bring out most intricate and high-standard Myanmar culture and fine arts while getting the new generation to cherish and value traditional culture and have more patriotic spirit and patriotic pride that safeguard and promote interests of one's own nationality.

For a nationality to stand firm in the community of world nations, it needs to have sense of unity of its citizens and national economic development and additionally it also needs to have its own national culture. It is inevitably natural for every nationality with a high historical tradition to have its own ancestral heritage of national culture. It is evident right up to this day that the national essence, namely traditional culture and customs, own beliefs and national norms that spring from teachings of Theravada Buddhism, and national cultural fine and performing arts that bring out these national norms and thoughts, has been growing all along in the long history of the Union of Myanmar and Myanmar nationality for thousands of years, as distinct specific national characteristics of Myanmar nationality. In truth, only when we could preserve the national character born of national culture would we be able to keep national outlook and spirit always alive and promote national integrity grandly amidst the community of world nations. Accordingly I would like to say that cherishing one's own national culture, safeguarding and promoting it, are national responsibilities which are as important as life, for the Union of Myanmar to stand grandly amidst the community of world nations.

A look at the world today will show that, with unprecedented advancement in communications technology, globalization is overwhelming each and every nation. It was thought that this globalization would bring greater opportunities of co-operation among nations for peace and development in the world but it is later seen that things have not turned out as hoped for among developing nations because some big nations who have the upper hand in technology and economy are misusing the global

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[9] Much of the state media can now be obtained via the Union of Myanmar website and the online version

> processes and imposing political, economic and social domination on developing nations.
>
> In such a situation, in order that developing countries like the Union of Myanmar do not fall under the influence of some neo-colonialist big nations, it becomes more important to keep intact national characteristics and national norms, and there has emerged a national responsibility that is in keeping with that of safeguarding sovereignty of the nation. That is why the State is striving emphatically to bring out and uplift the essence of national culture with aims at ensuring everlasting brilliance of good qualities and national norms of Myanmar and its people. I would like to say that, in endeavours to bring out and uplift essence of national culture like that, the Myanma Traditional Cultural Performing Arts Competitions are one of the national movements of the highest order involving participation of the entire nation. That is why we have been seeing much better performance in the competitions from year to year, with united participation of maestroes, artistes, amateurs, new-generation artistes and the people...
>
> *The New Light of Myanmar*, Friday October 27, 2000.

The overwhelming message put forth by the state here is one of national unity. Central to this fostered idea is a sense of 'difference' from other nations, a sense of uniqueness. This depiction of national unity impresses a responsibility upon the citizenry to ensure and maintain that uniqueness. Little opportunity to question various manifestations of unity is available in Burma and yet, the idea of a unified, peacefully-

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of the state newspaper the *New Light of Myanmar*, see <www.myanmar.com/nlm>

integrated-nation is pervasive in both the media reportage and in the formal constraints of the competition.

The Annual Sokayeti Competition is divided into four parts; singing (*so*), dancing (*ka*), composing (*ye*) and instrumental performance (*ti*). These divisions are spread over the four largest concert venues in Rangoon including the theater in the new national museum[10] (predominantly singing and dancing), the new Padonmat theater in Sanchaung (primarily instrumental and group performances), the Kambawza theater at the Ministry of Culture (solo instrumental) on Kaba Aye Pagoda Road. and finally, the National Theater on Myoma Kyaung Road[11] (instrumental, solo and group). In front of each of these buildings, huge painted murals advertise the event and inviting the public in. Upon entering, several layers of military police security must be penetrated, effectively discouraging much of the public. After a search of any personal bags and a pass through metal detectors (most of the time the metal detectors were not in operation), one was allowed into the auditorium.

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[10] See Chapter Two for the role of the new museum in the culture agenda of the SPDC.
[11] Three out of the four theaters used for this competition (the fourth is the smallest) were constructed within the past ten years.

Figure 3.1 and 3.2: Billboard murals advertising the competition in front of Badonmat Theater.

Before the stage, prominently and visibly situated for the audience to see, sit the judges.[12] The first rows of the auditorium were reserved for the regular visits of the various official, generals and politicians. These would include military personnel with their entourage of military security and political ministers from various offices, e.g.: Ministry of Culture, Education, Internal affairs, etc. Cushioned seats with tables for hot tea were ever waiting for these visits. Immediately behind the VIP seats were press seats. At each of the venues, television and newspaper crews were always in attendance to document, report, and eventually to archive the entire proceedings. Television crews from both MRTV (Myanmar Radio and Television) and Myawadi, the two state controlled stations, were present in all venues for the full run of the competition. Behind the television crews, on wooden benches, sat the audience.

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[12] My description of the performance space is drawn primarily from the instrumental performances at Padonmat theatre. Though all sites had consistent relative placements of performers, judges, VIP, press

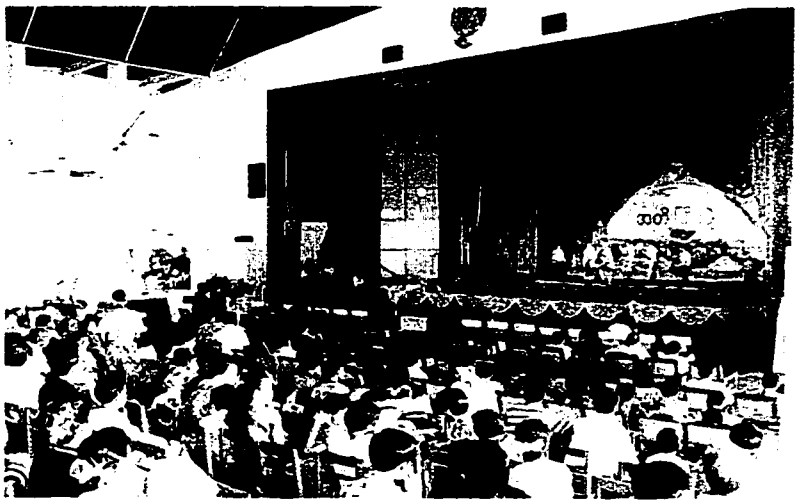

Figure 3.3: Performers, judges, press and audience at Padonmat Theater in Sanchaung township. The first row is reserved for VIP visits.

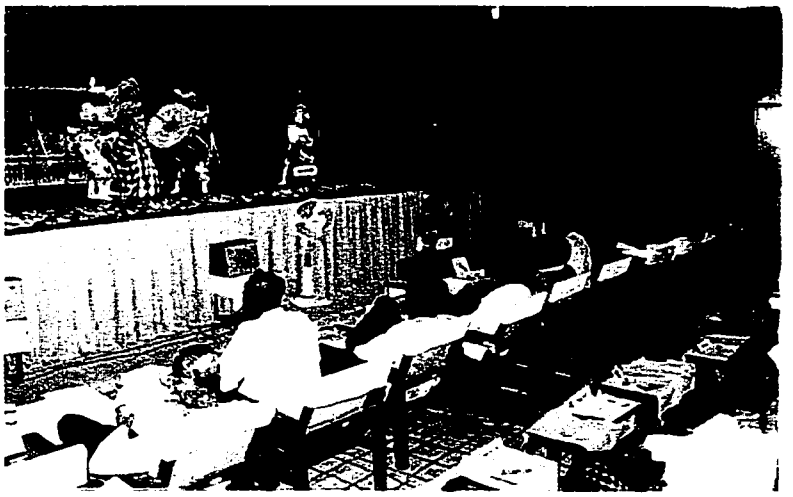

Figure 3.4: Performers (children s ozi troupe) and judges in Padonmat Theater.

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and public, the physical limitations of some of the buildings (particularly Kambawza at the Ministry of Culture) distorted the prescribed layout.

REPERTOIRE

The material for the instrumental performance competitions[13] is primarily drawn from the classical repertoire of the Burmese court. Cho, Bwe, Thachinkan, Patpyo, Yodaya, and Mon song genres dominate the instrumental categories.[14] The post-kingdom genres of kalabaw and khit haung (modern classical) are present in the dancing, singing, and composing competitions, yet are largely absent in the instrumental competition.[15] The abundance of Western harmonic influence in khit haung and kalabaw styles would not evoke a 'traditional' or 'pre-colonial' Burmese sound if played instrumentally.[16] The instrumental competition focuses on the performance of traditional Burmese instruments such as the *saung gauk* (harp)[17], *pattala* (xylophone), *hne* (oboe)[18] and *patt waing* (drum circle),[19] as well as foreign instruments that have been adopted (Burmanized) into the classical music pantheon, specifically the sandaya (piano)[20] and the tayaw (violin). Each of these instruments draws from the same musical repertoire (see Chapter Five). Though

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[13] I will deal here primarily with the instrument performing competition and less with the singing, dancing and composing competitions that were happening simultaneously.
[14] These song genres will be discussed somewhat in Chapters Five and Six. For a more detailed introduction see the works of Becker (1968, 1969), Garfias (1975b, 1995b), Keeler (1998), Khin Zaw (1958), and Williamson (1979c, 2000).
[15] Chapters Five and Six explore the khit haung and kalabaw genres as they are central to the present standardization and transcription projects.
[16] The texts of these songs, however, are overwhelmingly nationalistic.
[17] See Williamson (2000).
[18] See Okell (1971).
[19] See Garfias (1985).
[20] The 'Sandaya' was an old trapezoidal zither-like instrument that died off during the 19th century. The piano, introduced in 1880s as a gift to the king from the Italian ambassador, took on the name of this old instrument. (Etymological relation to the 'santur': In the Burmese language there is no 'r' sound. 'Ya' or 'y' is substituted for 'r' in most cases. Recognizing also that an unplosive 't' sounds like 'd'— Santur--Santuya--Sanduya--Sandaya).

used today in popular music (unlike many traditional instruments), the piano does hold a well-established position as a classical instrument for playing the traditional court music (Garfias 1995b). In addition to the solo competitions, there exist ensemble performances of the traditional saing waing orchestra (see Garfias 1979, Garfias 1985 for an introduction to the saing waing orchestra). Several other instruments were found in accompaniment roles in the vocal competition, but did not have their own competition arena. These include the iron pattala (iron xylophone), Burmese style lap/slide guitar, Burmese mandolin (a six string, single coursed mandolin), and Burmese Banjo (four string).

NON-CLASSICAL GENRES

There are, additionally, two very large and extremely popular genres of Burmese rural folk music, namely the ozi and dophat drum ensembles.[21] These are the most popular genres at the competition, filling the theater to capacity. Ozi and dophat performances have the greatest emphasis on theatricality, costumes and showmanship of all the instrumental categories. They are also the genre with the loosest ties to the Burmese court, having their roots in rural festival music. The ozi and dophat ensembles have a lead singer who dances, jokes and improvises, and thus, they are also the genre with the most potential for social commentary. In the context of the Sokayeti

competition, the social commentary does not challenge the established power holders; though in traditional (non-staged) contexts, it often would.

Figure 3.5: Performance of 10-15 year old male ozi troupe from Yangon division. Four musicians and dancer/comedian. Left to right: waletkout (bamboo clapper), palwei (flute) or a hne (oboe), ozi (goblet shaped folk drum), dancer/comedian, dressed as Shwe Yoe, a famous comedian, and lingwin (cymbals).

Figure 3.6: Professional Dophat ensemble from Yangon division. Left to right: two dophat (barrel drums), waletkout (bamboo clapper), and lingwin (cymbals).

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[21] For brief descriptions of Ozi and Dophat ensembles see Keeler (1998), Khin Zaw (1961), Garfias (1975a)

THE CONTEST

Each division of the competition will ideally have representatives from each of the seven states (Kachin, Chin, Karen, Shan, Mon, Kayah, Yakhine/Arakan), and seven divisions (Yangon, Mandalay, Irrawady, Sagaing, Tenassarim, Bago/Pegu). Pre-competitions are arranged throughout the country in the months leading up to the national one, but are not widely publicized. Rarely is it the case that there are representatives from each geographic area. It should be noted that each of the seven states are named after the most populous ethnic group in the area; Kachin, Chin, Karen, Shan, Mon, Kayah, Yakhine/Arakan. Each of these ethnic groups, and the many others that do not have their own state, are distinct in multiple ways (language, customs, etc.) from the dominant Burmese ethnic group. The traditional music of these groups (with the possible exception of the Mon) is also distinctly different from that of the Burmese. This competition, however, offers no venue for or display of any musics of the ethnic minorities. Contestants are expected to wear traditional clothing, including traditional 'ethnic' minority clothing if representing one of the minority states. Before each performance, a sign announcing the state or division being represented is prominently displayed in front of the contestants. The format and placement of contestants is consistent whether there are groups performing or soloists.

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and Maung Yin Nwe (1972).

Various pieces organized according to different levels of difficulty[22] are drawn (not from a hat but from a silver alms bowl) by one of the leading judges or a recognized expert on that instrument. Then, names of contestants are drawn to determine the order of play. Performers are always accompanied on stage either by a melodic instrument or by the *si* and *wa* (bell and clapper) rhythmic accompaniment.[23] In the younger age categories, this accompaniment is often played by the student's teacher. After the judges are ready, a gong is struck by the lead judge, indicating that the performance may begin. The contestant begins a two minute *let swan pyat* (literally...an improvisational show of the hands) before entering into the classical composition. The official gong will be struck a second time if the performer has not yet finished his/her improvisation within the allotted two minutes. The highly virtuosic *let swan pyat* provides an opportunity for the contestant to show his/her technical control and improvisational skill. These two minute 'introductions' prove to be the most exciting moments of the competition, as the rules governing appropriate stylistic conformity may, within reason, be broken.[24] Each

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[22] Generally the first thirteen Kyo songs are reserved for the beginning level students. In upper level performances, Patpyo songs tend to dominate. See Chapter Five for a brief description of these song genres.

[23] All Burmese classical music is constructed in two parts. For the single melody instruments, such as hne, violin or voice (most Burmese instruements are capable of playing two lines) a second instrument is usually necessary to play the supporting harmony (see Chapter Five). All Burmese classical music is rhythmically organized around si and wa (bell and clapper) patterns.

[24] While most contestants stray from the modal and rhythmic confines of the piece they are about to perform, some stretch limits beyond acceptability. I witnessed a pattala (xylophone) contestant use an extra pair of mallets during this improvisation, mimicking the two-mallet-per-hand style of a jazz vibraphone player. While I was duly impressed with the sounds that this performer made, he lost the contest, and most judges with whom I talked thought this performance inappropriate.

instrumental performance would last from 4 to 20 minutes, depending on the length of the piece that was drawn.

JUDGES

At each of the competition venues, there are anywhere from fifteen to thirty judges, who sit directly in front of the musicians or in the orchestra pit of the theater. A senior judge, a recognized master of the particular instrument being judged, presides very visibly over the event, not only by (usually) drawing the order of contestants and song selection from the alms bowl, but also by his central position amongst the judges and before the gong that announces the start of each piece. My interviews with various judges revealed that even the most (politically) critical of the judges still values his/ her position as a judge.[25] Judges are appointed by senior musicians. As it is considered an honour to perform this duty only the senior judges get paid for their services.

Ideally, fifteen judges are chosen from Yangon and one from each of the states and divisions in the country. This draws the total number of judges to approximately thirty. In reality, this causes many problems, not only due to such a large number of adjudicants and lack of space in some of the halls but also, and more importantly, because the uneven

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[25] Each of the teachers that I studied with (see Chapter One) during my stay were judges at this competition. Additionally several other musicians with which I developed friendships were judges. Much of my understanding of the mechanics of the competition is drawn from formal and informal interviews

distribution of knowledge in the country allows for certain judges to be thoroughly unqualified in their positions. The symbolic representation of all corners of the country and the illusion of a democratic judgment overrides the quality control. This portrays, in I believe a very consciously constructed way, the ideally integrated nation (Geertz 1980). However, as we shall see, the granting of awards, at least in the public presentation of the competition, is a peripheral part of the competition and of lesser importance.

The awards ceremony attaches as much honour to each of the judges as it does to the winning contestants. Each of the judges returns home with a framed certificate (which at a glance is identical to the contestant's awards) that is prominently displayed on the family room wall. Of all the musicians I interviewed who had any relationship to this competition, *all* had their framed certificates prominently displayed in their homes. Awards granted from elsewhere and from an earlier time in their lives were secondary, and rarely displayed.

ETHNIC MINORITIES

A great deal of emphasis is put on the ethnic minorities' participation in this competition. By organizing the contestants geographically, one contestant from each of the seven ethnic states could, in theory, be present in any particular category. The

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with these people (most importantly U Ko Ko, U Hla Htut, U Yee Nwe, U Tin Yi, U Mya Gyi, Sein

geographical origins of the contestants are always prominently displayed for the media, the audience, and the other players through a spoken introduction of "so and so from x state," and by a sign placed in front of the performer announcing the state or division that he/she represents. Geographical origins appear to be the most important factor organizing the contestants. The ethnic minorities are strongly encouraged to wear their traditional costumes. These often are formal costumes worn only on special occasions or 'ethnic' holidays that 'announce' ethnicity in very staged and formalized ways. During the contest, the bright red striped shirts of the Karen, the dark intricate weaving of the Chin longyi, Kachin jewelry[26] or Shan bombi[27] are all notably displayed playing Burman (ethnic Burmese) traditional music.

The emphasis that the state media, and the organization of the competition, places on ethnic minority participation is repeatedly articulated through announcements of geographical origins and the distinct dress that performers wear. Musics of the ethnic minority groups, however, are not present at the competition. The music and the musical instruments that are performed and played are unmistakably rooted in ethnic Burman identity. Most of these traditions are drawn directly from the Burmese court; and several

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Kyaw Naing, and Sein Ba Maw).

[26] These are some of the most important emblems of ethnicity as portrayed by Burmese television and newspapers (i.e. state sanctioned/ controlled ethnic symbols).

[27] 'Bombi' are pants (A Burmese word, I'm not familiar with the Shan term). Many ethnic groups in Burma wear wrap-around tube skirts on both males and females. The traditional and everyday garments of the Shan are easily recognizable as Shan and not Burmese because of these pants.

instruments such as the saung (see Simonson 1987)[28] and the saing waing embody in them a multitude of symbols evoking not only the royal Burmese court but also Buddhism. Such symbolism contributes to the marginalization (or forced Burmanization) of the ethnic minorities, since majority of the Christian and Muslim populations are found amongst the ethnic minorities. This author witnessed, on more than one occasion, an ethnic minority participant dressed in full costume, yet with a Burmese daipon (jacket) over the top of his ethnic dress. The minority participant here is cloaked (literally) with a Burmanness that dominates his identity. Or, perhaps a Burmese performer disguised as an ethnic minority participant.

I was initially quite surprised to see such a large number of ethnic minorities participating in the competition. I had known that many of the ethnic minorities in the outlying states claimed their own traditions, and, in some cases, had significantly different musics. On closer inspection, I began to realize that the ethnic participation was somewhat exaggerated by the media; the participants representing Shan state, for example were not always ethnically Shan, and in some cases did not even live in that state. Many ethnic Burmans, however, do live in the minority states, and can thus participate as representative of that state.

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[28] Muriel Williamson's work on the saung gauk (1968, 1975a, 1980a, 1981, 1984, 2000) also touches on this Buddhist symbolism. [29] I have been unable to answer why it is that the Shan, the most populous ethnic minority, are the least well represented in the competition. The Shan are a Tai group with many traditions much more akin to those of Northern Thailand.

According to one of the judges some contestants are known to have entered more than one of the pre-competition, thus doubling their chances of success and performing in states/divisions where they are not residents.

> Look at last year, in Rangoon division. Those who didn't get selected in Rangoon division, those people went and participated as people from other divisions. So Rangoon division lost but those talented people from Rangoon who participated as people from other divisions, those other divisions won.
> ...My grandchild, who is also my student, he participated in Rangoon division but he lost and was not selected to perform. So he went and competed for Karen division and ultimately ended up winning the national competition.
>
> (interview with a judge of the instrumental competition, June 3, 1999)

MEDIA AND ETHNICITY

What is important here is the appearance of significant ethnic minority participation in the competition. There is a disproportionate amount of media attention paid to the ethnic minorities in this competition. During the nightly news coverage of the competition, many minorities enjoyed a much larger percentage of time on television than they do onstage during the competition. An unquestionable misrepresentation (or rather

over-representation) of ethnic participation in the competition appears in the media. Of course this bodes well for the appearance of national unity and peaceful coexistence, regardless of the actual ethnic insurgent situations in the outlying states (see Gravers 1999, Houtman 1999, Lintner 1990a, Lintner 1999, Smith 1995b, Smith 1999). My estimate would put the ethnic minority participation (i.e., the number playing under that rubric) at 10-15% of the total participants, while 40% of the news coverage focuses on them. Interestingly, the Shan, though the largest and most populous of the ethnic minorities actually had the fewest number of contestants. Most all of the categories lacked a Shan State contestant.[29]

The irony of the media emphasis on ethnic minority participation is compounded by the lack of opportunity for any indigenous ethnic minority music to be played. When I asked the judges and participants why, I was consistently answered with a highbrow "this is classical music", or "this is 'art' music and not folk music" type of response. Since many of the ethnic minority musics have not been formally institutionalized, or are not perpetuated through a recognized training system, they are absent from the competition. A very strict line is drawn between folk and classical music–between that worthy of national recognition and praise and that which is not. Not surprisingly, this line roughly falls across the officially constructed boundaries of ethnicity. Music of the royal court is Burmese and national, while all other traditions are regional and ethnic. The most popular events of the competition, however, are the ozi and dophat drum ensembles. These, as mentioned, are ethnically Burmese rural folk traditions usually

found in festival contexts. Though they have vague ties to the royal court, their traditional contexts lie in rural settings, and they are not found in any of the institutions that teach music in the country.

The ethnic minorities are present in this competition not as representing their own traditions, but rather as participants symbolically modeling the peaceful integrated nation. Their difference is loudly publicized, yet is diluted and politically neutralized by their placement. Their participation as minorities is encouraged and supported with various markers of their ethnicity prominent (i.e., costume, sign in front). In fact, the present government avoids use of the possibly pejorative term 'minority' and opts instead to represent them as national races. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Stuart Hall has suggested, that hegemony does not imply the disappearance or destruction of cultural difference, but rather it "is the construction of a collective will through difference" (1991b: 58). This competition, like tourist shows in restaurants and formalized culture shows on state television, highlights the ethnic 'difference' and the simultaneous unity of all participants seemingly co-operating and working together towards common goals.

THE PRESS AND THE PATRONS

In addition to exaggerating the participation of the ethnic minorities, the press is very concerned with the patrons of the event. Indeed, the press is more concerned with the patrons than the musicians. There are currently two television stations operating

within the country, MRTV (Myanmar Radio and Television) the government channel, and Myawadi,[30] the military station. Both channels run virtually identical news and only slightly different programming.[31] Most evenings during the competition five to fifteen minute stories showing the competition events of the day would appear on television. These video clips appear to be constructed primarily to show not the music or musicians, but the patronage. The emphasis on these television news articles is placed on communicating which generals or ministers were present at any given event. In the case of Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt, Secretary-1 of the State Peace and Development Council, who is generally regarded as the person wielding the greatest amount of power in the government, his daily presence at the competition was consistently the most reported event in both television and newspaper coverage. He is considered *the* patron of the competition, and in addition to his many political designations, holds the title, "Chairman of the Leading Committee for Organizing the Competition." He is not a musician, and has not been educated as one; yet he is the Chairman of the Committee organizing the event, and has visibly patronized the competition since its creation in 1993. This competition and the increased role of 'culture' in present-day Myanmar politics is largely credited to Khin Nyunt. Khin Nyunt also oversees committees at the University of Culture (see

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[30] Named after the famous composer and poet Myawadi Wunci U Sa, see Williamson 1979a.[31] Actually, Myawadi, the military station, is generally thought to be the more liberal of the two as their quest for more advertising money encourages them to play a greater percentage of foreign (occasionally Western but predominantly Chinese) television shows.

Chapter Four), and even among the standardization and notation projects (see Chapters Five and Six).

A typical newspaper report on the competition prominently announces his rank and his political relationship to the event. For example:

> Yangon, 4 Nov.—The Thottithena Thambula marionette drama competition of the Seventh Myanmar Traditional Cultural Performing Arts Competition continued for the second day at the National Theatre on Myoma Kyaung Road this evening. Thottithena Thambula marionette drama troupe of Mandalay Division took part in the competition. Present on the occasion were Patron of the Performing Arts Competition Secretary-1 of the State Peace and Development Council Lt-Gen Khin Nyunt, Chairman of Leading Committee for Organizing the Competition member of the State Peace and Development Council, work committee and subcommittees, competitors and spectators.
>
> *The New Light of Myanmar*, November 4, 1999

The daily newspapers would often showed pictures of Lt. Gen. Khin Nyunt in three and sometimes all four of the competition venues on any given day.

The following four newspaper pictures were all taken from same 12-page newspaper on October 3, 1998.[32]

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[32] The article accompanying these photos lists the patrons that visited:

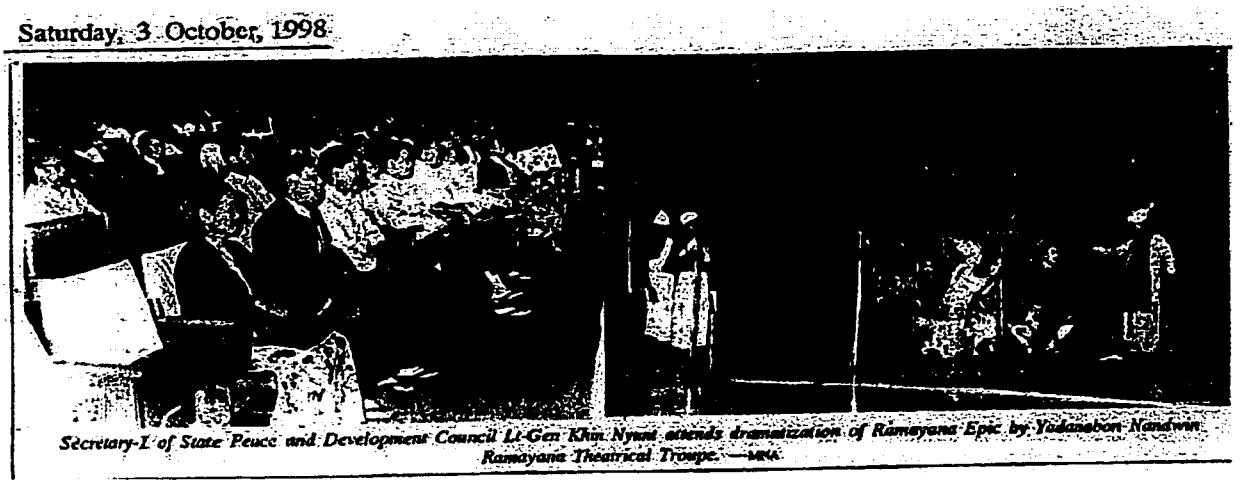

Figure 3.7: Lt. Gen. Khin Nyunt at Ramayana performance (Oct. 3, 1998). This evening performance was held in the National Theater on Myoma Kyaung Rd.

Among the spectators were Patron of the Leading Committee for Organizing the Sixth Myanma Traditional Performing Arts Competitions Secretary-1 of the State Peace and Development Council Lt-Gen Khin Nyunt, members of the Patronage Minister for Industry-2 Maj-Gen Hla Myint Swe and Minister for Culture U Win Sein, Chairman of Leading Committee for Organizing the Sixth Myanma Traditional Performing Arts Competitions Commander of Yangon Command Maj-Gen Khin Maung Than, Vice-Chairman Deputy Minister for Culture U Soe Nyunt, Deputy Minister for Labour U Kyaw Aye, Director-General of the Office of the State Peace and Development Council Lt-Col Pe Nyein, Chairman of Work Committee Commander of No 3 Military Region Lt-Col Win Maung, officials of Leading Committee and Sub-committee, teachers and pupils and tourists and people enjoyed the events of the Six Myanma Traditional Performing Arts Competitions (The New Light of Myanmar, *Oct 3, 1999)*

Figure 3.8: Khin Nyunt at harp contest (Oct. 3, 1998). This competition was held in Padonmat Theater (Sanchaung Township) in the morning.

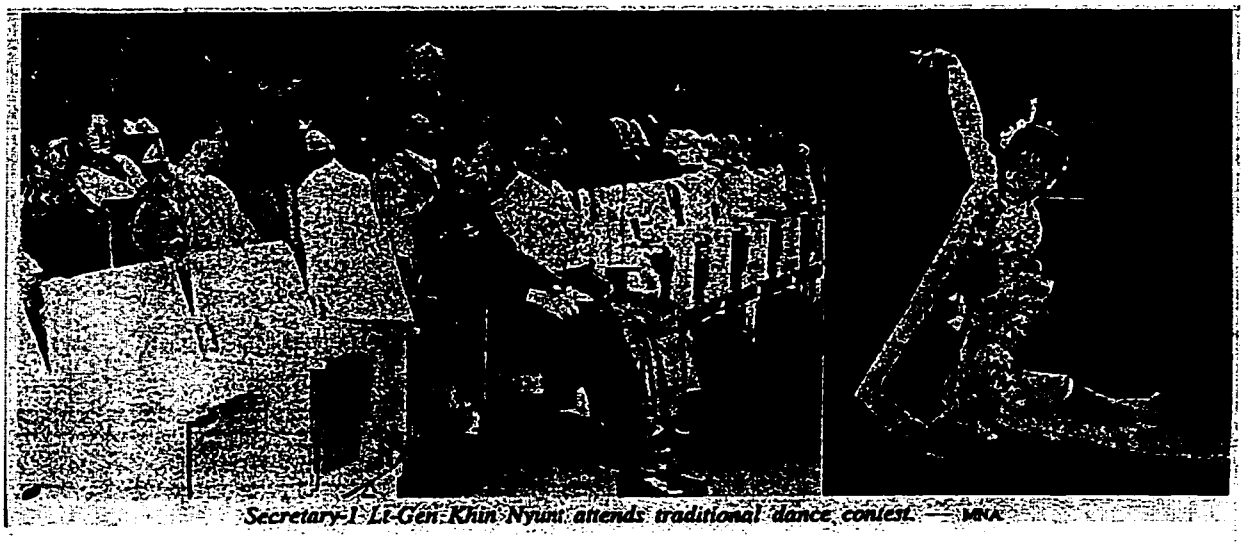

Figure 3.9: Khin Nyunt at traditional dance contest (Oct. 3, 1998). Held in the National Theater in the afternoon.

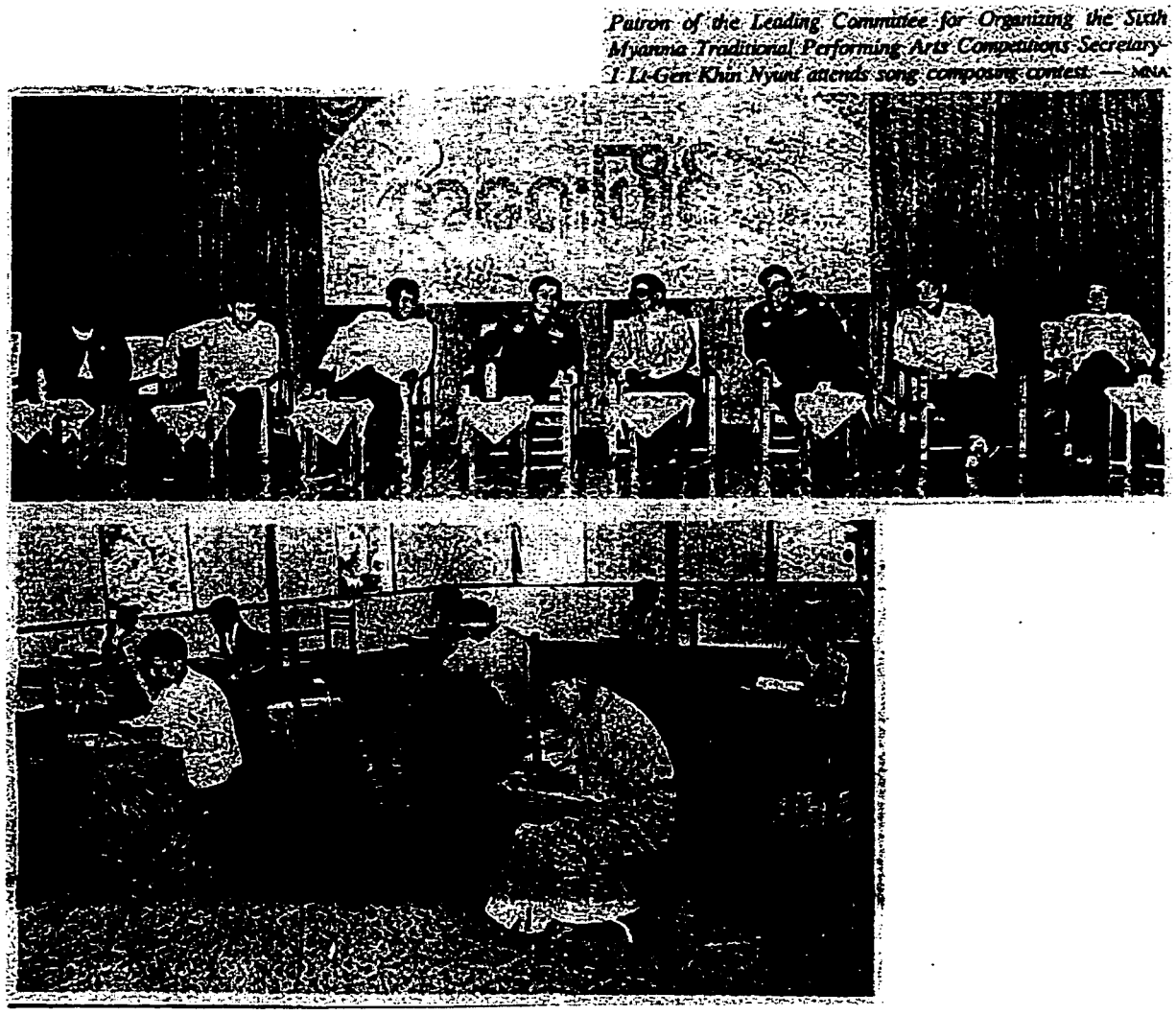

Figure 3.10: Khin Nyunt at the composing contest in Kanbawza Theater on Kaba Aye Pagoda Road (Oct. 3, 1998) during the afternoon.

The news coverage of the composing competition is particularly revealing as there is no audience for this event. Notice, however, rows of judges seated, watching contestants compose while generals visit. Closer inspection reveals traditional costumes worn by participating ethnic nationals. Though there is no live audience, television crews are still present to document the event for the evening news and newspaper reporters appeared daily to photograph the composers.

As is revealed in the national newspaper, the patronage of this event is paramount and of greater importance than the music.[33] The immense amount of time that Khin Nyunt spends attending daily shows, visiting with contestants (usually children), and moving between the various venues was remarkable for a head of government who, one would think, would have other priorities. In my estimate, he was logging as much as eight hours a day with the competition. During the day, the military leaders such as Lt-Gen Khin Nyunt would arrive in uniform, make appearances at most (if not all) of the venues, visit with judges, and shake hands with contestants. In the evening, the theatrical performances of the Ramayana and Yokthe (marionette) would be held. Again, Khin Nyunt and often other leaders, now out of uniform in semi-formal evening wear, would be present to support the event. Khin Nyunt's dress is important here. During the day, he is always in uniform, at work governing the country. In the evening, accompanied with his wife, who would never be in his company during the day, he is not in uniform, but rather enjoying a typical or 'natural' evening of leisure with his wife. After realizing the frequency of his visits to the competition, one begins to question how typical, natural or leisurely his behavior is. As Bakan writes of the political uses of the Beleganjur Competition "The purpose of the competition, politically, is to make the existing hegemonic order appear to be a natural extension of local cultural interests...or, to

culturalize politics" (1998: 458)(Bakan 1998: 458). Khin Nyunt's repeated appearances both as ruler (in uniform) and civilian (in traditional dress) reinforce the naturalized connection between culture and politics. It appeared to me sitting several rows behind him day after day that either Khin Nyunt was on vacation with nothing to do, or I was in fact watching him govern the country, and patronizing the music competition was indeed his top priority.[34]

Khin Nyunt's visibility as the patron of Myanmar tradition, and indeed of Myanmar culture at large, is essential to his symbolic positioning as leader.[35] Via the competition, and its ties to tradition and heritage, Khin Nyunt gains legitimacy in the modern state, a state that struggles with the tensions between tradition and modernity (Gartner 1994). His associations with Myanmar traditional culture appear to some to be an intentional connection to a pre-colonial past with himself in the role of King. Several

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[33] Reports in *The New Light of Myanmar* online are similarly covered for the November 1999 and November 2000 competition.

[34] In my mind I looked at this event and imagined the absurdity of parallel behaviour in the Western world. Imagine a U.S. president attending a 2 1/2 week-long music competition every day! Imagine the press documenting this at the expense of other worthy news. Several months after this event, I saw American politics take a peculiar turn. My particular vantage point from Burma offered further irony. The Presidential impeachment and the Monica Lewinsky affair (the scandalizing and re-scandalizing) were the rising news that preoccupied the American media (and any American news on other media) to a frightening degree. These affairs kept Congress busy and the American public distracted while, simultaneously, American bombs were being dropped on Baghdad and getting comparatively little news. Problems in Kosovo were also on the rise, and at this time (Feb/Mar 1999), still getting very little attention due to the media priorities of the sexual misconduct scandal. The entire American population appeared to be greatly distracted from other events. Who was governing the country during this time? Or, rather, what does this type of governing reveal?

[35] While traveling between the venues of the competition Khin Nyunt would block traffic as he was chauffeured in his black Pajero and flanked by truckloads of soldiers. The visibility of the ruler's motorcade (though usually not the ruler) impacts much of the populace; reminiscent of the ironic comment

of my friends and informants were suspicious of Khin Nyunt's King-like posturing. In several conversations, I heard rumours of his aspirations to revive the monarchy and place himself on the throne. Khin Nyunt has similarly positioned himself in royal patronage roles with respect to the Buddhist religion. Throughout the year press documentation of his patronage at various stupas and religious festival appear daily. The Shwedagon Pagoda restoration projects that were underway during my stay, his manipulation of such sacred Buddhist symbols and his power struggles with various highly-positioned monks could be seen as a dhammaraja-like, patron-king behaviour akin to the past monarchy (see Gravers 1999, Reynolds 1978).[36]

TELEVISION

The nightly television news, much like the daily newspaper, reports on the competition with a small amount of attention to performers, and a large amount of attention on the patrons (in particular Secretary-1 Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt).

"The purpose of Hindu-Buddhist Kings in South and Southeast Asia is to block traffic" (Ter Ellingson, personal communication).

[36] Associations between the music and the religion reinforce this king-like patronage (see Becker 1967, Simonson 1987, Williamson 1968a, Williamson 1975a, Williamson 1981b, Williamson 1984, Williamson 2000).

Figure 3.11: Lt-Gen Khin Nyunt on MRTV *(Myanmar Radio and Television) at festival with a child dancer (from online* New Light of Myanmar *October 28, 2000. Photo drawn from Myanma Radio and Television)*

Figure 3.12: Lt-Gen Khin Nyunt and U Soe Nyunt, deputy Minister of Culture, on MRTV *(Myanmar Radio and Television) at festival meeting the judges (from online* New Light of Myanmar *October 28, 2000. Photo drawn from Myanma Radio and Television)*

There is a rather significant element missing from the television coverage. When reporting daily events on the nightly news, sound is removed from field camera footage. Footage of the competition includes moving pictures of performers, judges and patrons. Television anchorperson narrates what events are being performed, what states and divisions are represented, and which dignitaries were in attendance. Such absence of sound is standard for any field footage on Myanmar television, highlighting an intense desire to control information, and the music competition is no exception. The fact that in this case a music competition is the subject of the report brings into much stronger relief the absurdity of the coverage, furthering the hypothesis that this competition has little to do with musical sound.

Viewers have no opportunity to hear the music until months after the competition is over and archival footage is played back during one of the many music hours on Myanmar television. Here only one musician, usually the first or second prize-winner in any competition section would be played. Footage from the Sokayeti competition is frequently seen throughout the year between programming on the MRTV and Myawadi television stations. These playbacks, along with the news media, become the primary sources of public consumption of the music competition.

THE AWARDS CEREMONY

Several days after the Sokayeti competition, an awards ceremony is held at the National Theater. Only at this time do any of the contestants discover how they have fared in the competition. First and second prizes are not announced or granted at the competition time itself, but rather at the awards ceremony, where up to three weeks could have passed since a given performance. By this time, memories of person A's playing, as compared to B's are forgotten. The awards ceremony is not officially closed to the public, but after the hundreds of contestants, judges, and officials have taken their seats, there is literally no room left in the theater for the public. The content of this event is not televised but the presence of certain generals certainly is.[37]

Between the removal in space and time of the awards ceremony from the individual competitions and the lack of sound in any media report, the public at large is prevented from gaining any insight into who is considered the best performer and what he or she sounds like. What the public does hear and see, on the other hand, is how ultimately important this event is, how well represented the entire country is, how peacefully and cooperatively all races can live and work together, how the youth are being morally educated, and, ultimately, who is responsible for all of it.

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[37] The results of a select number of categories will be announced in the daily newspaper.

Figures 3.13 and 3.14: Certificates of honour presented to doyen artistes, members of board of judges, Lt-Gen Khin Nyunt presenting awards and certificates to judges and competitors. New Light of Myanmar, *Thursday, 16 November, 2000.*

WHO IS PERFORMING?

In Myanmar, the state creation of the Sokayeti Performing Arts Competition raises questions beyond the local creation of identity by particular musicians. The role of the state, and in particular of specific leaders, is so prominent that one is led to ask who is really performing? and what is it that is being performed? If cultural performances and competitions construct social identities then what identity is being constructed, what culture is being created and negotiated? The Sokayeti competition is a performance of culture with the state as the key players.

While past competition participants could gain legitimacy and social prestige for having played for the king, or won a competition within the court, today's performing arts competition sees an interesting reversal. With the daily visits by the heads of state, we see here legitimacy bestowed upon the ruler by virtue of his association with the musicians. The musicians are the bearers of heritage, of true Myanma culture, and of the links to the legacy of the royal court. Competition is a heightened form of performance, in which one's accountability to the audience is formalized and made public. The highly publicized patrons (Khin Nyunt in particular) are perhaps the ones on stage, the ones that are performing. It is here that their legitimacy is built and their authority displayed (Kertzer 1988).

Events such as the Sokayeti Performing Arts Competition contribute, for the first time since the fall of the dynasty, to establishing a central point of musical authority. As the dynasty fell in 1886 to the incoming British, musicians were scattered throughout the country and the institutions of patronage and, perhaps more importantly, musical authority was distributed amongst private clubs, radio stations, traveling drama troupes, foreign record companies (particularly Columbia and HMV in the pre-war period), and moderately funded government conservatories.

The performing arts competition, along with the newly created University of Culture and the committees for standardization and notation of the canon, appear to be reversing this fragmentation and attempting to re-localize or re-consolidate a single voice of musical authority. As the leaders of the state are integrally involved in this re-

centralizing project, they are similarly able to usurp its political symbolism. Khin Nyunt is not accidentally connected to all three of the above, projects that are carefully ritualized for their symbolic power.

The Sokayeti competition is a political ritual. Khin Nyunt's royal posturing at this event evokes the past for political reasons in the present, bestowing "on the present the aura of a past that has a settled look" (Habermas 1986: 44). Rituals are potent means of legitimation, as they offer a way to unite particular images of the universe with a strong emotional attachment to that image (Kertzer 1988).

> The political leader who wants to create the public impression that he is champion of justice, equity, and the general good is far more likely to achieve a deeper and more lasting impression by staging a dramatic presentation of this image than he is by simply asserting it verbally. His appearance should be replete with appropriate symbols and managed by a team of supporting actors. In this way, power holders, or aspiring power holders, seek to promulgate the view of the political situation they would like the general population to hold. The drama not only constructs a certain view of the situation, but it also engenders an emotional response that associates notions of right and wrong with the elements in this view. It is, indeed, a moral drama, not just an instructional presentation (Kertzer 1988: 40-41).

Khin Nyunt's own words spoken during his opening-ceremony speech for the 6th annual competition are a fitting place to end this portrait. He very clearly states the

nationalist and moral agenda of the competition, and actually uses the vantage point of the competition as representative of tradition and heritage to attack his political opponents (specifically Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy) on the grounds that they are out to destroy the culture.[38] Their introduction of foreign ideas, not the least of which are democracy and human rights, and their alignment with the West, is nothing short of treason. It is Khin Nyunt's connection with the traditional culture that justifies his authority.

> ...(I)t must be underscored that national unity has to be built firmer and more steadfast to be able to crush the external (and internal) subversives and destructionists (who are) driving a wedge to split Union spirit in order to dishonour national dignity. (Their)... persuasive acts (designed) to tarnish the culture and traditions and weaken patriotism must constantly be offset by endeavours to preserve and promote culture and traditions. That is why the State Peace and Development Council has been undertaking tasks for (the) uplift of national prestige and integrity and preservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage and national character, and today's Myanma Traditional Performing Arts Competitions play one of the most crucial roles in these tasks.
>
> *New Light of Myanmar*, October 2, 1998.

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[38] See Chapter Two.

CHAPTER IV

THE UNIVERSITY OF CULTURE: TRAINING ARTISTS OR GOOD CITIZENS?

> All students who graduate from this university will receive jobs.
>
> Dean of University of Culture
>
> They have no future as musicians at all!!!
>
> Senior Musician
>
> ...a conservatory is probably more appropriately compared with a seminary than with a professional school, in that the concentrated focus of conservatory training seems more an inculcation of devotion than a preparation for a career.
>
> Henry Kingsbury[1]

INTRODUCTION

What role do schools of music play in a society? Are they created to train the keepers of a traditional past? Perhaps are music schools are designed to generate good, tradition-loving, citizens while the tutelage of future musicians is of secondary concern. It is an ethnomusicological axiom that music reflects the culture in which it is found; indeed, music contributes to creating that culture, and cannot therefore be isolated and detached from it. By extension then, schools of music should also reflect and contribute to the

construction of society. But how? Is this accomplished simply by creating more musicians and teachers (i.e., more music), or are schools and universities designed to inculcate certain values possessed by all good citizens, regardless of whether or not those citizens become practicing musicians?

This chapter will explore these questions with regard to the recently launched Myanmar University of Culture. This university was created in 1993, and offers degrees in several of the Burmese traditional arts. My analysis will approach the university along two seemingly contradictory perspectives. Firstly, I will inquire into what contribution this university makes to the continuance and maintenance of the Burmese music tradition. How is this accomplished, and what are the perceived results amongst the community of musicians? Secondly, I would like to explore the role the University has in inculcating various values of good-citizenry and patriotism in Burmese students. Indeed, these two perspectives are intertwined. They are often complementary; a well trained bearer-of-tradition is ideally suited to express patriotism. But they are also, adversarial; traditions necessarily change and comment on society, occasionally clashing with and critiquing the institutionally acceptable values of the day.

Does the new Myanmar University of Culture stand somewhat outside of Burmese society, with one foot deep in the musical traditions of the society and the other

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[1] See Kingsbury (1988).

artistically commenting on the world? In the afterword of his *Heartland Excursions: Ethnomusicological Reflections on Schools of Music*, Bruno Nettl observes and questions:

> The music school is the analog of factory, corporation and scientific establishment; it reflects the society of which it is a part. But if music came into existence, as some believe, as a special language with which humans could speak to God, or to the gods, then its institutions may also maintain a position of standing outside the culture, contradicting approving, debating and commenting (Nettl 1995: 145).

The analogy of a factory or corporation is useful to understanding the placement of the University of Culture in Burmese society. However, the University's ability to "stand outside the culture"–commenting on, debating with, approving or critiquing–may not be so obvious. Is it an institution that prioritizes the work that artists do, or the potentials that artists have as distinct from simply manufacturing a product?

Universities are also created with the aim of inculcating a certain type of devotion, either a devotion to a particular tradition or a devotion to a particular agenda or ideology e.g., patriotism, nationalism, consumerism, etc. In his 1988 book, *Music, Talent, and Performance: A Conservatory Cultural System*, Henry Kingsbury likens North American music conservatories to seminaries. He perceives in them an agenda concerned more with connoisseurship and the creation of particular cultural values than one of preparation for a particular career (see Kingsbury 1988: 19). Can parallels be made between Kingsbury's findings and the University of Culture in Burma?

THE STATE OF EDUCATION IN BURMA

The University of Culture has been instituted at a time when the country's education system is in devastating turmoil. On account of student political demonstrations in recent years, many of the universities, high schools and even elementary schools have been shut down for significant amounts of time. Burma has a long tradition of student-led political activity that stretches back to the Dobama Asiayone movement of the late 1920s and 30s, a movement that Aung San himself was centrally involved with (see Khin 1988, Maung Maung 1980). Further student-led demonstrations and mobilizations have occurred sporadically over the past seventy years, with the 1988 uprisings largely the result of student organization. In response to this civil disobedience, the ruling governments of the past forty years—Ne Win's regime between 1962 and 1988, and the SLORC/SPDC junta at present—have kept a heavy hand on the universities, closing them down frequently and employing many other methods to prevent political activity on campuses, including censorship of curricula and monitoring of teachers. Control of political activity on school and university campuses has been one of the primary concerns (if not *the* primary concern) of the SLORC/SPDC government since the disturbances of 1988. This paranoia has informed many new policies and radically altered student life over the past thirteen years. While control of student activity has been the paramount concern on all secondary school and university campuses,

education has suffered and has increasingly been used as a conduit for inculcating patriotism and other facets of the nationalist agenda.

Of great concern to Burma's future is the loss of education that many students have suffered in the past forty years. Between 1962 and 1999, universities were shut down thirteen times, from periods of a month up to more than three years. Such closures have been more frequent in recent years as pro-democracy demonstrations have increased. Between 1988 and 2000, the universities were closed more than they were open. Classes were canceled from June 1988 to May 1991, from December 1991 to May 1992, and from December 1996 to July 2000. Though many of the military institutes remained open during these times, only some of the Masters' degree programs within Rangoon and the smaller technical colleges, situated far from the urban centers, have had continued classes (Fink 2001: 182, Smith 1992). Most of the universities were closed throughout the duration of both of my visits, and entrance onto the main university campuses and access to libraries was highly restricted.

In the 1940s and 1950s, Burma boasted one of the highest literacy rates and one of the strongest education systems in all of Southeast Asia. Even into the 1970s under Ne Win's government, volunteers were encouraged to go to rural areas and act as tutors. As a result of this, Burma won two awards in the 1970s from the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for promoting literacy (Brandon 1998: 235). In the years since this time, Burma's education levels and literacy have plummeted to staggering lows.

Every government uses its education system to inculcate certain values and attitudes in its youth. In Burma, education policy has, at least since independence, been concerned with the protection of Burmese values against those of the West. In 1966, General Ne Win ordered that English no longer be used as a medium of instruction. English was linked to colonial rule. True nationalists were supposed to speak Burmese only. English was re-introduced only in 1979-80 after Ne Win's daughter failed an entrance exam to a British medical school because of her poor language skills (Lintner 1990b: 62). In recent years educational concerns have been central to the machinations of the SPDC government. At present, Secretary-1 of the SPDC, Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt,[2] serves as the head of the National Education Committee, and all curriculum concerns are centrally controlled. All major educational concerns are filtered through this office, as they are perceived to be central to state security. "Government textbooks, reinforcing the regime's propaganda in the state-controlled media, stress the honor of the military and the necessity of continued military rule to maintain the country's political stability" (Fink 2001: 175).

Before proceeding to specific matters concerning the University of Culture, several important problems confronting all educational institutions in Burma must be addressed. To begin, estimates of the military's share of overall government spending

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[2] Leading Patron of the Sokayeti Performing Arts Competition; see Chapter Three.

reach as high as 50% of the annual national budget.[3] With such enormous amounts of revenue being spent furthering the military machine, there is little remaining for basic social concerns such as education and health. Insufficient state funding for education forces much of the burden for school supplies and teacher payment onto parents and family members. Given the economic strain of families, few children graduate even from elementary school.[4] Teachers, similarly, suffer the consequences of this low funding. Teachers are forced to find extra jobs, hold private tutorials (which are illegal) or accept bribes in order to survive. Teachers and professors able to leave the country have gone abroad to teach in a freer environment for much better pay. This absence, however, has greatly diminished the quality of the educational facilities that remain.

Secondly, the frequent closures of the schools have created an enormous backlog of university students waiting to start and/or finish their degrees. This high level of competition, combined with poor teacher pay, contributes to the cheating and bribing of teachers and administrators. Today, bribes are considered necessary, and somewhat commonplace to most bureaucratic obstacles, including examinations and admittance to universities. Enrollment is limited each year by the number of places available making the level of competition very high,

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[3] The size of the country's military has grown extensively in the past thirteen years. At the time of the 1988 uprising, the Burmese armed forces comprised approximately 125,000 personnel. Today their numbers approach 450,000.

[4] See Fink (2001) and Smith (1992, 1995).

Thirdly, the Tatmadaw (armed forces) has maintained several of its own military universities, which have superior funding. Soon after the 1988 disturbances, several isolated, military-only medical and technological institutes were opened, and, unlike many other universities, have remained open throughout the past decade. This has raised grave concerns amongst civilians, as military personnel are becoming educated while ordinary citizens are being marginalized. In the words of one of Christina Fink's informants; "Education gives you confidence in yourself and strength to make decisions. The more people are uneducated, the more you can keep them down" (Fink 2001: 174). In the future, it is likely that those who attend military institutes or the four-year Defense Services Academy will be far better educated than ordinary civilians (Fink 2001: 182).

Furthermore, critiques of the poor quality of education for those lucky enough to be enrolled are abundant and consistent (see Brandon 1998, Fink 2001, Smith 1992, Smith 1995a). A large component of any student's education includes political ideology courses. Furthermore, all university curriculums must be approved by military censors. This censorship of courses and subject matter has greatly limited the fields of inquiry available for study in universities. The humanities and the social sciences have all but disappeared in higher education establishments.

Though beyond this study, multiple accounts of discrimination against ethnic minorities and women are surfacing in the pro-democracy and human rights awareness literature (Smith 1992, Smith 1997, Smith 1999). Most significant for this analysis is the regime's interest in eliminating fluency in minority languages. Education conducted in

Burmese and English will ensure, the regime hopes, that the minority populations will become assimilated into the Burman majority population. "In this way, there will be less basis for minority claims against the state's unifying projects" (Fink 2001: 176).

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTS OF THE PRESENT SITUATION

According to the state, in contrast to the above account, the education sector has been greatly improved and expanded in recent years. Now, more than ever, it is meeting the needs of the nation's diverse population. Drawing again from the symposium on *Human Resource Development and Nation Building in Myanmar*, we can observe the official account of the status of education in the country. U Myo Nyunt, the Director-General of the Department of Higher Education under the Ministry of Education, reflects on the present government's contributions:

> Since the State Law and Order Restoration Council took responsibility of state power in 1988, all state sectors have been upgraded to reach the national goals of the realization of a peaceful, modern and developed nation. The Education sector is being upgraded with a national outlook in line with the social objective of uplifting the health, fitness, and education standards of the nation. It is obvious that the education system adopted by the State is one that is based on the national cause and will consolidate

> national unity and will promote all aspects of human resources development and nation building (Myo Nyunt 1998).

Verbosely proclaimed in the media and in political addresses is the vast expansion of the education system instituted by the SLORC and SPDC governments. The government web page, <www.myanmar.com>, announces to the international community the strong commitment that the SLORC/SPDC have to the growth of their educational system.

> With the growing economic situation, the Education sector has been expanded and as of 1997, over 4000 primary schools, about 400 middle schools and over 200 high schools have been added. Besides upgrading the colleges throughout the country to University level, more colleges are now being opened. At present under the Higher education system, there are now (11) Universities, (2) Senior General Than Shwe Institutes, (18) Colleges, (4) Engineering Institutes, (2) Computer Universities, (4) Cooperatives Colleges, (1) Culture Institute, (4) Medical Institutes, and (6) Institutes of Medical Technology.
>
> www.myanmar.com[5]

As we have seen above (Chapter Two), with the University for the Development of National Races (1991) and the International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University (1998), many of these new universities assert a strong patriotic and national unity agenda. Indeed, it appears that the paramount concerns in universities and schools

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[5] Under the present political situation verification of these statistics, and others related to health and social welfare, is impossible.

at present are twofold; firstly, to facilitate the adoption of patriotic values and secondly, to control all anti-government political activity.

In the service of this second agenda the SLORC, in July of 1992, announced a new correspondence course system called "The University of Distance Learning" (see Houtman 1999, Smith 1992). The purpose of this program is to enable those who live far from universities and technical colleges to study for a degree by mail. This new University serves the added advantage of keeping students at home and preventing them from communicating and forming allegiances with fellow students from other parts of the country. Thus, political activity is discouraged (see Brandon 1998: 239). In these distance education programs the students only come to the campus once or twice a week at most. As this arrangement is convenient for students who need to work to support themselves and since many distance education classes have continued during the many university closures, quite a number of students have shifted to this program. However, the quality of distance education, in comparison to regular courses, is notably inferior, as direct contact with professors is minimal. Nevertheless, from the regime's perspective, the benefits of the new program are significant (see Fink 2001: 180).[6] Akin to the motivation behind the University of Distance Learning, many of the larger universities have been fragmented into multiple campuses that are less centralized. Many of these

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[6] For this same reason internet access is denied to all but a small portion of the population. Online courses are, thus, impossible at this time.

new satellite campuses are found in rural areas where, again, students have greater difficulty organizing mass demonstrations or devising effective political statements.

The participation of teachers and professors in any political activity is also kept tightly controlled by the dictatorship. During Ne Win's BSPP days, and continuing through today, all high school and university teachers have had to attend training and refresher courses in which they are taught military drills, techniques for monitoring students, and political ideology. In addition to learning how to control and monitor students such courses weed out and "dampen the spirits of independent-minded teachers and... instruct them in how to inculcate the regime's propaganda" (Fink 2001: 177). Loyalty to the state is demanded of teachers. Before returning to teach in 1991, after almost three years of closures, teachers were required to answer a questionnaire on a broad range of topics, including Aung San Suu Kyi, communism, the United States and the CIA. Seven thousand teachers allegedly dismissed from their jobs for holding views contrary to the SLORC's (Smith 1992).

All teachers' and student unions are banned in Burma, and all teachers are expected to join the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA). The USDA is a mass-membership organization, but not a political party. Civil servants and military personnel are not prohibited from joining; and many, including teachers, are expected (or pressured) to join. The USDA frequently holds mass meetings, and it is estimated that millions of Burmese have been pressured to attended rallies throughout the country. Such organizations, though ostensibly non-political, are primary conduits for the

transmission of government agendas (see Brandon 1998: 240, Houtman 1999: 116-119, and Steinberg 1997).[7]

THE UNIVERSITY OF CULTURE

Upon this troubled foundation, the University of Culture was created in 1993. Students who have passed the secondary school matriculation exam may enroll at this university for study in one of four subjects; music, dramatic arts,[8] painting, and sculpture. Bachelor of Arts degrees are offered in all four disciplines. After opening, classes were temporarily held in the compound of the Fine Arts Department (Ministry of Culture) on Kaba Aye Pagoda Rd in Rangoon. In 1996 the University moved to its newly constructed property in Dagon Myothit, a suburb of Rangoon far away from the urban center (and rather difficult to get to). The university has a consistently full enrollment of approximately 600 students. Close to 200 students enter the university each year, with the music department being the largest of the four divisions, and sculpture being the smallest.

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[7] The USDA has been likened to what GOLKAR was when it was established in 1967 to propagate the political agendas of Sukarto's New Indonesia (see Steinberg 1997).

[8] Including dancing, acting and singing.

Figure 4.1: Central court of the University of Culture

U Ye Htut, head of the drama department at the university s inception, expresses below the need for advanced education in the arts to properly enrich national sentiment. This need, according to U Ye Htut, is now realized with this new University.

> It is not enough for such Myanmar fine arts as Myanmar classical music, dramatic plays, Myanmar painting and sculpture and traditional customs of Myanmar national races to be merely put on record. Their status needs to be raised. The State raised the role of national culture by building museums and theatres, and cultivated it by holding national competitions and celebrating festivals annually.
> ...national schools and universities are the soil on which to cultivate discipline, integrity and unity as well as the fertile grounds for the flowers of national culture to grow. In other words, national culture needs to be firmly rooted in national schools and universities (Ye Htut 1997: 182).

Statements such as U Ye Htut's tend to dominate the official discourse surrounding the university. Indeed, throughout U Ye Htut's article, there is frequent and overt reference to the formation of discipline and integrity, two cornerstones of national culture, and yet no mention at all of the contributions the university makes to the creation of art. The emphasis on instilling 'union spirit' pervades most public accounts of the education system. Such cultural patriotism is instilled in the youth from a very young age, and tends to saturate the curricula of all schools and universities, as teachers are admonished to "train their pupils to possess patriotism, Union Spirit, and conviction to preserve and promote national culture, observe discipline and keep self-cleanliness." (from a speech given by Senior General Than Shwe, quoted in Houtman 1999: 102). The University of Culture is certainly no exception to this trend; in fact, it appears to have been designed for that purpose.

THE OTHER SCHOOLS OF FINE ARTS

In the early 1950s, the Fine Arts Department of the Ministry of Culture (then the Ministry of Union Culture) opened several schools of the arts in both Rangoon and Mandalay. Four schools in total were constructed, with two each in Rangoon and Mandalay. One school was created for music and drama, and another school for painting and sculpture. These schools were the first national schools of the arts, designed as an alternative to the apprenticeship style of transmission. Though apprenticeships with

senior musicians still exist in Burma (see Chapter Five), most students who aspire to performance careers enter the state schools of fine arts. Many of the leading musicians in the country today, including many of the instructors at the University of Culture, are graduates of *Pantera Kyaung*, the state music school.

Juliette Crump provides an account of these schools in her paper "The Health and Status of National Schools of Music and Dance in Laos and Myanmar" (Crump 1997). While visiting the state schools in 1996, Crump was quite surprised to see music and dance education excelling at these schools, as she had believed that political and economic pressures over the past decades would have overpowered cultural enterprises. Instead she found, too her surprise, "functioning and productive schools of music and dance, as in the more prosperous and stable countries nearby such as Thailand" (Crump 1997: 122).

If the national schools of music and dance were running productively and applauded by senior musicians and 'objective' observers, then the formation of a University would seem to be unnecessary. Despite this the government has plans to open another University of Culture in Mandalay.

CURRICULUM

My fieldwork opportunities at the University of Culture were, admittedly, rather restricted. Due to the political concerns described above, University campuses are controlled with tight security. Without a current student or staff identification card, it is impossible to enter most university campuses. "The campus is like a fort, with locked

gates and guards at the entrances. This means that students who have graduated cannot come back and visit on campus, nor can the general public use the universities' facilities" (Fink 2001: 181-82). As I was not a student, my visits were tightly monitored and I was always escorted. Visits to classes and interactions with students while on campus were always in the presence of at least one teacher (often more) and one escort. Though I was encouraged to ask the students anything about their education, such an environment, with a student glancing to his/her teacher before answering any question, was less than conducive to uncovering the multiple perspectives that undoubtedly exist within the University. Though I was encouraged to take pictures, I was denied permission to record any formal interviews that I conducted on campus. Such visits revealed the high levels of control that operate within this setting.[9]

Unlike the state schools of music, entrance to the university is contingent upon passing the 10th standard matriculation exam. In contrast, the state school, *Pantera Kyaung*, requires 4th standard. 10th standard is roughly equivalent to the completion of high school in the West, with graduates approximately 16-18 years old as they prepare for university. Curiously, the university has an age restriction of 20 years as the oldest age that a student can enter. Such age restrictions allow for a window of only a few years after secondary school for students to enroll. These restrictions also prevent older or

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[9] The following account is drawn primarily from my interviews with students, teachers, and the dean of the music school as well as the proposed curriculum and syllabus. Though open six years by the time of my visit, the university did not yet have more than a draft of the curricula and syllabus. Course and syllabus organization appeared to be constantly in flux, necessarily drawing into question the permanence of some of my observations.

returning students, those whose education has been interrupted, from entering the University. In addition, all students are screened with an aptitude interview before being admitted.

Unlike most university music departments throughout the world, students are not expected to have had any training on a musical instrument before they enter the school. Beginning group lessons are held for first year students on *saung* (harp), *pattala*[10] (xylophone), violin and piano. In the second year, a student is required to learn a second instrument. Ideally, of these two instruments, one will be a traditional Burmese instrument, such as *saung* or *pattala*, and the other a Western instrument, violin or piano. Both the violin and the piano have been adopted into the Burmese classical music tradition, and here they operate as both Western and Burmese instruments.[11] It is quite common to hear piano and/or violin performing traditional Burmese *thachin kyi* (classical songs) solo or in small chamber music ensembles. These instruments are unquestionably considered part of the Burmese classical tradition. As a student adopts piano or violin, however, he/she also learns some basic skills in the Western style.

Course requirements include courses on International (Western) music notation[12] and history courses focusing on both the Western/European art music tradition and the Burmese classical, court music, tradition.[13] Fundamentals of Western music theory

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[10] Pattala basics are transferable onto many of the orchestral instruments including patt waing (drum circle) and kyi waing (gong circle). An accomplished patt waing player will have received much of his/her training on the pattala.
[11] See Garfias (1995a, 1995b).
[12] All Western staff notation is referred to in Burma as International notation; see Chapters Five and Six.

Figure 4.2: Pattala class

courses are required throughout the first three years. As there is not yet a standardized theory of Burmese music, reference to Burmese theory tends to appear only in practical application classes. Students are also required to take vocal classes, concentrating primarily on the *thachin kyi* (classical) and *khit haung* (modern classical) repertoire.[14] In the third and fourth year, upper level course topics focusing on particular composers, including Beethoven, Mozart, Pedethayaza (1672-1752), and Myawadi (1766-1853),[15] are offered. There is also one optional course on the musics of the ethnic nationalities. This class is taught by a Burman (Burmese ethnicity) professor, with occasional guest speakers, and emphasizes only the musical instruments and the songs.

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[13] This course is titled Myanmar Musical Evolution.
[14] See Chapters Five and Six for an explication of *thachin kyi* and *khit haung*.
[15] Pedethayaza and Myawadi are two of the most famous composers of the Konbaung dynasty (see Williamson 1979a).

DUAL-EDUCATION SYSTEM

The University of Culture operates on what they call a dual-education system. Course work is divided into "Academic" and "Cultural" subjects. "Cultural" subjects, such as music, art, etc., are supplemented by mandatory "Academic" subjects that include Burmese language (referred to in the syllabus as Myanmar language), English language, history, integrated science, geography, and mathematics. These academic subjects are compulsory subjects accompanying the cultural courses of the students' specialization (i.e. music, dramatic arts, painting, sculpture). As students move through the university the ratio of academic to cultural subjects changes each year according to the following percentages; first year 60% academic and 40% cultural; second year, 40/60; third year, 30/70; and fourth year, 20/80 (Department of Fine Arts 1999).

This 'dual-education' system assures that the student achieves a base level of proficiency in Burmese, English, mathematics, history, etc. by the time of graduation. By third year and fourth year, students will be concentrating primarily on their 'cultural' specialization. English is the approved medium of instruction for all the academic subjects except Burmese language. For cultural subjects, courses are taught in both English and Burmese.

All classes at the university, including the instrument lessons, are taught in groups. Although students learn Western notation, the traditional Burmese repertoire is still transmitted through rote memorization. Though memorization by rote is the

traditional style of learning music and many other subjects throughout the country, it is also a style of teaching that reinforces certain types of authority. Students do not interact with or ask questions about the material, but rather commit material to memory without question. As Christina Fink writes, rote memorization is the usual teaching method throughout Asia, including in democratic Thailand and Japan, although this is beginning to change. But in Burma the effect is perhaps more damaging, because it reinforces submission to all authority, a message students are getting in virtually every dimension of their lives (Fink 2001: 177).

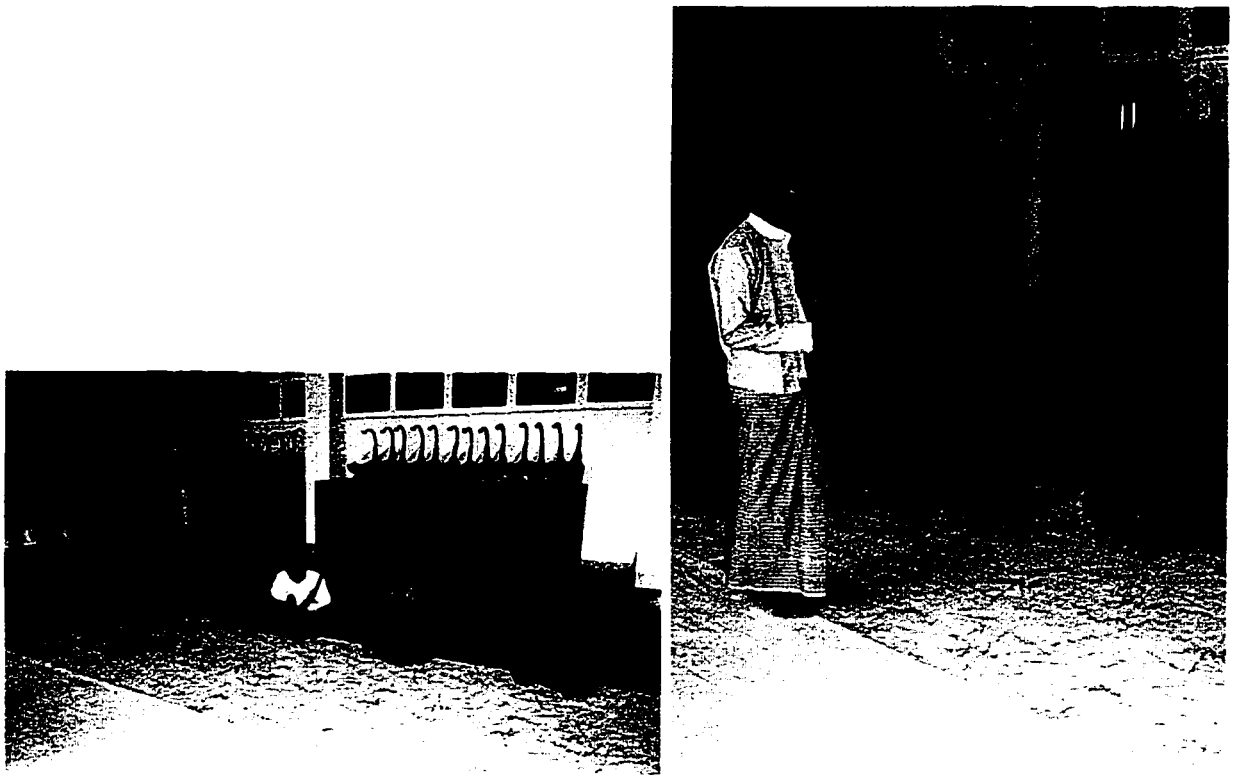

Figure 4.3 and 4.4: Saung gauk class. The teacher here is leading the class marking out the rhythm with si (bell R.H.) and wa (bamboo clapper L.H.). The saung gauk is a solo instrument and not traditionally played in groups.

GUARDIAN SYSTEM

This authority of the teacher is further institutionalized through a "guardian" system. Each student is assigned a member of the staff to act as his or her guardian. As written in the *Proposed Curricula and Syllabus*; "All teaching staffs must take responsibility of students as guardians. All guardians must adhere to the principles laid down by the Guardian Committee and submit monthly reports on activities carried out" (Department of Fine Arts 1999: 5).[16] This system is not unique to the University of Culture, but found throughout the country. Since schools have re-opened, professors at all universities have been held responsible for the behavior of their assigned students. Here the authorities hope that the strong influence of the professor/teacher and the respect a student has for his/her mentors will further discourage political activity. Professors have to take responsibility for the behavior of several assigned students and, thus, can be held accountable for any behavior of that student. Professors are also expected to patrol campus and guard against any political activity to the point of it interfering with their teaching responsibilities.

> Rather than preparing for classes, professors and lecturers must spend a good chunk of their time patrolling the campuses for students engaging in political activities. When universities were open in the mid-1990s, most

> professors had to patrol three times a week, and on anniversary days of political events... professors were compelled to skip their classes if they conflicted with their patrol duty (Fink 2001: 181).[17]

STUDENTS AND FUTURE CAREERS

Boasting over 150 graduates a year, most of whom are students of music, the University is providing quite a number of trained musicians and artists to the community. But where do they go when they graduate? Though several of the more advanced students have remained at the university in teaching capacities, most do not. The elementary and secondary schools rarely have budgets capable of supporting music teachers[18] and the few performance opportunities available to musicians are unlikely prospects after a mere four years of training.

Practically speaking, then, as few students could afford to spend four years in school with no job prospects at completion the career opportunities available to these graduates must be questioned. How do they justify their time and expense? Adding to my own confusion on this matter, the dean of the music school assured me that, indeed,

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[16] The Guardian Committee is comprised of the school Rector, Pro-rectors, Department Heads and Professors.

[17] The extent of the authorities' nervousness is apparent in the following anecdote: A university professor in Rangoon who had to teach English to a class of several hundred students in the early 1990s was ordered to hold on to the microphone at all times, even when writing on the chalk board. The authorities were concerned that a student might jump on stage and use the microphone to make a political speech (Fink 2001: 181).

[18] Elementary and secondary schools are beginning to re-introduce vocal classes, yet I know of no secondary school instrumental music programs.

"all students that graduate from this University will receive jobs" (personal communication, University of Culture, June 1999)

As no North American university that I am aware of can claim such success, my puzzlement increased. As Kingsbury writes in reference to North American conservatories and music schools; "If the conservatory only admitted students who could make a career in music, we'd have to close our doors tomorrow" (Kingsbury 1988: 56). He thus draws the conclusion that, "clearly the ongoing practice of the teachers and administrators of the conservatory is not oriented simply toward preparing young musicians for a professional career" (Kingsbury 1988: 56). Indeed, as I pressed on in my interview with the dean, she shared with me the fact that, though some students apply for jobs as musicians (performers or educators) at the state school, *Pantera Kyaung*, and at the radio and television stations, most find work in government offices. In fact, all students of the University of Culture are guaranteed work in government ministries.[19] Training in the basic 'academic' courses has provided the students with a sufficient basic education to work as civil servants in any of a variety of government ministries not necessarily related to the culture industry. Moreover, as the University of Culture has remained open while most universities throughout the country have been closed, there is a need in most ministries for a workforce with a basic post-secondary education.

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[19] This is similar to Tibetan 'Gar pa' dance troupe schooling. Graduates of the school move on to work in civil service positions (Ter Ellingson, personal communication, May 2001).

With the age restrictions on enrollment, this education has been restricted to a very young, and therefore (hopefully, for the government), more impressionable student body. All of these students, quite young during the 1988 protest, are somewhat removed from the underground student resistance movement that is preserved amongst older students, who are not permitted to enroll in the school. Discipline and control—though never assured—is much more likely.

Despite the fact that few students have the ability, or the opportunity, to pursue careers related to their field of study, the Ministry of Culture still highlights, to the general public the university's importance in safeguarding heritage and preserving tradition (even erroneously claiming, inside the country, that it is the first of its kind in Southeast Asia).[20] This accentuation of heritage and tradition in the official discourse surrounding the university can be clearly seen in the above-mentioned 'scholarship' of U Ye Htut, but also more visibly—and more importantly—in the newspaper and television news coverage. Regular visits to the university by the heads of state are consistently covered as front page news, with a General (again usually Khin Nyunt) inspecting the progress of the students and enjoying some of the students' artistic labors.

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[20] I have yet to determine what they mean when they claim that this is the first University of Culture in Southeast Asia. Schools of the arts, where B.A. degrees can be earned, have appeared in Thailand Bangkok University—Performing Arts Dept, Chulalongkorn University—Fine and Applied Arts Rajabhat Institute Chandrakasem—Bangkok; in Indonesia—Institut Seni Indonesia, Yogyakarta; in Malaysia, Universiti Malaya— Arts, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak—Sarawak, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang—Selangorl; and in the Phillipines—De La Salle University, Manila, Humanities. See also Barmé (1993) and Myers-Moro (1989, 1993), for discussions of Thailand's Fine Arts Schools and Universities.

Secretary-1 observes artistic works and attends entertainment programme of students at University of Culture

YANGON, 1 Sept.-Chairman of Myanmar Education Committee Secretary-l of the State Peace and Development Council Lt-Gen Khin Nyunt accompanied by officials of the State Peace and Development Council Office, arrived at the National Theatre on Myoma Kyaung Road here at 8.30 am today. ...Heads of department and the students conducted Secretary-1 Lt-Gen Khin Nyunt and party round the display of paintings and the sculptures. The Secretary-l and party attended the entertainment programme presented by the students of the Music Department and Theatrical Department who will obtain the degrees from the University of Culture.

New Light of Myanmar September 2, 1999

Much like the Sokayeti competition, the heads of state profit on this opportunity to align themselves with the tradition. A symbiotic relationship of co-legitimation ensues as students (as well as the University) are granted artistic authority and the ruling council garners legitimacy, both from the display of educational patronage and association with the arts of the royal dynasties.

ACCOUNTS OF SENIOR MUSICIANS

Given the confusing status the university has as a conduit for tradition, it has caused a significant, though quietly expressed, controversy within the music community. The following accounts are drawn from several interviews I conducted with senior musicians. Some of these musicians work at the university, while others wish no involvement with it at all. Among other things, I asked each musician to compare the University to the preceding state school, *Pantera Kyaung.*

Interviewee 1 is a senior musician and, having spent his entire life practicing and performing, does not feel the university is capable of even covering basic musicianship skills.

1: They have to learn so many other subjects. You can't learn much in such a short time.

GD: How does that compare to Pantera school?

1: Well that's for four years. But Pantera school accepts students after the fourth standard. The University accepts you only after you've passed the 10th standard. For the methods...they're not taught like the way we were taught. They are taught only according to the songs. They're not taught the basics. Producing good sound, good tongue, good wind, good fingering,

good si (rhythm), good ear. Six things. Only after that can you study the music.

Interviewee 2, reflects on the low standards at the University of Culture.

GD: How is the University of Culture different from pantera kyaung.

2: As different as sandalwood and a fart. They couldn't be more so!

Those that pass primary school can go to pantera kyaung. They concentrate on one subject, pattala, harp, etc. Whereas at the U of C they're simply teaching old dogs how to "shake a paw." Those people get to go only after 10th standard.

In school lessons there is primary, middle and high school. For music education there should be as well. Here there is no such thing! Pantera Kyaung has it. It is the primary school. The University of Culture, No! There is no middle level. There is no advanced level! But they have a university. Why do they have a University? Only when students get to the University do they start the basics. Is it the same at your university?

Will they allow those that pass the Pantera school to go to the University of Culture? No! They haven't passed the 10th standard. So those that pass the 10th standard and go to the university, their knowledge

is not as high as those that went to Pantera Kyaung. Only those who have gained knowledge BEFORE they went to university know a bit. Otherwise they don't know anything. And it's very rare to find those people who studied on their own before going to the University of Culture.

What we need is a pantera school, then a middle school, and then a University.

GD: So why do they have the university? Why did they create it?

2: I don't know ...that's the government.

I don't believe in any kind of education.

GD: What do you mean by that?

2: What I want is my own idea. Not formal education. If I'm in the 5th grade. I have to be at the same level as other 5th graders throughout the world. Here NO!

When I said I don't believe in formal education I mean here, here in Burma, it doesn't happen. Because the levels are not the same.

GD: ... interesting.

2: That's politics

That's why I don't want to say anything about politics.

GD: We're not talking about politics we're talking about music.

2: But, there's a vicious cycle. It's always there. At the end it's always politics. Whatever subject we're talking about it always ends in politics.

Interviewee 3, similarly, struggles with the type of education that the University of Culture offers.

3: Those students, they have no future as musicians at all!!! They are attending the cultural university...not to be musicians. Their hobby is music so that they go to the University with a music major, art, drama, dance... they pursue that.

They actually have no future and the government has no plan for it... I think.

GD It seems to be a sort of national symbol.

3: Yes, Yes, Yes!!...It's the dignity we have...the only university in Southeast Asia they say.

At the Pantera Kyaung you know, before the University of Culture, there's a music school of dramatic arts and music. It's been there since 1953 it's nearly 50 years old now. There's also in Rangoon the Kanbawza. Pantera Kyaung is getting smaller and smaller. We thought...we hoped...that when you pass from Pantera school you could earn your living as a musician, or music instructor, but ...no. We hoped, if

the government could only make one music instructor or tutor in one high school if the government planned like this. Every Pantera, ex-Pantera student would get a job. There are so many high schools in Myanmar.

You know in school you have the 'Physical education' instructor, of course. If the government planned there would be one music instructor at one high school, then every Pantera graduate would get a job.

And what about this. When someone gets a degree, a bachelor of music from the University of Culture...where will he go? Actually, he knows nothing about music. Even after four years. Today's situation is not very good for musicians. Only the very famous, the very most popular vocalists, some pop artists, are very well to do. The situation is bad.

Whenever I lecture at the University of Culture I try to impress on them...the students, they shouldn't expect to play thachin (classical music) well. This is not Pantera Kyaung. You instead must have book knowledge. Because you are going to get a degree, you need to know theory and history, and the international (the European) history and notation. You don't have to play well.

As a University, it is very young. Secretary-1 (Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt) decided we needed a University and so they opened the University within 6 months.

Interviewee 4 is another senior musician who has spent his career performing and teaching.

GD: How is the University different from Pantera Kyaung?

4: There is no difference.

The only difference is that you learn some other things at the university (Painting, Sculpture, Theatre) and the academic classes that teach everything that university students learn elsewhere such as English, Burmese, mathematics.

All students have to learn all academic subjects as well as their painting, music, etc. You must not be older than 20. They don't want to start with old people. They won't accept anybody over 20.

At Pantera...if you want to study you can study just one thing...intensely.

GD: What is the university training these people to do?

4: The first batch, some of them became teachers at the University, and the rest of them were given positions in government offices. Mostly office stuff, like bench clerks. They are given those positions. Most work at government offices and some work at private offices. Those that want work in Government offices can.

Others that patronize cultural events where the University of Culture students are displayed have also commented to me on the university and its students. Students of the University of Culture are encouraged to participate in the Sokayeti competition each year. Most of them would enter the competition at the student level.[21] As most of these students have only been playing for a few years, their quality of performance is considered quite low. Thus, the general reaction by civilian patrons of the competition, as well as other musicians and judges, is that the University of Culture students are the poorest quality players at the competition. Their performances are very poorly attended, and they are generally considered the 'joke' of the Sokayeti competition.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CULTURE IN BURMESE SOCIETY

The above accounts question the capacity to which this University intersects with the interests of the artists' community and the community at large as compared to the political agendas of the state. Though the position of this university in Burma's present socio-political situation is undoubtedly influenced and informed by political concerns, its contributions to the artistic community are somewhat complex.

None of the senior musicians whom I interviewed felt the musical training at the University was substantial enough for a musical career. The lack of opportunities in

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[21] The six levels are; 5-10 yr. old, 11-15 yr. old, 16-20 yr. old, Student, Amateur, Professional.

music education also restricted future work in music. Despite this, it should be noted that the university itself has provided many jobs for accomplished musicians to teach the students for their short four years.

As Kingsbury has noticed, most schools of music and conservatories, despite their publicly perceived image, are unable to prepare many musicians for a professional career. At the University of Culture, this would appear to be the case to an even greater degree given the paucity of skills and opportunities that graduates have. Is this University, then, simply a veiled civil servant factory masquerading as an Arts University? Is it merely creating a workforce, readied with a basic education of 'academic' skills, for positions in low-level government jobs?

The development of basic musicianship skills, though limited for a career in music, does aid in the creation of, if not accomplished musicians, at least a strong and devoted audience. Such an audience is necessary for those musicians who do pursue careers as performers. I mentioned in Chapter One the limited performance opportunities for professional musicians. Little in the way of concert activity appears to exist beyond small house gatherings, pre-recorded television performances, and restaurant 'culture shows' for tourists. The Sokayeti competition as well as the University of Culture, I would hypothesize, are designed with a strong intent to create an audience for Burmese traditional music. Burmese traditional music has passed out of favor in the past decades as international and popular musics flood the local market, thus requiring a revived audience. As SLORC's/SPDC's 'open door' policies have attempted to increase trade,

increased access to foreign culture threatens the Burmese national traditions. For Burmese traditional music to survive, an audience—an educated and devoted audience—is necessary now more than ever.

Howard Becker, in *Art Worlds*, notes a parallel in North America, as he points to several studies that indicate how students and alumni of arts schools participate more as devoted and sophisticated consumers than as performing or economically productive artists (Becker 1982: 52ff). Subscriptions to concert and theater series and memberships to museums and arts societies are, perhaps, what maintains an artistic community. If there is an audience, then there will be performers; but just because there are performers, doesn't mean there will be an audience.

The University of Culture does appear to be somewhat analogous to a factory, corporation, or scientific establishment; and, as Nettl asserts, it does reflect the society of which it is a part. The 'products' of this factory, however, do not appear to be simply music and musicians. Rather, a basically-educated patriotic workforce is the product. The potential of music schools to which Nettl refers—maintaining a position outside the culture, "contradicting, approving, debating and commenting" (Nettl 1995: 145)—also does not appear to be significantly present at the University of Culture. The oppressive level of student control, poor teacher pay, high security and surveillance, censorship of curricula, and the ever-present patriotic themes in all aspects of study, precludes an open environment where such 'critique' is possible. The University of Culture has little

potential, at this point, for standing outside of Burmese culture, "contradicting, approving, debating and commenting" (Nettl 1995: 145) in any overt manner.[22]

As laid out on the first page of the *Proposed Curricula and Syllabus*, the aims of the University divulge many of the same national objectives as discussed in previous chapters of this dissertation.

> The general aim of teaching Academic Subjects and Cultural Subjects is to fulfill the objectives of the University of Culture by providing the students to gain the knowledge of:
>
> —keeping dynamic patriotism
>
> —strengthening of national unity
>
> —preserving and disseminating the Myanmar Traditional Culture
>
> —teaching Myanmar Traditional Culture customs of indigenous national races at Universities, Institutes, Colleges and Schools
>
> —upholding the spirit of nationalism
>
> —upbringing the good artists with high morality and nobility of international level
>
> —high technology to promote the creative power in artist way
>
> (Department of Fine Arts 1999: 5)

The University of Culture is still quite young. Ambitious plans for growth include a second University in Mandalay, construction of which has already begun, and a

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[22] This is certainly not to say that there isn't tremendous potential for subversion; for debating and commenting on the system. The structure and intent of the University, however, does not facilitate open

future graduate program. What can be seen throughout this project, and others discussed in this dissertation, is the artist—as the bearer of tradition, the keeper of royal culture—moving into a central position in the legitimizing symbolism of the country, but restrictively, under the control of the regime in power. Though not creating performing artists, the University of Culture is, however, developing hobbies and providing an introductory musical education that brings forth devoted audiences and patrons. Given the infancy of this new project, the results of this music education and audience construction remain to be seen.

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debate and dialogue with the rest of the society.

CHAPTER V

TRANSMITTING THE TRADITION:

ORAL TRANSMISSION AND INDIGENOUS NOTATIONS

> Pure Burmese melodies are beautiful in themselves. But on account of the preponderance of grace-notes (*mordente, accaciatura, appogiatura*) Europeans find it difficult to catch Burmese tunes.
>
> Mariano (1901)[1]

> This is very true, but not true enough. Ornament in Burmese music does something more than preponderate. They themselves are an inherent part of the tunes. That is why when a Burmese song is taken down by a Western musician and reproduced, the ornaments having been unappreciated and eschewed the 'tune' that remains no longer sounds Burmese.
>
> U Khin Zaw (1961)[2]

INTRODUCTION

Efforts to standardize and notate Burmese classical music have long predated the SLORC/SPDC government. Various government-commissioned projects throughout the 1950s democratic era, and several independent efforts prior to that time, have attempted to standardize and notate some of the most important and well-known classical songs.

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[1] Mariano 1996: 210, first published in 1901, quoted in Khin Zaw (1961).
[2] Khin Zaw 1961: 199

Many of these projects were ostensibly created with the intent to preserve and teach the tradition. As in many countries throughout Asia, fears of losing traditional culture rose in the face of colonialism and later postwar Westernization and modernization. The following two chapters will discuss the multiple motivations behind the translation of these songs into notated form, as well as some of the problems inherent in putting Burmese music to paper.

This chapter explores some of the traditional music transmission practices used by Burmese classical musicians. Beginning with a description of some basic principles underlying Burmese classical songs, I will then explore various pedagogical techniques used by senior teachers to pass this music to the next generation. In particular, a description of an autochthonous oral notation system called *pazat saing*, that allows for the verbal communication of two melodic lines, provides insights into how the tradition has been maintained without recourse to written text. I will also introduce an indigenous written notation system designed to reflect particular idiomatic features of Burmese music. Both of these systems appear to be in danger of disappearing as International (Western) notation rises in prominence.

This chapter thus lays the groundwork for Chapter Six, which examines the introduction of Western staff notation and recent endeavors to transcribe pieces from the Burmese classical and modern classical repertoire into this new notation system. An initial project sponsored by the Ministry of Union Culture began in the 1950s, but was discontinued after the Ne Win coup of 1962. These projects resumed, though in a

somewhat different form, in the early 1990s, sponsored by the SLORC/SPDC regime. The introduction of Western-style or "International" notation and the musical consequences of using this notation will be addressed with specific reference to several specific pieces. Volume 1 of a new collection of songs, *Khit Haung Teh Thachin Mya* (*Old Style Songs*), has recently been published (Government of Myanmar 1999), and will be discussed in light of the 'totalizing' patronage of the present rulers.

Burmese traditional music is an orally transmitted system that is gradually confronting modernizing values of preservation and standardization. As with Chapter Three, concerned with the Sokayeti performing arts competition, and Chapter Four, that addressed the University of Culture, questions concerning state manipulation of the tradition to serve political ends are being pursued. What are the political purposes behind such patronage and what are the consequences to the music and musicians? More specifically, I am questioning how the present standardization and notation projects serve the political interests of the ruling elite in their quest for national unity and political legitimacy. In what ways do these projects reflect, or diverge from, the actual practice of music and musicians? Is the tradition being made more accessible to Burmese nationals and to foreigners through these projects? Do these preservation projects help in preserving the music culture (musicians, performance contexts, pedagogy, etc.), or just the sound?

THE BURMESE CANON—THE MAHA GITA

In Burma today, one still finds the oral tradition to be the preferred manner of musical transmission. The texts of court-related classical songs, known in Burmese as *thachin kyi* (သီချင်းကြီး) were originally collected on palmleaf manuscripts, numbering over 500 songs. These songs have been catalogued multiple times in anthologies collectively known as the *Maha Gita* (မဟာဂီတ). These "Great Songs" were first collected and compiled during the last Konbaung Dynasty (1752-1885), and musicians and scholars still meet regularly to edit and revise different versions of the texts. These texts are bound together in numerous books, the most famous of which are: U Pyon Cho's *Maha gita baung-gyok-kyi* (Pyon Cho 1960), Maung Maung Lat's *Gita wi-thaw-dani kyan* (Maung Maung Lat 1954), Bassein Daw Tin Tin's *Gi-ta thu tei tha-na sa-dan* (Tin Tin 1968), and the Ministry of Culture's *Naing-ngan-daw-mu Maha-gita* (Ministry of Culture 1969). Each of these volumes holds roughly the same assortment of songs, with occasional omission of certain songs in some collections and inclusion of additional songs in others. Additionally, variations in certain song texts, and contrasting organization of song genres, also sets these collections apart from each other. In practice, all of these books are referred to as *Maha Gita*, simultaneously referencing both the individual texts and the entire canon of classical songs.

Each of these collections is organized by song genre. The book[3] contains the six important classical song genres (*Kyo*, *Bwe*, *Thachin Kan*, *Patpyo*, *Yodaya* and *Mon*), as well as several minor genres that were added at a later date. The first three genres are considered to be the oldest in the repertoire, and the mode in which their music is found is thought to be the most characteristic of the tradition (Becker 1969, Garfias 1975b, Williamson 2000). The first group of songs, *Kyo* songs, were originally designed for the harp (*kyo*, "string") and were composed as teaching songs. The first thirteen *kyo* songs, in particular, are considered essential building blocks of the tradition, and are compulsory pieces for all students (see Williamson 1975b). *Bwe* and *Thachin kan* songs have texts eulogizing the King or the Buddha, and are technically much more demanding than *Kyo* songs. All *Bwe* songs share roughtly the same melodic and harmonic material, but with different sets of lyrics.[4] *Patpyo* songs are pieces written at a latter date than the first three genres and frequently quote many of the earlier song styles. *Patpyo* are the most numerous in the canon, and are considered the high point of the tradition, since a thorough understanding of the preceding genres is necessary to fully appreciate them. These songs were, generally, of a more popular nature in the Konbaung court and combine many elements of the previously established song genres. *Yodaya* is the Burmese word for Thailand (from Ayutthaya). In 1767, the Burmese (under King Hsinbyushin) attacked

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[3] Henceforth referred to in the singular.
[4] My findings that all Bwe songs have roughly the same melody and accompaniment clash with Williamson's findings in her 1979 article "The Basic Tune of a Late Eighteenth-Century Burmese Classical Song."

Siam and sacked the Thai capital of Ayutthaya. After the battle, the Burmese brought back to the royal court many Thai artisans and musicians who, in due course, made significant contributions to Burmese culture. *Yodaya* songs are pieces drawn from the union of Thai and Burmese musics; either Burmese renditions of Thai songs, or pieces written in the Thai style. Finally, *Mon* songs, formerly referred to with the pejorative term 'Talaing,'[5] are songs influenced by Mon music of southern Burma. In addition to these six song genres, smaller additional categories of *bawle*, *dein*, *teitat*, *nat* songs,[6] and others are also catalogued.

In addition to the multiple versions of a piece of music, there is also a high degree of improvisation in much of this music. Notwithstanding, several professional musicians in the country claim to know definitive versions of each of the more than five hundred songs in the collection. Since no notation is given, and variations within the different collections do occur, slight discrepancies of lyrics and melody occur between one musician's interpretation and another.

Furthermore, all instrumentalists also draw from this repertoire. Instrumental versions of Maha Gita pieces are, in fact, more common than vocal renditions. Within each of these instrumental traditions there is also tremendous variation, dependent on the idiomatic possibilities of the instrument on which they are played, i.e.: saung, pattala or

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[5] Early compilations of the Maha Gita use the label 'Talaing.'

[6] A vast repertoire of *nat* (spirit) songs is only hinted at in the Maha Gita. Nat spirit propitiation music has not, to my knowledge, been influenced by the present patronage projects of the SLORC/SPDC. For an introduction into the Nat cult and its ceremonies see Rodrique (1992) and Spiro (1996).

saing waing. Variation based on the training of the musician and the particular family (or dynasty) of musicians from which he or she has learned also contributes to great variation within the tradition.[7] Though an Indian-like gharana system[8] does not exist in Burma, there still exists a strong reverence for the authority of one's teacher and the 'correctness' of his or her teachings. This reverence for authority of one's teacher reinforces the variations that exist between students of different teachers. It also contributes to the problems of standardizing.

Given the variations built into the oral system and a reverence for teachers' authority, long and impassioned arguments ensue concerning which tradition, song version, melody, etc., is the correct one. The difficulty of standardizing these versions into definitive renditions is enormous, given the conviction that professional musicians have concerning the correctness of their own renditions. What, then, are the common elements found across multiple versions of a given song?

A CLASSICAL SONG

The centrality and importance of variation between performers and performances, and the fact that there is no standard notation, raises several questions. What are the

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[7] I find a strong parallel here with American jazz. Though the classic jazz repertoire is predominantly based on vocal pieces, instrumental performances tend to dominate. Emphasis is placed on renditions of various pieces and the discrepencies between one musician's interpretation and another's. The 'piece,' independent of variation or the performer's personal interpretation, is never heard. Indeed, this variation is central to the aesthetics of the tradition.

[8] See Neuman 1990: 145-167.

common properties that a given piece retains across performances? What are the identifying features of a particular piece of music or a particular song genre?

Most scholars and musicians of this tradition appeal to a basic melodic shape behind many of these songs, though the actual notes sung or played by the vocalist or accompanist are highly variable. Whether performed by an instrumental soloist as chamber music (saung, pattala), or simultaneously in a group (saing waing—with pat waing, kyi waing and hne all playing different versions of the melody), the melody of the song is never played exactly the same way. In fact, "no single participant in an ensemble sings or plays 'the song' in an isolable, repeatable form. Instead, each member of the ensemble plays variants" (Keeler 1998: 384).

With the aim of discovering this fundamental or basic tune that underpins a Burmese classical song, several scholars have asked musicians to play the same piece several times or to have different musicians play the same piece consecutively (Cox 1986, Tokumaru 1980, Williamson 1979b). While the results gained by Williamson, Tokumaru and Cox are limited, they do reveal some interesting consistencies.

Muriel Williamson, upon listening to and transcribing several performances of the Bwe song *Gandama Taung*,[9] identifies the song-poem, its metric scheme, and its basic tune as "a single complex pattern for oral transmission" (Williamson 1979b: 155). The pattern of all these elements function as a template that guides any given performance.

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[9] This piece can be found on U Ko Ko's recording *Burmese Piano* (1995).

Hearing informants assert that, "the tune always remains the same," led Williamson to the conclusion that there existed a "conceptual *basic tune*, freely ornamented according to individual taste and experience" (Williamson 1979b: 168).[10] The basic tune is then carried by the syllables of the song text and the predetermined unchanging rhythmic cycle set by the *si* (bell) and *wa* (clapper).[11] "The existence of such a template for each song-text will tend to shield the original composition from decay," while simultaneously providing "the framework for a range of vocal and instrumental improvisatory techniques, to be exploited in individual versions" (Williamson 1979b: 156). Williamson's 'template' implies that, at least for the beginner, the words, melody and rhythm are "a single experience" (Williamson 1979b: 169).

Tokumaru finds a common contour across multiple performances of the Kyo song that he investigates (Tokumaru 1980 72-75). Tokumaru's findings, however, are inconclusive, as Kyo songs are largely instructional songs that are to be played with no variation. Instead they are designed to develop a basic repertoire of patterns for use throughout the rest of the repertoire. Nonetheless, Tokumaru's findings suggest that even in this basic repertoire slight variations do exist and point to a prioritizing of melodic contour over specific pitch.

My own findings, drawn from my pattala, saung, hne and patt waing lessons reveal considerable melodic variation between realizations of each piece. At the same

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[10] Emphasis in original.
[11] For a discussion of Burmese rhythm see Becker (1969), Garfias (1975b, 1980c).

time, strict confinement to the rhythmic patterns laid out by the si (bell) and wa (bamboo clapper) was expected. Little to no variation seems to exist in the rhythmic structure of classical pieces. Tempo fluctuations do occur, particularly at cadence points; yet, the prescribed rhythmic pattern does not change. The si and wa are most always used to accompany all classical songs. If they are not present, the rhythmic pattern is still implied, and is often tapped out by the singer or listener. Williamson's findings are similar to mine, in so far as she discovers that "vocalists, oboists, and players of drum circles enjoy considerable freedom to embellish and vary a musical line, provided they stay within the parameters of the particular song's tonal levels and rhythmic constraints" (Williamson 1979b).

The importance of variation and embellishment of a 'basic tune' can also be seen in teaching applications. Here a master will teach several versions of a tune with different degrees of ornamentation realized over progressively more difficult versions. The simplest, widely spaced (*ace*—widely) versions contain the basic melodic contour and minimal ornamentation. A piece of music, except for a beginner piece, would rarely be performed in this style. A piece of middle-level difficulty (*ala*—middle spacing), and finally, a highly embellished melody (*asei*—tightly-packed), would be more typical a of professional-quality performance[12]

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[12] The final track of U Ko Ko's CD *Burmese Piano* (Ko Ko 1995), is a rendition of the Western song "Oh When the Saints Go Marching In" performed in a highly embellished, tightly-packed manner. This is a revealing example for the Western ear unfamiliar with other 'basic tunes.'

Burmese musicians say that the accompaniment part behind a singer should be fairly simple with relatively sparse spacing of notes. A repeated section, however, affords musicians an opportunity to display their skill at improvising complex variations. Most of the *thachin kyi* songs have repeating sections in which greater improvisation and variation is expected on the second hearing. When playing with a singer, the accompanying instrumentalist (*saung, pattala, saing*) will play a wide-spaced or middle-spaced accompaniment so as not to interfere with the embellishments of the singer. During repeated sections, the instrumentalists are then expected to raise the level of density, offering abundant embellishments.

Keeler (Keeler 1998: 384-85) notes a conceptual parallel between the 'nuclear theme' or *balungan* melody of Javanese gamelan music as discussed in the work of Sumarsam (Sumarsam 1975) and the 'basic tune' of Burmese music. "Although Burmese music offers the learner no easy aid to a piece comparable to the Javanese *balungan*, the basic melody of a Javanese or a Burmese composition—what a musicians hears as constant or distinctive in a composition—seems elusive in similar ways" (Keeler 1998: 385).

My own experiences learning Burmese music tend to support this. Oftentimes my teachers would teach me a loosely-spaced basic melody, highlighting the contours of the piece and conforming to a strict rhythm. Such a basic rendition of only widely-spaced playing would never be performed by a senior musician, as it would be considered simplistic. As my lessons progressed, I would then be expected to slowly introduce

variations and embellishments in increasing levels of density, while always retaining the basic contour and conforming to the chosen notes of the mode.

TEXTS

All pieces, whether sung or played instrumentally, have song texts that accompany them. The song text itself carries melodic cues and formulas for the instrumental accompaniment. Singing of the musical texts is usually the first stage in musical tutelage. As most Burmese music is vocal, all musicians will study as vocalists. Despite the centrality of songs within this tradition and the necessity for all musicians to learn the vocal part, there is not a strong reverence for vocalists within the country. There are relatively few aspiring vocalists or famous classical singers in the country;[13] in fact, as Garfias has witnessed, "for recording sessions, radio broadcasts and concert performances it is very often an instrumentalist whose vocal interpretations of certain songs are very much admired who does the singing, although in fact there are few musicians who are known primarily as singers (Garfias 1975a). This also seems to be reflected at the University of Culture, where all students are expected to study vocal interpretation, yet none specialize as vocalists.

The vocal basis of the Burmese traditional repertoire is also important for the audience. When songs are performed instrumentally, the original poem, with which a

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[13] This is not the case in modern classical and popular music, where the vocalist is primary.

melody is associated, is already known by the audience. When those compositions are used in theatrical settings (without texts), additional layers of meaning are added to the drama through the association with the unsung lyrics.

The lyrics, forming the basis of each song, serve as a memory aid. As many lyrics (in this tonal language) follow the contour of the melody, any musician who forgets the melody or accompaniment of a tune need simply reflect on the lyrics, which will offer clues to the melody. On more than one occasion, I witnessed one of my teachers attempting to resurrect an old song. In several instances, the teacher had previously written out the cipher notation (see below) for the piece, which, one would think, would come in handy at a time when songs are trying to be recalled. However, consultation of the Maha Gita (the source of the lyrics) was usually sufficient to resurrect the entire melody, as well as the accompaniment necessary to then perform the tune.[14]

Several of the Western scholars who have researched Burmese music have asked to what degree the Burmese language guides and controls the melodic constraints of a given tune (see Garfias 1981, Williamson 1981a). While beyond the scope of this study, it is useful to know that Burmese poetry is centrally concerned with rhyme; rhyme that is confined by the tonal constraints of the language. Rhymes internal to lines, known as "climbing rhymes," as well as end-of-the-line rhymes, and rhymes that link the stanzas, are governed by strict rules. When realized musically, there is similarly an emphasis on

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[14] Muriel Williamson shares similar stories of senior musicians recollecting melodies from the Maha Gita texts (Williamson 1979b: 169ff).

rhyme, correlated in this tonal language to pitch, and less so on rhythmic meter. Partially for this reason, Burmese vocal styles are characterized by their rhythmic fluidity, lack of accent, and the appearance of nonconformity with the underlying si and wa patterns (see Garfias 1980b).

Before examining the effects of foreign or indigenous notation systems, let us address the oral tradition and transmission practices as they have existed in Burma and still dominate today. It must be noted that despite the growing uses of musical notation in recent years to preserve and teach—and propagated to some degree by various new institutions such as the University of Culture—the transmission of music in Burma today is still predominantly oral/aural.

ORAL TRANSMISSION

Few studies have been conducted on the oral transmission of Burmese music. Scholars have appealed, in varying degrees, to the modal system that underpins the melodic organization of these *thachin kyi* songs. Judith Becker (1968, 1969, 1980), Robert Garfias (1975a, 1980b, 1981), and Muriel Williamson (1975a, 1979b, 1979c, 2000) have each addressed the modal system of Burmese music and its centrality to the oral transmission process. The modal system, as the dominant organizer of sound, is also the dominant organizer of the transmission practice. Mode, as defined by Judith Becker, is the "system of melodic formulae which provide the material and structure for oral composition" (Becker 1969: 268).

There is not, as yet, a universally agreed upon theoretical system that unites the melodic, harmonic and rhythmic (or other) organization of Burmese music, and all their possible variations. Like languages, oral music systems are learned subconsciously and are reproduced without conscious knowledge of its organizing principles. The complex structures underlying both language systems and music systems are not necessarily apparent to the speaker and musician. Judith Becker asks in her 1969 article, "The Anatomy of a Mode," "how does the rice farmer sitting on a mat in an open courtyard watching a traditional musical drama know immediately the song type of an aria sung by the princess? How does the musician playing the harp for friends gathered in his home create a new song within a given song type, clearly related to every other song of the same type?" (Becker 1969: 268)

According to Judith Becker, how a tune is realized is dependent upon the modal system that simultaneously guides the performer and provides opportunities for improvisation and realization at the time of performance. "Without the modal system the oral tradition in its restricted meaning of simultaneous composition plus performance would hardly be operable" (Becker 1969: 267). The modal system provides for the musician the basic materials of the music system and the rules for combining these materials into music (Becker 1968a: 277). The melodic patterns used by the musician are comprised of multiple small segments of ornamentation. The segments, combined into patterns, combined into verses, combined into songs make Burmese music a multi-leveled hierarchical system (Becker 1969: 272).

Each Burmese mode can be identified by a predetermined set of notes and a pitch hierarchy among those notes, as well as by various melodic motives specific to each (Powers 1980). In each mode, there are five primary pitches and two secondary pitches established within the seven-tone scale. The two secondary pitches are avoided on notes of stress (wa beats), and are minimally used in the secondary supporting melody. With one of the primary tones being the tonic, or tonal center, there appears to be a three-level hierarchy of pitches guiding both the melodic and harmonic material: fundamental tonic, primary tones and secondary tones. In addition to a prescribe selection of notes, modes typically have melodic motives or formulas that recur. These motives or patterns are strong identifying elements used to distinguish one mode from another.

The building blocks of the tradition are to be found in the first thirteen *Kyo* songs. These thirteen songs, with which all beginning students will start, are generally not embellished or improvised upon, but rather provide the beginning student with an arsenal of melodic and harmonic patterns which are then used throughout the rest of the Maha Gita repertoire and provide the starting point for improvisations.

This study does not attempt to dissect the workings of the modal system, but rather attempts to understand the complications of musical standardization. Further explication of the modal system is necessary given the limited work done by Becker (1969), Garfias (1975b, 1980c) and Williamson (1975b, 1979c). Further complications arise resulting from discrepancies between the above authors due to the different locations of their research (Mandalay and Rangoon), their different teachers, and the different

instrumental traditions that they focused on (Becker and Williamson, saung gauk; Garfias, saing waing). These differences can be seen in the contrasting terminology used for the tunings and modes of the saing waing ensemble that is distinct from the terminology used for the saung gauk. In addition to contrasting terminology, the idiomatic application of the modal system differs somewhat between these instruments. These problems add to the difficulty in standardizing an agreed-upon theory.

SOCIAL ASPECTS OF MUSICAL TRANSMISSION

By embedding musical transmission into a wider social context, assuring that the next generation of musicians maintains the tradition, musical notation is unnecessary. As with most oral traditions, the transmission of information is highly dependent upon a personal relationship between student and teacher. In years past, an aspiring musician would go to live at the home of a recognized expert. Living with his/her teacher, the young student would cook, clean and do any number of odd jobs around the home in exchange for occasional lessons (see Okell 1964). In many cases, the teacher would accept full financial responsibility for the student, feeding him and seeing to his basic needs. As the student turned professional and started to earn an income, the teacher would often still control his finances and the student would be expected to take care of

the teacher.[15]

As important as the formal lessons to the student's musical education was the constant training of the student's ear earned from listening to the master practice and perform. Emphasis on ear training was also developed during lessons as songs would be delivered by rote, with the student mimicking a new piece line by line as delivered by his/her teacher. Indeed, it was this ability to memorize long passages by rote that John Okell remarks upon as being one of the most difficult things about learning a Burmese musical instrument (Okell 1964).

In the past fifty years, apprenticeships appear to have declined and have been superseded by the state schools of music that have attempted to formalize the teaching process. It is my belief that the state schools have excelled most effectively amongst the chamber music soloistic traditions (harp, pattala, piano), while many of the ensemble players (saing waing) seek out masters who are regularly engaged in performing and touring.[16]

Apprenticeships are still somewhat common amongst the theatrical and saing waing troupes that regularly tour around the country. As most of the performance opportunities for saing waing musicians are found on the road performing for festivals and theatrical productions (as opposed to the urban television and radio station work that many other musicians receive), it stands to reason that students of this tradition must

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[15] Several interviewees recounted to me their troubling experiences of breaking away from their own teachers. This seemed to have as much to do with asserting financial independence as musical competence.

move with their teachers. Theater troupes have been very important to the transmission of Burmese traditional musics throughout the country. During the cool dry months from October to April, theater troupes tour non-stop around the central part (Irrawady delta) of the country (Garfias 1979, Sein and Withey 1965, Singer 1995) and are very popular with the public.

THE INDIGENOUS ORAL NOTATION

In addition to the above-stated social and musical characteristics that have facilitated the continuance of this music over the past 250 years, there exists an oral notation system that has contributed to this transferring of certain songs and elements of the tradition. Variously described by others as a solfège system (Keeler 1998), a syllabification system (Garfias 1981), and mouth music (see also Williamson 1979b: 128, Williamson 2000), this system of vocables has been constructed to transmit the harmonic as well as the melodic properties of a tune. This tradition, know as *pazat saing*, has developed to capture not only melody but also the two-part characteristic of most Burmese songs.

What has set Burmese music apart from many neighboring traditions in India, Thailand and China, is its fundamentally two-part character. In addition to a vocal or lead melody line, a second, supplementary part is always included. This secondary part is not

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[16] The apprenticeships that I witness during my stay were all to saing waing troupes and leaders.

an accompaniment per se, but a necessary part of the song. Instruments that are restricted to one part, like the hne (oboe) and palwei (flute), as well as the voice itself, are considered incomplete without another accompanying instrument. Never did I witness a performance context in which the voice or a single melody instrument performed without a second instrument providing the supporting part.[17] The second harmonic part, though secondary in importance, is said to hold up or support the melody. The term used for the supporting tone or concordant pitch (usually a fourth or fifth below) is known as *meik-than* (*meik* meaning literally "affection" or "friendship," and *than* meaning "sound"), or usually just *meik*.

The importance of the second part is crucial to defining the distinctiveness of Burmese music. "The two-part structure of Burmese music is a vital component, and thus one which cannot be disregarded without severely changing the quality of the music which the Burmese have come to regard as essential" (Garfias 1981: 34). The relationship between these two parts is the aesthetic center of the tradition. U Khin Zaw, former head of the Burma Broadcasting Corporation is one of the few authors to have written about Burmese music for an English audience. He describes this music as follows:

> In our music, accompaniment to singing does not mean a harmonic background to vocal melody, but a partnership in patterns. In and out of

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[17] During the vocal, hne and violin categories of the Sokayeti competition, contestants were accompanied on stage by another instrument (pattala, or occasionally Burmese syle guitar or mandolin) that would supply this secondary part.

> the framework of musical time and melodic direction provided by the instruments, the vocal part weaves another, related pattern and direction. So long as they keep to the framework, both singer and player may embellish and improvise. It is skill in weaving sounds, rather than voice production, which determines the quality of the singer (Khin Zaw 1958: 165).

Of great importance to the transmission of this tradition is the conveyance of this second part. The basic premise of the Burmese oral notation system is that there are lexical syllables which are equivalent to certain pitches, others for certain strokes, and others for certain simultaneously sounded intervals (Garfias 1981: 35-36). These vocables have evolved into a specific system for the presentation of contours of the compositions. "This method serves as both an accurate means of transmitting the important qualities of each tradition and as an aid to teaching and as an accurate vehicle for memorization" (Garfias 1981: 34). Any system invented to transmit songs must, necessarily, devise a way of including the second melodic part.

An explication of this system can be shown with the first Kyo song.[18] This song, *Pu sin taung than kyo* (ပုဇိုင်းတောင်သံကြိုး), but known more commonly by its first vocal line, *Tan tya teh shin* (ဆံတွဲစေတရှင်),[19] is the first piece that any student learns to

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[18] A rendition of this piece can be found on U Yee Nwe's CD, *Sandaya: The Spellbinding Piano of Burma. Featuring U Yee Nwe.* (Yee Nwe 1998)

[19] Most thachin kyi are referred to by their first line, rather than their actual Maha Gita title.

play, regardless of the instrument. As with all of the first thirteen Kyo songs, this piece is not improvised (and is thus somewhat uncharacteristic of the Burmese music tradition at large), but is designed for pedagogical purposes, establishing a basic vocabulary of melodic patterns. Pedethayaza (1672-1752)[20] wrote the first four Kyo pieces as teaching tools for his harp students.[21] The lyrics to this piece are comprised of vocables that transmit not only melodic material but harmonic information as well. The student thus in her very first song does not learn a single monophonic melody, but learns some of the expected harmonic relationships between these two melodic partners.

The first line of the piece, contains the lyrics "Tan tya teh shin, tan tya teh shin, dyan dyan, Tan tya teh shin." These lyrics are, to a non-musician Burman, nonsensical vocables, yet to the Burmese musician point to the relationship between right and left hand parts on the pattala or saing, or first finger and thumb parts on the saung.

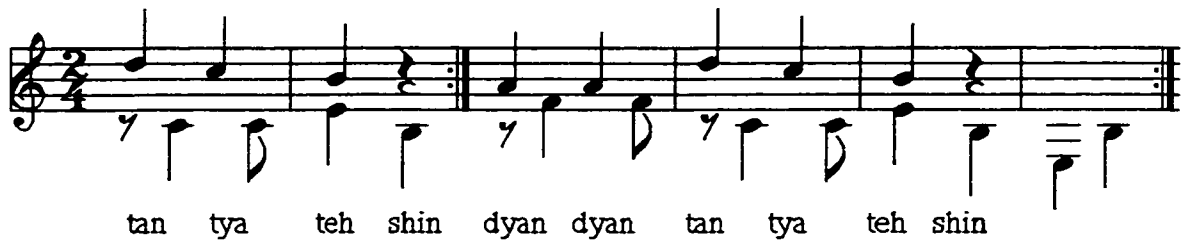

Figure 5.1: The first eight bars of Kyo song No. 1, "Tan tya teh shin."

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[20] Of the remaining pieces, the authorship of no. five is unknown and the rest are attributed to Myawadi Wunci U Sa (1766-1853). For a brief, biographical account of Myawadi Wunci U Sa see Williamson, 1979a.

Tan refers to the span of a ninth from the lower tonic to the note above the octave (roughly C to high D). This harmony could be played simultaneously or, as in this case, in an alternating, D to C, style. *Tya* refers to the octave on the tonic, again sometimes played simultaneously, but in this case alternating. Alternating notes, as opposed to simultaneously played notes, are referred to in Burmese as maung nin (ဖောင်းနှင်း); literally, teeter totter. The alternating of left and right hand mimics the motion of a teeter totter. This term is also used to relay the alternating pattern of the si (bells) in the right hand and the wa (clapper) in the left. *Teh* refers to the seventh note of the scale and its concordant *meik*, or friend note a fifth below. The term *shin* has no explicit musical meaning yet is a common polite tag placed on the end of sentences by females. *Dyan* is onomatopoetic for a short descending pattern of two three or four notes, in this case A to F.[22] This motive could alternately be played in a more tightly spaced manner (A-G-F) or even more densely packed (B-A-G-F). Throughout the first thirteen kyo songs, *dyan* appears in progressively more embellished ways, but the contour remains the same. This first kyo song continues with some lexical text and a variety of *pazat saing* vocables, which serve to establish a multitude of melodic motives or formulas for use in other pieces.

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[21] Williamson quotes the years 1714 and 1733 as reported composition dates for this piece (Williamson 1975b: 123).
[22] In traditional tuning this note would be between F and F# (see Williamson 1968b).

The lyrics "tan tya teh shin" contain in them the melodic and harmonic material realized on the accompanying instrument. It is this basic pattern that every beginning student first learns. Several of the first thirteen kyo songs contain these vocables, which contain melodic as well as harmonic information. Although most pieces in the Maha Gita are never heard in this form, it is reported (Garfias 1981: 39) that basic patterns exist for every piece in the repertoire. This basic form serves both as both a teaching device and as a reference point for the performers as they embellish and improvise or create an interesting accompaniment for the voice. While teaching me a new song from a later section of the Maha Gita, my teachers would frequently shout out *pazat saing* vocables to me, establishing the melodic and harmonic character of the new tune. Many of these syllables I would have learned in the first thirteen kyo songs. The basic form of this oral notation retains what are considered the essential characteristics of the tradition without the need for written notation.

NOTATION

Musical notation is the representation of music through means other than the sound of music (Ellingson 1992b: 153). Such a broad definition is necessary to include not only pictorial representations of music, as seen in staff notation, tablatures, or other diagrams, but also non-pictorial representations, such as other sounds like the above vocables.

As used by ethnomusicologists, 'notation' is often distinguished from 'transcription' as discussed by Charles Seeger (Seeger 1958). Notations may be either prescriptive or descriptive, while transcriptions are descriptive. Prescriptive notations describe how a piece of music is to be played, whereas a descriptive notation describes the sounds that were made in a particular performance of the piece. In practice, this distinction has gray boundaries. Descriptive notations can be used as a basis of performance, and prescriptive notations can be used to describe how something sounds. In the frequent attempts to standardize Burmese classical music, both agendas are pursued. I will return to this point later in this and the following chapter.

Recent literature on notation systems have emphasized not only the way in which they conceptually frame and organize music, prioritizing certain elements over others, (Becker 1980b, Ellingson 1992a, Ellingson 1992b) but also their contextual position in society, revealing how they are used socially (Duriyanga 1990a, Duriyanga 1990b, Myers-Moro 1990, Myers-Moro 1993, Sumarsam 1995). Who uses them and what purpose do they serve?

Notation systems, it must be recognized, are not physical things independent of human bias. They are, rather, a set of ideas. Musical notations and transcriptions could be thought of as an applied science or a technology, a humanly constructed means of conceptually organizing sound. Different notation systems arrange sound in various ways. Organizing musical parameters to be non-musically represented forces a prioritizing of certain musical elements over others. All notation systems are biased

towards various musical (both sonic and non-sonic) parameters, and recognizing such biases is necessary to understanding the role of a notation system in a particular cultural context. Additionally, where notation systems travel between musical cultures, the biases may become magnified. Western notation, for example, imposes certain conceptions of time, pitch, melody and rhythm, as well as certain priorities regarding what musical elements are to be notated and what should be left out. As the Western notation system is incorporated into other musical cultures, the priorities of the system also travel.

THE "IDEA" OF NOTATION & THE "IDEA" OF PRESERVATION

Before discussing the introduction of written notation into Burma's music culture, the question must be asked; "Why would one bother using it in the first place?" Prior to official sanctioning or public acceptance of a notation system (foreign or locally invented), there must be a felt need for such a system. The Burmese music tradition has existed for many centuries by orally transmitting hundreds or thousands of songs from teacher to student. Why in the 1950s, and again in the early 1990s, was there such a desire to preserve and codify the tradition; a desire that, to my knowledge, did not exist to any significant degree in other periods.

Perhaps one root of the need for notation is a sudden desire to preserve. Judith Becker, asking this very question of the introduction of notation in Javanese gamelan, writes:

> Why, after many hundreds of years of gamelan playing, did certain people at the court of Yogyakarta suddenly become concerned about old pieces being forgotten? The reason is that neither the Dutch nor the Javanese themselves understood oral traditions in which through a process of continual re-creation every piece is at once contemporary and the cumulative result of ageless tradition. Each performance is both unique and a summation of all previous performances of that piece as known to those particular players. Past and present coexist in the moment of performance. The concern for preserving old compositions is a European concern reflecting European reliance upon notation. Since the use of notation became widespread in the art music tradition in Europe, a piece unwritten is indeed soon lost and forgotten. Oral traditions have greater continuity; an unwritten composition may persist in similar form for generations, or it may slowly and subtly evolve into some other piece or form. The idea of preserving a gamelan piece as it manifests itself at one particular point in history and in one particular locale is not an indigenous concept. It was introduced by foreigners who mistakenly believed that a gamelan piece is a fixed entity which, if captured in notation, would be preserved from extinction. The irony is that by accepting this Western view of their own music, Javanese musicians are contributing to making it, in fact, the case (Becker 1980b: 13).

A similar situation to that described above in Indonesia can be observed in the Burmese case. Here an oral tradition was maintained by musicians for centuries, only to be questioned as different values or interpretations of 'preservation' were introduced during the colonial period. As in Java, the idea of preserving a piece as it manifests itself

at one particular point in history and in one particular locale is, in Burma, not an indigenous concept. My observations revealed a growing tension between the forces of standardization (embodied in notation projects) and oral keepers of the tradition. It is also worth noting that many of the personnel, who have strong convictions in the value of notation, are not musicians. But what purpose would these notations serve to a non-musician?

Sumarsam, also writing on Javanese music, emphasizes the increased sense of legitimation that such musical literacy brings. The Javanese elite used notation to legitimize the status of gamelan as "high art," high art, on par with Western European music (Sumarsam 1995:106).

> During the period of national awakening, the attempt to legitimize the status of gamelan to represent Indonesian national culture created a debate among Indonesian nationalists. This debate and the discussion about national culture formed a background for the founding of gamelan schools and academies and continued to be the subject of discourse in these institutions. Concomitantly, writing on gamelan developed in these institutions (Sumarsam 1995: 159).[23]

Both Becker and Sumarsam discuss the introduction of both Western and native written notation systems in light of intruding Western values. Important in both authors'

work is the initial adoption of specific foreign values (in this case variously-defined notions of preservation and literacy) that are then adapted and organized in various ways to fit the nation-building or culture-defining projects of Indonesia.

Myers-Moro offers a supporting perspective in light of Thai musicians' urges to preserve their music.

> While considering the history and forms of musical notation in Thailand, one must ask why efforts to record music occurred when they did and not at some other time. I repeatedly suggested to informants that the idea of notation derived from contact with the West, but none seemed to agree wholeheartedly. However, the notion that music—which has existed for a very long time in the oral tradition—must be preserved lest it die out appears to indicate an altered perception of time, change, and the fixedness of music itself (that is, that a piece of music should be fixed at all rather than mutating through individual innovations over time); this may well have come from the West, where we have written down compositions for a long time. (Myers-Moro 1993: 146)

Interesting to Myers-Moro's account is the denial, or at least reticence, to admit that such ideas as notation come from the West. Instead, they are drawn from changing perspective of time and change. The sense of history and historical continuity has

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[23] It is in this context that we begin to see the emergence of one important European attitude toward Javanese music: the necessity to standardize the melodies of Javanese songs (Sumarsam 1995: 107).

changed, most likely as the sense of identity and community is challenged in the formation of the nation state.

A similar view was found in 1990s Burma, where an aggressive anti-colonial campaign was daily put forth by all the state controlled media. Western culture, particularly British and American, is strongly denigrated. Elements of Western culture recognized as valuable, such as staff notation, are renamed *International*. As the five-line staff notation system becomes increasingly used throughout the country, its 'Western' roots are masked. The five-line staff system is referred to exclusively as "International Notation" in Burma. Several times throughout my research, I inadvertently referred to it as "Western notation," whereupon I was quickly corrected.

As musical notation systems are invented or introduced into a musical system, aural-perceptual biases can become disproportionately amplified. In the practical application of a new system, whether indigenous or foreign, multiple problems arise as the perceptual biases of listening are translated into pictoral representations of a sound. In the case of a foreign system being introduced, the perceptual biases of a different type of music from which the notation was derived are introduced into the new system. As Becker again writes, with the introduction of Western notation in Java, the bias of the new technology is even more powerful because the user is often unaware of the implications.

> Notation presupposes a linear concept of time, necessitates decisions as to what should be notated, and forces a perceptual bias on the user. The implicit bias of any given notational system is all the more powerful because the user is unaware of the implications of the new technology and therefore offers no conscious resistance (Becker 1980b: 11).

An awareness of the perceptual biases that different systems bring is paramount in understanding the relationship between the notation and the music culture.

INDIGENOUS CIPHER NOTATON

Prior to the introduction of the Western/Internation notation system (to be discussed shortly), Burmese musicians adopted a local form of written cipher notation. This notation system is still frequently used today and can be found in instructional books for pattala, saung and patt waing. Of the instructional books directed at the general public, most use the following type of tablature and none, until the late 1990s, use Western notation.

We can read in this tablature (see Figure Two) the basic skeleton of the two-part (widely-spaced) style. This example, the above mentioned Kyo song #1, is designed to be read on pattala (though could easily be transfered to the harp or patt waing), and clearly shows the interaction of the two melodic parts.

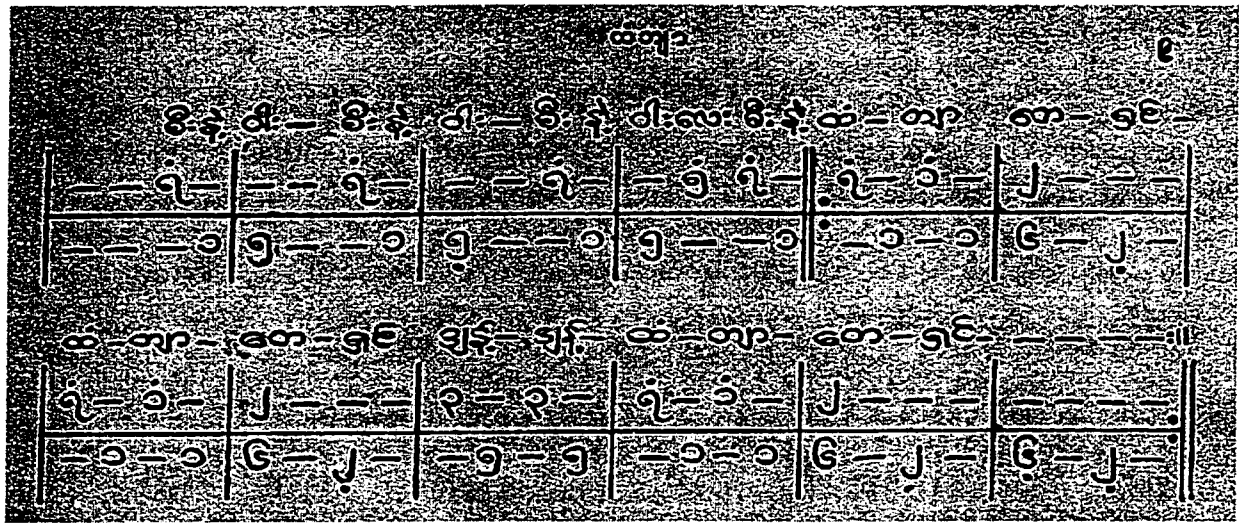

Figure 5.2: Burmese cipher notation of the beginning of Kyo song #1, Tan tya teh shin.

This cipher notation (Han Sein 1967) shows two parts depicting the right and left hands striking particular numbered keys layed out beneath a vocal line. Bar lines are drawn after every cycle of the implied si and wa (bell and clapper) pattern. Unique to this notation is the numbering system that reflects the downward motion of most Burmese melodies. In a Burmese seven-note scale, downward motion is considered natural and thus the scale descends with the prescribed numbers 1 to 7 (၁ ၂ ၃ ၄ ၅ ၆ ၇ ၁— or, 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1). This contrasts with Western cipher notation that would depict the same passage as (1 7 6 5 4 3 2 1). The literal note names for the seventh, sixth, etc., descending scale are drawn from the fingerings on the *hne* (oboe). Here the scale is laid out in descending order as successive fingers are placed on the bored holes of the *hne*, thus descending in pitch (or fingers) while ascending in number. The names of these notes (for

pattala and saing waing players) are taken from the hne as well, i.e. first hole, second hole, etc. These note names thus, also reflect the descending quality of Burmese melodies.[24]

The Burmese cipher notation retains this emphasis on two-part realization, a basic widely spaced tune and falling melodies. This notation is commonly used throughout Burma today, offering to the beginner the basic widely-spaced version of songs, or the basic template from which later variation is possible. In recent years, cipher notation using Arabic numerals is becoming more common. When Arabic numerals are in use, however, it is implied that Western pitch names are used (i.e. 1st pitch is Do, 2nd pitch Re, third pitch Mi, etc.) in contrast to when Burmese numerals are used (i.e. 1st pitch Do, 7th pitch Re, 6th pitch Mi, etc.). Though these simultaneously occuring systems contributed greatly to my own confusion, Burmese musicians nimbly move from one system to the other without thought.

In the following chaper I will discuss the introduction of Western notation to Burma and some problems associated with its use in depicting Burmese music. The encouragement on the part of the current regime to place Burmese classical songs into Western notation raises an array of interesting problems, and provides for us further insights into the complications of music patronage.

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[24] Beginning pattala players will write in chalk the pitch numbers on the keys of their instrument.

CHAPTER VI

"TRANSLATING THE TRADITION INTO REALITY": STANDARDIZING BURMESE CLASSICAL MUSIC

> It is a matter for rejoicing that a state school of fine-arts has come into being. How much more rejoicing there would be in the hearts of lovers of true Burmese music if the Government, instead of merely opening a class for teaching how to play certain musical instruments, had seized upon the means of saving real Burmese music from oblivion. The implacability of business so far as gramophone records are concerned, the rapid deterioration of public taste pandered to by cinema and gramophone, the invasion of Western instruments and instrumentation, the ephemeral catchiness of jazz tunes who, but the Government can save Burmese music from the combined assault of these powerful forces?
>
> U Khin Zaw (1940)[1]

INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, I introduced several of the basic principles behind Burmese traditional music and presented a number of the traditional modes of oral and written transmission. In this chapter, I will explore the introduction of Western music notation to Burma followed by an analysis of some government-sanctioned attempts to

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[1] Khin Zaw 1940a: 423 (also in Khin Zaw 1961: 200).[2] To my knowledge, efforts to commit folk material (ozi and dophat), royal drum music (si daw), or music of the Nat Pwe (spirit propitiation festival) have not been undertaken.

transcribe pieces from the classical music repertoire into this new notation.[2] The introduction of Western notation will be discussed in light of its perceived association with 'high-art' and artistic legitimacy (see Levine 1990). The first official attempt at using Western notation was sponsored by the Ministry of Union Culture, and began in the 1950s with a large gathering of many of the countries most esteemed musicians. These meetings resulted in one small, three-volume collection of the first thirteen *Kyo* songs. Though more standardizations were planned, the project was abandoned during the Ne Win government. Notation and standardization projects were revived in the early 1990s as part of the SLORC/SPDC's valorization of traditional culture. Much like the patronage projects outlined in previous chapters, the notation and standardization projects can be interpreted in several ways. On the one hand, they represent significant efforts to preserve the traditional arts and support the artists that produce them. On the other, they serve a variety of political purposes, as they reify a particular past and create a picture of a unified and cohesive history that conforms to specific views advanced by the present regime. This history is a politically viable history, bestowing legitimacy on those that are associated with it. It is a history that attempts to unite all the people of the country under one cultural banner at the expense of other, competing views of history. Before exploring the state adoption of these notation projects I will discuss the introduction of Western notation into Burma.

INTERNATIONAL NOTATION

What most people throughout the world refer to as Western notation, i.e., the five line staff, is referred to in Burma as "International notation,"[3] in an attempt to disassociate this system from the colonial West.[4] As discussed in the previous chapter musical notation carries with it biases rooted in the musical system from which it is derived (Becker 1980b: 11). The biases inherent in Western music notation that prioritize harmonic material above rhythmic must be noted. Significant to the employment of this notation in the Burmese musico-political world is the weight that Western notation places on reifying a piece of music. In Western music history, music notation has taken such pride of place that it is often simply referred to as "music," and thus, a quiet implication follows that if there is no notation, then there is no music. With this perspective, notation turns music from an abstract, into something concrete; into something real.

Numerous ethnomusicologists have dealt with the introduction of Western music notation into foreign musical systems, yet these discussions are absent from any discussions of Burmese music. In the case of Burmese traditional music, several specific problems present themselves. Many of the distinctive elements of the tradition, discussed by both Burmese and Western scholars, and presented during the last chapter,

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[3] Recent (Winter 2001) discussions on the SEM-L discussion list reference a similar use of the term 'International' to refer to the English language. By some accounts English is no longer a Western European language but, rather, an 'International' language in many parts of Southeast Asia.

[4] On numerous occasions throughout my studies I inadvertently referred to 'Western notation' whereupon I was quickly corrected with 'International Notation."

find trouble when confined to the parameters of the Western notation system. While each rendition of a Burmese "tune" is necessarily different, identification of the "nuclear theme" or "basic tune" proves arduous since it is never independently heard, i.e., never heard without variation. In tackling such a project one must choose whether a notation is to depict the "tune," as a certain performer plays it at a certain time, or instead, to outline the basic tune that is never played but serves as a skeleton for all renditions, regardless of performer or performance. Each end of this continuum—from specific, individual versions to general and universal templates—proves potentially limiting for preservational and pedagogical uses.[5] In addition to the necessary variations a piece enjoys, accommodation to multiple versions of a piece, as asserted by individual musicians, also proves difficult. As a result of contrasting musical training from different teachers (or lineages), the basic tune, text, or rhythm is often noticeably different and thus, represents more than just a variation. Who or what determines which musicians' version is legitimate or correct?

Finally, the rhythmic consistency implied by bar lines and note values in Western notation also creates problems with Burmese music, which is characterized by a rhythmic fluidity. Vocal parts in particular, float above the accompaniment deliberately ignoring strong beats articulated by the si and wa and, thus, prove very difficult to render into

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[5] Again the parallels with American jazz and notation are significant. Multiple volumes of specific solos, taken from specific performances and recordings of the Jazz greats are readily accessible. On the other end of the spectrum templates of the 'basic tune' can be found in a wide variety of 'Real Books', and 'Fake Books,' divested of personal arrangement. Neither end of this spectrum satisfactorily codifies Jazz.

Western notation. Other concerns such as tuning systems and ornamentation are similarly problematic.

ANTECEDENTS TO THE STATE PROJECTS

P. A. MARIANO (1901)

One of the earliest attempts to notate Burmese music into Western notation was done by P.A. Mariano and can be found in the appendix of Max and Bertha Ferrars' book *Burma*, first published in 1901 (Ferrars 1996). Mariano's piece is virtual unrecognizable as a Burmese melody due to an unexplained chordal accompaniment, or harmonization, that Mariano appears to have added.

In the first of four examples that Mariano gives in Ferrars' book, he has transcribed a duet with a saung (harp) and a pattala (xylophone),[6] though the title, genre and lyrics of the piece are not given. Mariano appears to be writing the harp part on two clefs, treble and bass, with the pattala ('dulcimer' on notation, see Figure 1) either doubling the harp bass part or providing a two bar ostinato. The bass part, supporting the vocal and harp melody, is here asserting two note chords (C and G) or occasionally (C and A). These chords, not found to my knowledge in other Burmese music, appear to be rough chordal harmonizations, or at least allusions to harmony, supporting the melody. I

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[6] Mariano refers to the pattala in this case as a dulcimer, presumably because it is struck with mallets. He does, however, include a photograph with a saung and pattala. The pattala has no struck strings and I know of no dulcimer-like instrument in the county.

know of no other example that includes three or four distinct pitches simultaneously. Burmese music is two-part music; three or four parts are not heard simultaneously.[7] Such inclusions of extra harmony or accompaniment were found in other turn-of-the-century works such as Alice Fletcher's 1893 *Study of Omaha Indian Music* (see Fletcher 1994), in which harmonizations by John Comfort Fillmore were added to melodies of Omaha Indian music. Fillmore's transcriptions were thought to reveal a 'latent sense of harmony' as it was assumed that a natural and universal law of harmony was guiding all musical systems (see Ellingson 1992a: 122). In Mariano's transcription, we find a static accompaniment prominently asserting a pedal tone on C, establishing the tonic but revealing none of the prominent secondary supporting tone, "meik", resulting in a 'partnership in melodic patters,' as claimed by many authors as central to the tradition (Khin Zaw 1958).

Twenty years later, Mariano included some notations in James George Scott's book *Burma: A Handbook of Practical Information* (Scott 1921). In this instance, Mariano has abandoned the harmonizations and has instead, simply, written out a number of single, one-voiced, melodies. Mariano at this time claims that harmony is not practically used in this musical system. While I am unaware of Mariano's research in the interim twenty years, his abandonment of harmonic realizations in favor of contrapuntal-like music is revealed when he claims "although harmony is not practically used they have

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[7] In a full saing waing performance several variations may occur simultaneously but this is not considered harmonization.

a fair knowledge of counterpoint, and they make pretty and simple variations on many of their songs" (Scott 1921: 361). Despite this, Mariano does not reproduce this 'counterpoint' in his notations.

Mariano also comments on the difficulty of obtaining a basic tune for notation given the Burmese proclivity for variation and embellishment. In the accompanying text he asserts that a "preponderance of appoggiaturae is a peculiar feature of their style, which renders it difficult for the unaccustomed European ear to eliminate the notes of the plain melody." Again, unfortunately, though he emphasizes the importance of the embellishments, Mariano does not notate them.

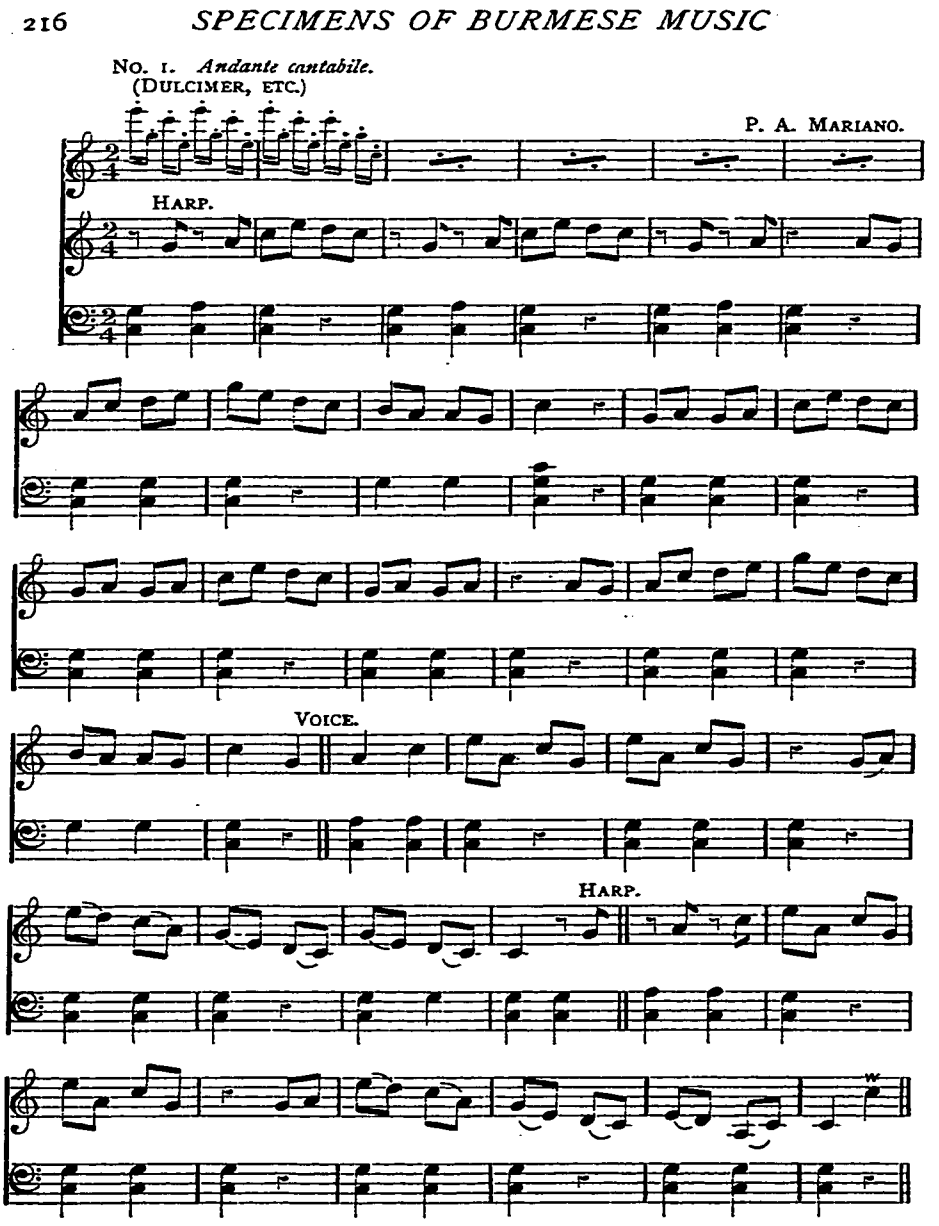

Figure 6.1: Specimen of Burmese Music by P.A. Mariano (1901).

PAUL EDMONDS (1924)

In his 1924 account of life in Burma, *Peacocks and Pagodas*, Paul Edmonds offers us the next account of Burmese music with accompanying transcriptions. Edmonds is searching here not for insights into Burmese music, but rather fuel for Western composers whom he feels have 'played out' the possibilities of the diatonic scale. He writes:

> ...when I came to Burma I felt that I must seize the opportunity of enquiring into the Eastern scale in the hope of bringing back information of value to our composers of the future. I was to be a pioneer leading the way to heights hitherto undreamed of, and by my humble agency might even start the worn-out music of the West on a new lease on life (Edmonds 1924: 115).

Edmonds transcribes the melody to the Bawle[8] tune "Sein chu kyar nyaung," as performed for him by a soloist, U Hla Thin (see Figure 2). He regrets he was unable to transcribe many other tunes as "they were so interlarded and loaded up with ornamental runs, trills, appogiaturas, and grace notes that it was exceedingly hard to get down to bed rock" (Edmonds 1924: 121). Looking to verify his transcription across different performances, Edmonds also had the opportunity to hear a full saing waing ensemble perform the Bawle tune. His account is as follows:

As soon as the tuning was over and everything in order, I asked for the "baw le," and stood with my pencilled notes in my hand ready to follow. I recognized the introduction, but after that all was chaos. Only the merest phantom of the tune emerged from the riot of extra notes and ornaments put in at the fancy of each individual player. The gong man hammered away at his gongs and the oboe squeaked more or less in unison. The drum circle, being pentatonic, could not, of course, play exactly what was being played by the instruments which boasted a full scale of eight notes, but the drummer, striking his drums with fingers only, did his best....The result was a cheerful, but to my unaccustomed ear, exceedingly monotonous noise.

The absence of semitones or accidentals makes modulation into other keys impossible, consequently monotony is unavoidable. The only variations available are those of time, rhythm, and accent, and those obtained by grace-notes, appogiaturas, and runs, added at the discretion of the individual performer. The license allowed the individual and the fact that the drums with their limited pentatonic tuning cannot play exactly what is being played by the other instruments, make Burmese music a characteristically happy-go-lucky affair. It is sometimes pleasant to listen to, I admit—for a short time; but the Western musician can learn nothing from it (Edmonds 1924: 126).

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[8] Bawle are mournful seranades and one of the smaller genres of the Maha Gita repertoire. U Khin Zaw attributes the Bawle to Hlaing Hteik Kaung Tin (1833-1875) (Khin Zaw 1940a: 410).

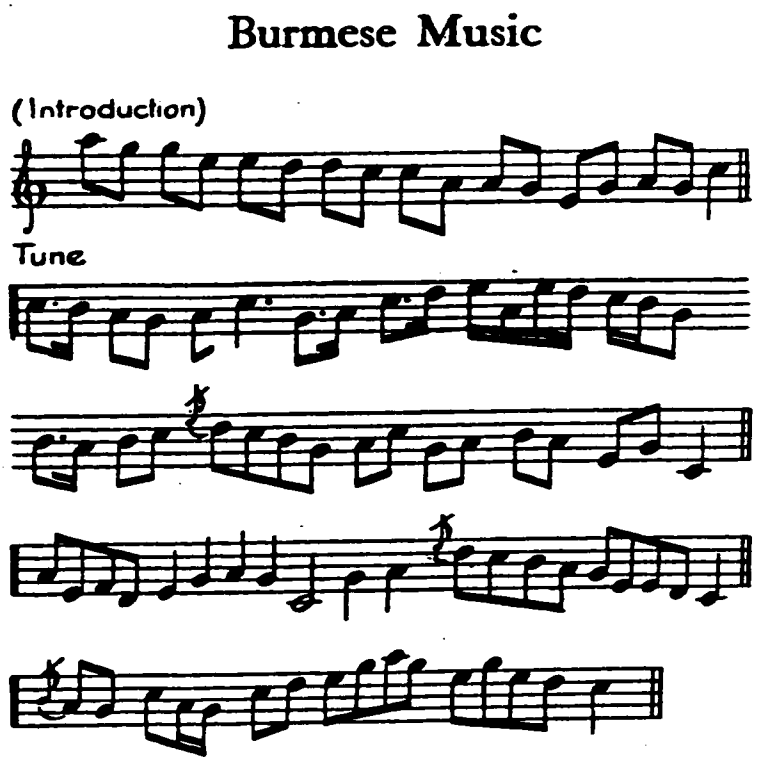

Figure 6.2: Paul Edmonds' transcription of the Bawle song, "Sein chu kyar nyaung" (1924)

Perhaps due to their various agendas and harmonic manipulations, Mariano and Edmonds had comparatively little influence as ethnographers or musicologists, and are scarcely mentioned in the works of Becker, Garfias and Williamson. Their significance for Burmese music scholarship lay, I believe, in the influence they had on key figures within

Burma, who were then instrumental in the movement to standardize and codify much of the classical repertoire.[9]

Within Burma, early treatises on music and the arts in Burma were written on palm leaf and many have disappeared today. Even relatively recent works have been printed on such poor quality paper and subject to such harsh humid conditions that much has been lost.[10] Additionally, several libraries that housed early accounts of Burmese music were destroyed during the Second World War. Given the loss of resources inside the country and the attempt to assert Burma's unique culture in the post-war community of nations, an appeal beyond the country was considered necessary to assert the legitimacy of the musical system, indeed the culture at large. One of the most outspoken champions of Burmese 'culture' and the standardization efforts, in 1940s and 50s Burma, was U Khin Zaw. U Khin Zaw looked not to indigenous scholarship in his quest to assert Burmese musical culture but, rather, to Mariano and Edmonds.

U KHIN ZAW

Before World War II, U Khin Zaw was the librarian at the University of Rangoon Library. He was a British-educated scholar and an amateur musician of Western music.[11] Though U Khin Zaw had gone to great lengths to preserve many documented songs

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[9] The exception to this is Kurt Reinhard's *Die Musik Birmas* (1939). Reinhard's dissertation on Burmese music draws almost completely from Edmonds and Mariano but is, curiously, more an ethnological work on the races of Burma than an account of music (Reinhard 1939).

[10] The earliest sources on Burmese music are not drawn from Burmese sources but, rather, Chinese documents (see Picken 1984).

[11] Apparently U Khin Zaw was a flute player (Western style) and was not a professional musician (U Ko Ko, personal communication)

recorded up until the 1940s, many of these recordings were destroyed during the war. In the late 1930s, U Khin Zaw had begun to collect and transcribe many of Burma's classical songs. He was the first native Burmese scholar to write in English on Burmese music, publishing the first serious and accessible account in his, "Burmese Music: A Preliminary Enquiry," published in the *Journal of the Burma Research Society* (1940) (Khin Zaw 1940a).[12] Several times throughout his article U Khin Zaw refers to Mariano's and Edmonds' work. In the opening paragraphs U Khin Zaw mentions several Burmese scholars who have done some work theorizing Burmese music, but he spends very little time concerning himself with the matters of these local scholars. Instead, U Khin Zaw devotes a large portion of his article engaging with the work of Mariano and Edmonds. While the details of U Khin Zaw's agreements and disagreements with Mariano's and Edmond's work is beyond this project, it is significant to note that U Khin Zaw, in his quest to codify and legitimize the Burmese tradition looks to scholarship beyond Burma—regardless of its quality and accuracy. Several themes that connect U Khin Zaw's work to that of Mariano and Edmonds are also worth noting.

Notable in the work of Mariano and Edmonds, and found again in U Khin Zaw's, is an evolutionary perspective on Burmese music, developing from a pentatonic music and aspiring towards the twelve-tone harmonic system. Mariano and Edmonds, in their accompanying text, disclose the primitive and simplistic nature of Burmese music as it

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[12] An almost identical article appeared the same year in the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* (Khin Zaw 1940b) and several years later another revised version can be found in the journal *Open*

strives towards twelve-tone chromatic capabilities. U Khin Zaw, accepting this, must take on the challenge and prove that Burmese music is understandable in terms of Western theory and is, indeed, evolving.

Note Mariano:

> ...the Burmese are the most musical people in the East...Their melodies are mainly composed of the five notes—namely, C, D, E, G, A. ...But decided progress in the art has brought on the introduction of the 4th and 7th tones (Mariano 1921: 360).

Then Edmonds:

> I wrote it down on paper in Western notation after several repetitions, and upon examining the upper part, or tune, was interested to find that it was, apparently, in the pentatonic scale...The pentatonic scale, as all musicians know, is one of the earliest and most primitive scales. It dates back to a time when human ears were unable to appreciate, or possibly could not endure, the interval of a semitone (Edmonds 1924: 118).

And finally, U Khin Zaw:

> Our music does modulate from the tonic to the dominant, say from C-major to G-major, and from the tonic to the sub-dominant, C-major to F-major and back again frequently. But we have no F-sharp or B-flat. What should we do? Simple! Put our F half way between F-natural and F-sharp,

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Mind (Khin Zaw 1961).

> and our B half way between B-flat and B-natural. That was how our fourth and seventh notes came to be neutralized out of sheer exigency. In reality our music has been aspiring to the diatonic just-scale all these centuries (Khin Zaw 1961: 175).
>
> How can music, which is at this naive stage be compared with such things as the Pastoral Symphony, the B minor mass, and Mozart's operas? (Khin Zaw 1961: 211).

The perceived legitimization that Western notation and Western-style music theory brings to an 'evolving' music, frames much of the early attempts to notate Burmese music. U Khin Zaw even develops a cycle of fifths chart to describe the seven modes that are theoretically possible with the Burmese seven-tone scale. In practice, only four of these modes are used and they are determined as much by melodic motives as by note selection and tonic. U Khin Zaw's cycle of fifths, which runs through the seven possible tones by fifths, starting from and returning to C, appears to be an attempt to frame Burmese theory in Western terms, while its practical application to musical practice appears somewhat limited.[13]

After World War II, U Khin Zaw moved from his position as librarian at the University of Rangoon, to the head of the Burma Broadcasting Service. In this position, U Khin Zaw proceeds to aggressively champion traditional Burmese culture with copious

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[13] Though U Khin Zaw's work was occasionally referenced by musicians during my stay, I encountered no musician who actually used his theories or appeared to understand the modal system in these (cycle of fifths) terms.

publishing on all matters of Burmese traditional culture (see K 1981, Khin Zaw 1956).[14] In his capacity at the Burma Broadcasting Corporation, he renewed his earlier (pre-war) efforts to record, theorize and vindicate Burmese traditional music. Placed in the context of post-war political and national unity struggles, a need to codify and establish Burma's traditional culture is soon recognized as worthy of government involvement.[15] U Khin Zaw's post at the apex of the state-controlled broadcasting corporation provided him a lofty position from which to express this need.

> True Burmese music nowadays resides only in the memory of old Burmese musicians. And they are now too old. Their music should be recorded. They should be organized into a state orchestra and paid to broadcast selections from the classics at least twice a week. Their instruments should be measured and a standard pitch and a standard scale should be fixed and one complete set of Burmese musical instruments should be maintained and kept correctly in tune for purposes of research. The notation of the authentic ground patterns of Burmese classical songs should be undertaken. Above all, organized research into the theory of Burmese music should be instituted at once with suitable equipment and aid (Khin Zaw 1961: 200)[16]

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[14] Many of U Khin Zaw's publications were first presented in *The Guardian*, an English language monthly in Burma where he published under the name 'K'. Several of these articles have been compiled in his *Burmese Culture: General and Particular* (1981).

[15] This is not unlike Thailand's struggle to define tradition after the fall of the monarchy and its move to partial democracy in the 1930s, as revealed in the writings of Pamela Myers-Moro (1989, 1990, 1993). See also Duriyanga (1990a, 1990b).

[16] Despite U Khin Zaw's enthusiasm it is interesting to note his reservations on the feasability of the project. In 1940, Khin Zaw draws a parallel between the worth of notating Burmese music and what Fox-Strangways has discovered with Indian music (Fox Strangways 1975). U Khin Zaw quotes Fox Strangways, from *Music of Hindoostan*: "Notation...would only hamper the unlimited power to vary. It would also be useless, because the songs are handed down and valued as being 'so-and-so's' song, with, of course, all his idiosyncrasies and mannerisms, which could not possibly be notated." U Khin Zaw

Even today, sixty years later, if one peruses the books stalls of downtown Rangoon, one is likely to come across photocopies of U Khin Zaw's 1940 work. This independently-bound, mini-book, is copied and sold as the primary source of information on Burmese music.[17]

FROM NOTATIONS TO STANDARDIZATIONS

Beyond the obviously daunting task of simply notating Burmese music on the Western staff, the problem of unifying or standardizing these notations, such that a single notation of a single song serves to represent the tradition, is quite problematic. The attempt to standardize definitive versions of an orally-transmitted and improvised genre raises multiple sociological questions concerning musical authority and the place of a codified national culture in Burmese politics. Various inconsistencies within the standardization process, and disagreements between key members of the government standardization committee, will reveal that the musical sound and its accurate graphic representation, is secondary to the perception of unity, high prestige and singular authority as realized in a government-authorized national music canon. This appearance

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continues, "for the voice it will require a certain amount of temerity to note Burmese music" (Khin Zaw 1940a: 426).

[17] In 1952 the Government of the Union of Burma did published a privately written musical collection entitled "Classical Burmese Music"—prepared for Piano by the Right Rev. Friedrich W.A. Lustig, after a piano presentation by Saya Myaing. The Reverend Lustig, also known as Ashin Ananda, was a Latvian monk who spent many years in Burma (Lustig 1952). These notations are not mentioned in any of U Khin Zaw's work.

of cultural unity embodied in musical notations (as well as competitions and universities) is sculpted by the ruling generals and directed at not only the Burmese people but the global community at large. The standardization projects are secondary to a publicly perceived national unity that such standardization implies.

U BA THAN AND THE MINISTRY OF UNION CULTURE:

U Khin Zaw's work (particularly 1940a, and 1981) (K 1981, Khin Zaw 1940a) reflects the growing importance of 'culture' in Burmese nation building during the 1940s and 50s. In the late 1950s, under the sponsorship of the Ministry of Union Culture, an attempt to notate and standardize at least some of the canon began. Alinka Kyawswa U Ba Than, the leading harp player of his time, and many say of this century, was appointed as a senior cultural officer of this Ministry. U Ba Than was one of the few artist that had a working knowledge of Western staff notation and he proceeded to publish, through the Ministry of Union Culture, the first thirteen Kyo songs.[18] These were published in three sections: *Standardized Classical Burmese Music* Vol. 1: Nos. 1, 2 and 3. These transcriptions were notated in a piano-score style, with treble and bass clef, and were intended to be used by both pattala (xylophone) players and pianists. U Ba Than notated and published a number of other classical songs including the Patpyo song,

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[18] These can be found as *Standardized Classical Burmese Music*, Vol. 1: No. 1, 2, and 3 in various libraries today. Further volumes of notations were never completed (occasionally, one may find photocopies of these in bookstalls on the streets of Rangoon or Mandalay).

"Lu Ma Naw" and the famous Yodaya piece "Myaman Giri." With the rising popularity and status of the piano there was great encouragement to translate Burmese classical compositions to accommodate it. This amounts to the greatest collection of pieces completed in Western notation. Further volumes were planned but were never completed.

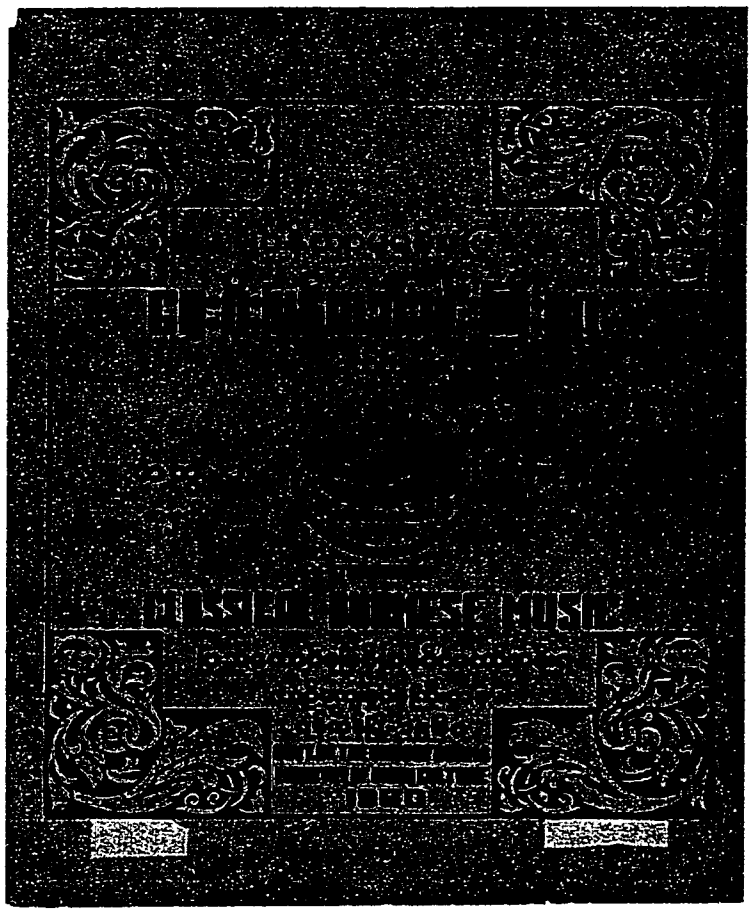

Figure 6.3: The cover to Volume 1 of "Classical Burmese Music," notated by U Ba Than.

Now under the sponsorship of the state, the project becomes representative not of a particular performer, or even a particular genre or song but, rather, it becomes

representative of Burmese cultural traditions at large. From the preface to these notations we read:

> The aim and object of the Ministry of Union Culture is to explore every possible avenue for the preservation of archaic or traditional Burmese Songs in their original essence both in tune and style and to standardize them as authenticated Burmese Classical songs for the interest and benefit of the general public. To accomplish this object time and labour have been freely expended, and well-known musicians of the country have been consulted. With a view to translate it into reality this book containing thirteen classical (Kyo) songs[19] ...selected from several other standardized songs is published for the first time of its kind. The notation of tunes for the aforesaid thirteen (Kyo) songs is not explicity (sic) meant for the piano but as a source of foundation to facilitate the manipulation of Burmese Musical Instruments. Besides, the fingering system for playing music is based on the same lines as those of other Burmese Musical Instruments, such as, drum-circle (Saing-Waing) and xylophone (Pattala).
>
> The Ministry of Union Culture is endeavouring its level best to continue to publish all Burmese Classical Songs standardised under its authority and record them in the archives of the Union Government.
>
> Dated 8-12-59 Ministry of Union Culture

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[19] (five songs, *viz.*, Htan-ta-yar, Thi-dar, Tha-yar, Way-bar, Htway-ta-la, in Vol. 1, three songs Bon-zaung-myint, Zay-yar-myo, Sein-lè-lè in Vol. II, five songs San-yar-taung-kyun, Shwe-pyi-gyi-ay-yar, Myo-nan-nge-lay, Ko-bar-baung-su, Shwe-phon-shwe-phon in Vol. III)

DISCUSSION OF U BA THAN'S NOTATIONS

The first thirteen Kyo songs are recognized as the fundamental building blocks of Burmese music. As discussed in the previous chapter, every student will begin with these thirteen songs that hold in them many of the melodic motives, phrasings, and harmonic relations that a player will draw from as he/she moves towards a more improvisatory performance in other song genres. These pieces, unlike the large majority of the repertoire, are fixed pieces that are not improvised or varied.[20] Rhythm is clearly organized into duple time and, again, unlike the bulk of the repertoire we find in these Kyo pieces a strict pulse laid out on the si and wa (bell and clapper) to which the performer rigidly conforms.

As these are teaching pieces with strict rhythm and no variation, they are somewhat unrepresentative of the Burmese classical canon at large. The rhythmic pushes and pulls found in other songs and the multiple melodic variations are much more characteristic of the tradition. However, the fact that they are not varied from performance to performance, have minimal embellishments, and their rhythm is strict, makes them comparatively easy to set to print.[21] The reader will also notice the absence

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[20] When senior musicians are asked to play these pieces some embellishment does occur.
[21] There are, however, multiple versions of some of these pieces and senior musicians debate and argue between themselves when asked to come up with one definitive version. In particular there are several debates concerning how many bars Kyo song #1, "tan tya teh shin" is to have. The two different versions of the piece can not be played simultaneously.

of lyrics. No mention is made of the pazat saing system of vocables, which had been central to the oral transmission of this very piece (as well as other notated songs).

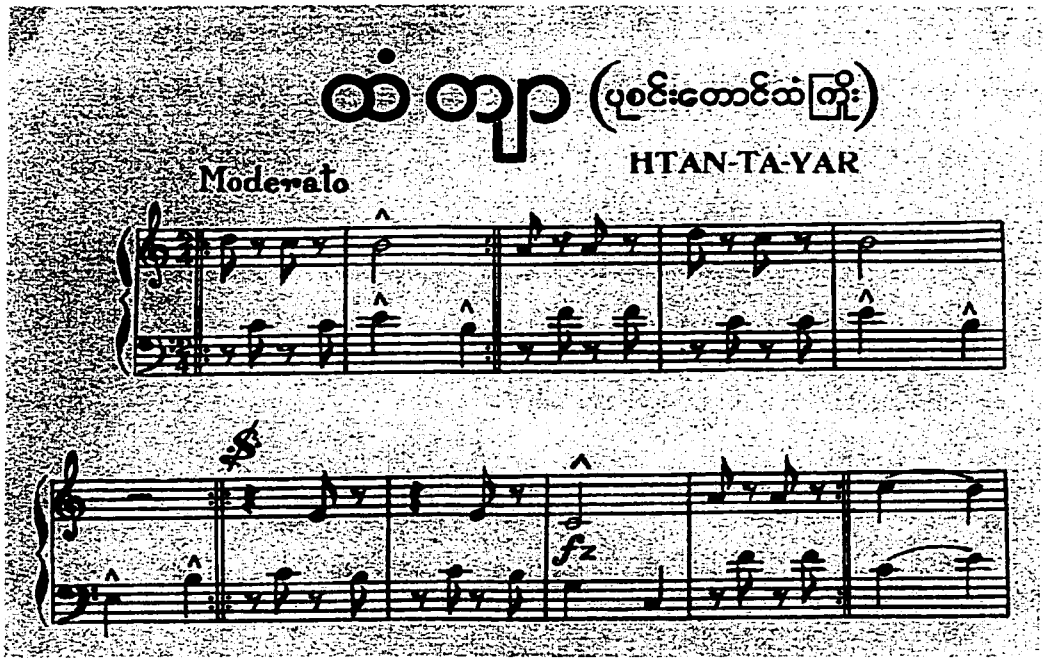

Figure 6.4: Kyo Song #1 as notated by U Ba Than in "Standardized Burmese Music"(1960)

After the 1962 military coup, little evidence is found of the continuation of this project. Though plans were made to standardize many of the other, more advanced pieces, they were never realized. Throughout the next thirty years various musicians attempted their own independent notation collections but government support and encouragement of the project ceased— until the early 1990s.

KHIT HAUNG THACHIN

Present day discourse concerning 'traditional music culture' includes, in addition to the thachin kyi court music, a genre referred to as khit haung thachin (ခေတ်ဟောင်းသီချင်း) or old style songs. Khit haung are often referred to as modern traditional songs as their roots lie in the pre-colonial court tradition. In these pieces the increased use of Western musical instruments (piano, guitar, banjo, etc.) and the gradual incorporation of foreign musical ideas (harmony in thirds, accented rhythm in vocals, etc.) place them outside of the strict rules of the court music. Recording technology, after the turn of the century, but particularly during the 1920s, 30s and 40s, had developed local markets and were supplied by Columbia records and HMV. Khit Haung songs are representative of these early recording years.

In the past few years, under the authority of Secretary-1 of the State Peace and Development Council, Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt, aspirations to commit many of these *khit haung* (modern traditional or old style) songs to Western staff notation are being made.

TWO EXAMPLES FROM KHIT HAUNG THACHIN

Today's resuscitation of this project includes a much stronger emphasis on the colonial period *khit haung* pieces and comparatively less, at the moment, on the thachin kyi classical repertoire. Whereas thachin kyi classical songs were written for Burmese

instruments, though often performed on piano, guitar, violin etc., khit haung songs are often written on or for piano and often include a small orchestra of Western instruments.[22] One can also hear in these pieces the gradual adoption of even tempered tuning, steadier rhythm, and, by the 1930s, occasional chordal accompaniments and song structures that mimic American Tin Pan Alley forms.

Though the standardization project is planning to continue notation of the thachin kyi repertoire, beyond U Ba Than's transcriptions, there is a present emphasis on the documentation of these khit haung oldies. This could be for several reasons:

First, they are easier to translate into Western notation than the classical repertoire. As these songs occasionally draw on some Western influence, particularly in tunings and rhythm, they lend themselves to Western staff notation much more readily. Additionally, many of these pieces were composed on Western instruments, thus the translation to the Western staff might be less problematic.

Secondly, definitive versions of these pieces are more easily identified since recordings (78 rpm) of all the pieces chosen were made shortly after they were composed (1920-40). Recordings made during the composer's lifetime are able to more accurately reflect his or her intentions. Recordings, subsequently, influenced a move to valorize the original composer's intentions, intentions that were not revered to the same extent in monarchial times. Reproduction of the 'original' version, as played by the composer,

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[22] Which could include, violin (Stroh violin), trumpet, guitar, banjo, etc.

would not be possible nor even valued, prior to the 20th century. Recording technology, and later notation technology, have influenced various understandings of what a piece of music is.

Thirdly, many of these early khit haung pieces were written by the teachers and mentors of today's leading composer and performers. Today's musicians are only one or two generations removed from these original composers of the 1920-40s. Thus, transcribing these piece is a way that aging musicians of today can honor their own teachers.

Of the multi-volume standardizations that are planned, Volume One, *Khit Haung Teh Thachin Mya* (*Old Style Songs*), has recently been published (Government of Myanmar 1999) and deals exclusively with khit haung, old style songs. This book begins as many books in the country do with a statement of the twelve national causes (see Chapter Two), placing it firmly under the government's national unity and protection-of-culture umbrella. The book then proceeds to display all the names of musicians and scholars in the country that have contributed under various committees to unite the songs in this book. Committees for standardizing lyrics, committees for writing the performer and composer biographies, and committees for notating the songs are prominently announced in the opening pages. Most of the book is dedicated to short, one-page biographies of approximately seventy famous khit haung composers, followed by lyrics of said composer's most well known songs. At the end of the book noticeably finer quality paper appears where we find a selection of sixteen notations of various songs

documented and notated in Western staff notation. These notations were completed by two of the leading composers of late 20th century Burma. The irony of translating this tradition into Western musical notation is compounded by the fact that very few professional musicians know how to read it. Of those that do, none use it in their day-to-day musical performances or rehearsals, but rather as a means of picking out a Western melody from an international book. If notation is used during a rehearsal it is most always a numbered, cipher notation (see Chapter Five) and even in this case it only serves as an aid to recollect the piece. Performances would never use notation. I would like here to address two of the notations included in this book.

Figure 6.5: Cover to Khit Haung Teh Thachin Mya—Old Style Songs.

EXAMPLE 1: "PYO HMATAN"

"Pyo Hmatan" (see Figure 6.6), was composed by the great composer Myo Ma Nyeint,[23] recorded by Columbia records in the 1940s, and sung by Mei Shin, one of the leading singers of the day. Myo Ma Nyeint was a prolific Mandalay composer throughout the 1930s and 1940s. He studied with both Sein Be Da (the last court saing player) and Maung Maung Gyi (the last court harpist),[24] giving him a solid understanding of the classical tradition. The text of this piece is a love song and translates, literally, as 'epic love song.'

One hears in the introduction of this piece block chords played on the piano accompanying a melodic line played on violin (in this case a Stroh violin with horn) and trumpet. As the voice enters we move to a traditional style of accompaniment that closely replicates the music of thachin kyi. The two part realization of the melody identifies this piece as Burmese, with roots in the classical music tradition; the right hand of the piano maintaining a heterophonic relationship to the voice (or the violin solo) and the left hand giving a polyphonic supporting harmonic line. It is, of course, the second line that is repeatedly cited as the distinctive quality of Burmese traditional music by all the authors thus far discussed. The recording of this piece also reveals a somewhat loose singing style that avoids heavy metrical accents.

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[23] Myo Ma Nyeint (1909- 1955)
[24] Maung Maung Gyi was responsible for much of the original text codification of thachin kyi songs collected in the Maha Gita.

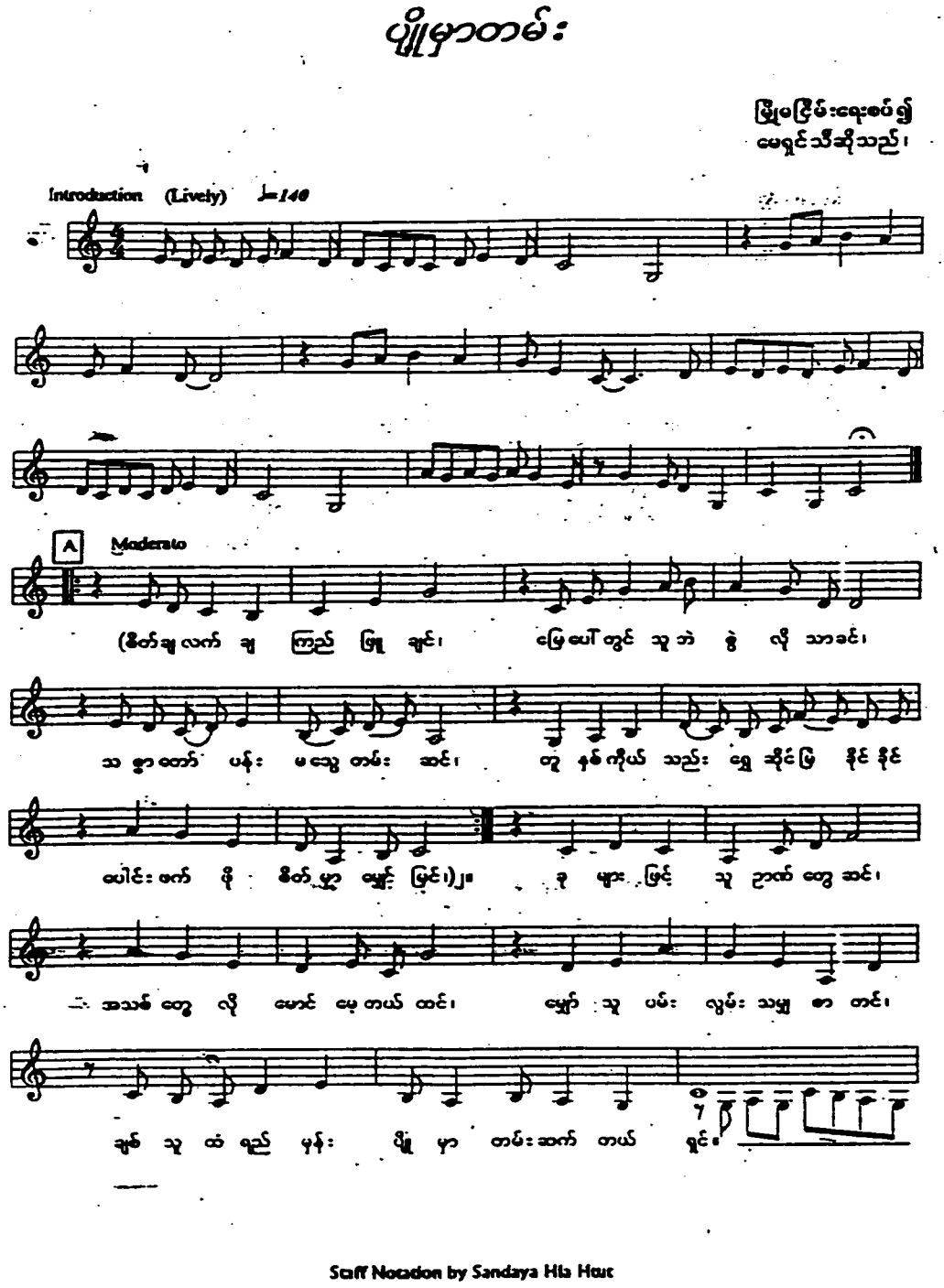

Figure 6.6: "Pyo Hmatan"

EXAMPLE 2: ZWE

According to the pianist U Ko Ko,[25] "Zwe," written by Mya Ka Laung was derived from the melody of a tune by the composer Shwe Dein Nyunt, another famous khit haung composer (see Figure 6.7). This definitive recording of "Zwe," recorded in 1941 (A.I.F. 152. 1941. Sept) came at a time of peak frustration with colonial occupation. This song is one of many Dobama movement (Our Burma) songs rallying for steadfast determination in ousting the British colonialists; Zwe translates as "tenacity, determination, or perseverance." This piece was recorded by the A-1 Film and Recording company and includes the pianist/composer A-1 Khin Maung on piano and Pi Hla Pe on vocals.[26]

On the recording for this piece we can hear, again, the distinctive Burmese two-part style. Voice, violin and piano right hand play heterophonic variations of the same melody while the piano left hand supports with a distinct, but related melodic line. As the voice drops out the banjo takes over the lead. The banjo copies the melodic contour or the 'basic tune,' as played by the violin and right hand piano, and inserts an abundance of its own embellishments (not notated). In this example, more so than the first we hear a flexible rhythm particularly at cadence points (bars 3 and 5); a clear trait of Burmese traditional music cadences.

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[25] U Ko Ko's first public radio performance in the early 1940s was of this song.
[26] With composer Khitaya Aye-banjo.

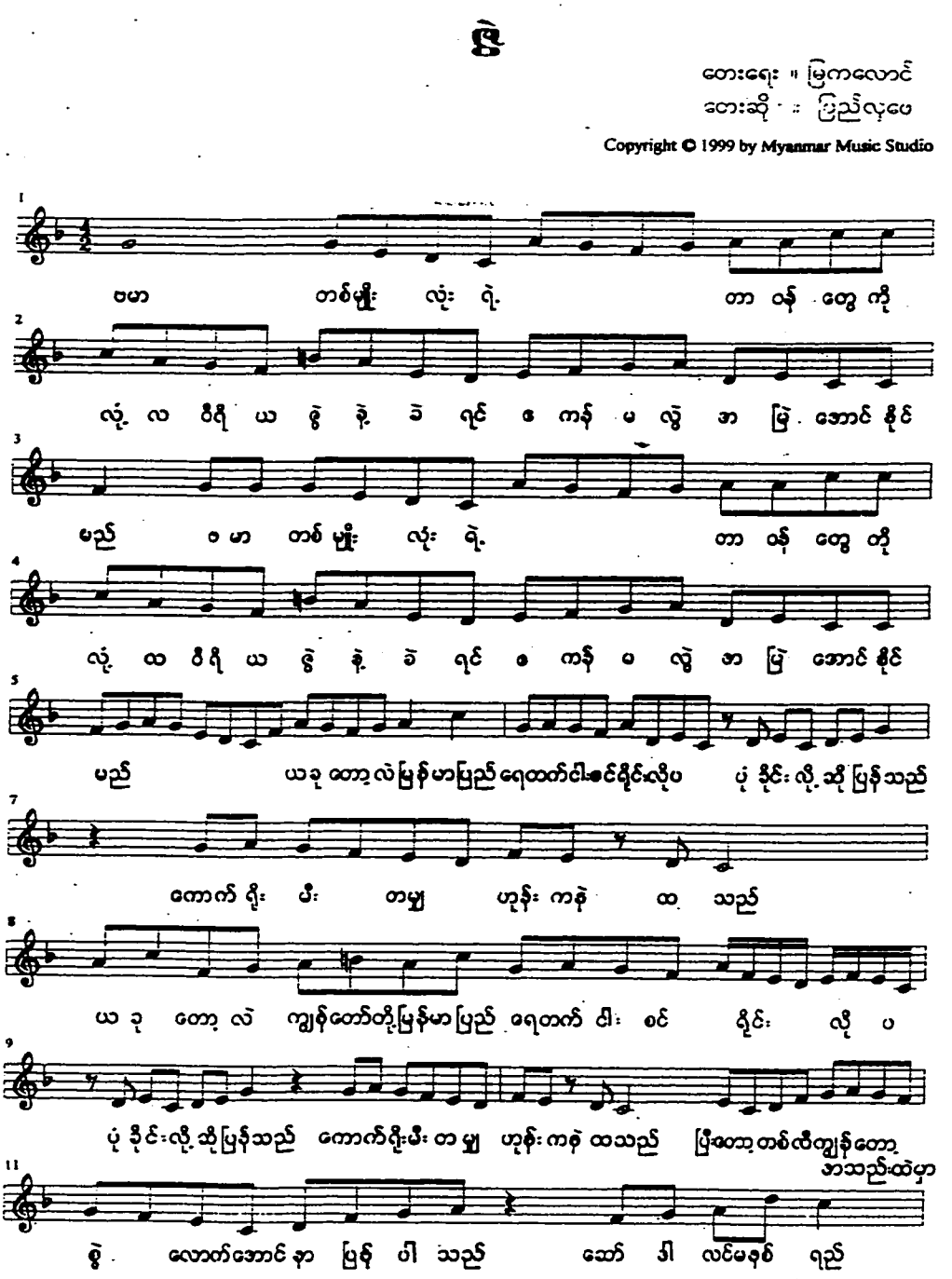

Figure 6.7: "Zwe"

DISCUSSION OF STANDARDIZATIONS

In these two notations (Figure 6.6. and 6.7) the first thing we notice is the exclusion of the second melodic line. Both the chordal harmonization and the more traditional Burmese style accompaniment are missing. Indeed, throughout all of the transcriptions in this volume the supporting harmonic and melodic parts are absent. In my discussions with the two musicians charged with this assignment, it was revealed that notation of the full accompaniment was the original intent but lack of experience writing in Western notation and difficulties with the computer notation programs that they were using made the project, as originally planned, unruly and overly time consuming.

Secondly, due to the strict and even rhythm that International (Western) notation implies, these notations are unable to capture the flexibility of the vocal lines, particularly in the cadence sections of Example Two, "Zwe." The distinct character of the Burmese cadence is lost in this visual representation. Burmese cadences are not simple ritardandos but rather tend to hang on the penultimate beat for a time, before resolution. This occurs not only at the end of pieces but at the ends of most phrases.

A third observation will highlight the fluid vocal style that Burmese traditional singers use. As mentioned in Chapter Five, singers in this tradition avoid accent. Classical (thachin kyi) and khit haung songs have a loose relationship to the strict rhythm implied by the accompanist or the percussive rhythm parts of the si and wa (bell and clapper). The sliding and glissandoing quality to both the voice and the violin

realizations similarly reflect this. As the vocal lines are written exclusively with quarter notes and eighth notes this character of the voice is lost.

It should also be observed that the transcribers of both "Pyo Hmatan" and "Zwe" have included melodic accompaniments or non-vocal parts in their realizations of the essential melody; seen in "Pyo Hmatan" in the last bar of page 1 and in"Zwe" on beat 3 of bar 1, beat 1 of bar 5. This implies essential parts of the piece or melody that are independent of the vocal part and hints at important musical material, absent in the notation. The notaters here appear to struggle with representing both the vocal line and the essential accompaniment.

DISCREPANCIES WITHIN THE PROJECT

Several other style discrepancies can be noted between these two notations. While realizing that these notations are all published together, it is striking to notice some inconsistencies between the notations of each of these musicians.

A short list would include:

• A different font used for both the music characters and the lyric text. This is due, in part, to the use of different music notation programs, but also a result of each notater's unwillingness to consult the other.

• The transcriber of "Pyo Hmatan" has included metronome markings and other tempo indications while the transcriber of "Zwe" has not.

• On the bottom of the "Pyo Hmatan" notation the transcriber has taken credit for his transcription work while on "Zwe" one sees a copyright claim for the entire piece. Music copyright enforcement law is negligible in Burma; in any case a copyright claim would not be made for unique notations within the book.

• With regard to their rhythmic organization, "Pyo Hmatan" conforms to a short barred 4/4 time throughout. "Zwe," on the other hand is notated in 4/2 timing making for extremely long (potentially confusing) bars. However, these stretched timing may more accurately reflect both in length and feel the classical rhythmic cycles often tapped out by the si and wa.[27] A closer inspection of these two notations will reveal a multitude of questions regarding representation of the tradition and also a multitude of differences in the approaches taken by these two transcribers.[28]

What may be alarming to the cultural preservationist are the potential distortions to the tradition that these government-sponsored notations present.[29] Most apparent is the reduction of the two-part realization of these pieces to a single skeletal melody as well as the stiffening of a flowing melodic line, with distinct cadences, into temporally equal four beat measures using quarter and eighth notes exclusively. These two characteristics

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[27] Further into the piece the timing switches into 2/4 time and one can more clearly see the 4 beats to the bar quarter note pulse that I believe western ears could more easily identify. As repetition of the initial them recurs but the notation remains in 2/4 time.

[28] On page two of "Pyo Hmatan" chord substitutions written above the staff (guitar Chord style) are also inserted implying the block chord accompaniment. Chord substitutions are not found on the "Zwe" transcription.

[29] These, I believe, are duly representative of other transcriptions in this volume.

are the most distinctive and recognizable aspects of Burmese music, delineating it clearly from its neighbouring traditions in India, Thailand, and Southern China. These idiosyncrasies are clearly heard in the recordings though they are not identifiable in the notations.

Recollecting, again, the importance placed on both parts necessary to a realization of any Burmese melody:

> For instruments such as violin, pipe or hne...it is simple enough, provided that the prospective writer of Burmese music knows not only all the resources of staff-notation but also the laws of Burmese musical time. It is not so simple however in writing for such instruments as piano or *pattalar*[30] which require left-hand and right-hand parts. Pardon my use of the word 'part' here in its non-technical sense. The problem is to write for the left-hand and right-hand in double staves and yet show clearly that *it does not mean melody and bass nor two melodies; that the two parts are really one part, the division being only of labour not thematic; that both staves together make on utterance of one melody only*[31] (Khin Zaw 1940a: 427).

By observing the two different approaches used in these transcriptions, one may get a hint of the unspoken competition that exists between the two composers that did these notations. All transcriptions in Volume 1 of this series were set to print, without editing, by two senior musician/composers. Ironically, for a project designed to

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[30] Pattala, xylophone.

standardize, these two composers did not share their notations with each other, were not willing to consult each other on approaches to the project nor were they willing to have their work proofed by other. Indeed, each approached the task with different understandings and conceptions of what was important. Their use of different equipment and notation programs[32] revealed a markedly different visual presentation. In fact, whereas each committee for this book project (lyric committee, biography committee, etc.) included numerous professional musicians, the notation committee included only these two musicians, as they were the only ones familiar enough with the medium. As the book was preparing for press the notations were not proofed by the book editor who, perhaps, would have questioned some of the non-standardized qualities of these standardizations. The level of disagreement between musicians during this project was revealed to me in an interview with one of these notators who exclaimed frankly to me: "standardizing is fighting!!"

WHY STANDARDIZE?

When I asked musicians involved in this project why they were doing it I consistently got two responses. Firstly, "to preserve the tradition," implying the need for a descriptive transcription, codifying the essential elements of the piece and the style. Secondly, "to show foreigners how to play our music," implying, perhaps, a prescriptive

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[31] My emphasis

notation for use in teaching. I don't wish to delve into Seeger's presecriptive/descriptive dichotomy or assume for a moment that these musicians in Burma approached their project with this sort of critique. None-the-less, these two responses reveal a sort of schizophrenic relationship between the nationalist intentions behind this notation project and the daily practice of the tradition from which it comes. Both agendas are present yet neither is fully dealt with. Ultimately, I believe both the prescriptive and descriptive uses of these notations are distantly secondary priorities behind their value as simple tangible symbols of the tradition.

RESISTANCE OF THE TRADITION TO STANDARDIZATION

In some ways, perhaps, the different approaches to the project and styles of notation revealed by these two leading musicians actually do reflect Burmese music culture. Multiple variations of the same piece exist in an oral tradition as do slight variations in overall style. These variations and subtleties of style find their authority in the musical leaders that practice them, pass them on to their students, and compete with other leaders for musico-social prestige. In these different standardizations we see unique individual variations that resist conformation to a singular style. While the typographical variations are not large, they are significant enough to raise awareness amongst an independent reader.

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[32] Though they each had access to both computer programs

I am not implying overt political resistance to the project by either of these participants; quite the contrary as both of them heartily endorsed this project. Rather the tradition itself, including all its sociological dynamics, of which these two leading musicians are a part, resists the standardization. As we look closer at how this project is actually executed we realize that these non-standardized standardizations may in-fact reflect very effectively various sociological aspect of the music culture. Burmese traditional music places a high value on individuality and comparatively little on musical co-operation between people.[33]

Further insights into the value of these standardizations and their place, or lack of place, in Burmese musical behavior, can be gleaned from an observation of professional musicians' and teachers' use of them. Most of the professional musicians that I met were not literate in Western music notation. Of those that did understand how to read it, only a few used it in their daily musical life. Those that did have competence in staff notation often used it to write out their own compositions, perhaps to legitimize their own work. Never did I witness its use in other contexts. For most musicians, and most of my teachers, competence in reading Western notation was irrelevant to their musical activities. A few specific cases, however, are worth mentioning:

The violinist, U Tin Yi, having spent his career as a studio musician, is spending his retirement with Western classical music, playing Vivaldi concertos and Bach suites.

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[33] Even in the group saing waing ensemble, there is a strict social hierarchy among the players that maps onto a musical prioritizing of the parts.

He enthusiastically reads all Western sheet music that he is able to aquire. When asked to play Burmese music he will either study the Maha Gita texts to recollect pieces or, in some cases, consult the cipher notation that he, as a student, learned from his teacher. In several cases he had actually notated Burmese melodies into Western notation, yet these were never used to recollect or learn new pieces. Western notation seemed to be exclusively reserved for reading Western music.

While I was in recording studios and the studio musicians were learning pieces to accompany a singer, Western staff notation was not used, even by those familiar with how to use it. Instead, a copy of the lyric sheet would offer enough clues to the melodic contour and the 'basic tune' for musicians to then insert their own parts.

With regard to music notation, my lessons with the saung master U Myint Maung were unique. Over the past thirty years U Myint Maung has transcribed, in Western staff notation, more than 200 of the thachin kyi songs. U Myint Maung uses staff notation of his own transcriptions with most of his students, as he feels it is important for them to learn how to read music. While learning various pieces on the saung I used his transcriptions, yet I was instructed by U Myint Maung to memorize the piece as quickly as possible. Only after memorizing the piece, and thus no longer using the notation, was I making music. The notation here operates as quick way to learn a piece (less time intensive on the teacher as a student can be sent home with the notation) and as a memory aid.

As I was recording U Myint Maung and asking him to recollect pieces he hadn't played in a while, he, curiously, pulled out his formerly written notations for the piece rather than looking at the Maha Gita texts alone. This raised some peculiar questions and may imply that U Myint Maung's versions are becoming more standardized and less improvisatory as he has become more literate in notation.

It is also interesting to note that U Myint Maung, having transcribed more classical music pieces than any other musician in the country, wishes no involvement with the government standardization projects. Residing in Mandalay, and now far away from the re-located center of culture (formerly Mandalay though with these present projects increasingly Rangoon), he is able to assert his musical individuality via his transcriptions without surrendering them to the government project.

CONCLUSIONS

Ultimately, these notations "may be less what they assert than the fact of their assertion" (Trouillot 1995: xviii). As the rulers emphasize tradition and their symbolic relation to it they now have quite visual and tangible manifestations of their oral tradition, embodied in the performing arts competition, the new university, and now a growing

number of these notations.[34] The style with which these notations are completed, is secondary to the compilation of the book itself.

I will remind the reader of the preface to U Ba Than's 1960 notation project. This objective was tackled with a "view to translate ...(the tradition) into reality." Now in print, the tradition becomes real. Turning the tradition into tangible controllable objects and events such as performing arts competitions, universities and sheet music legitimizes the tradition, and those that patronize it, for use in modern nation state identity and unity politics. The emphasis here is on the medium as the symbol not necessarily the confusing content of that medium which may in fact distort the tradition more than reflect it.

With the limited use that notation serves in Burmese music, the question must be asked, why is this necessary? The standardization project, like other cultural projects, serves to reify the traditional court culture and its legacies (such as the khit haung repertoire). Though not used by contemporary musicians, standardizations serve to legitimize a traditional culture to both the Burmese populace and the International community at large.

In effect, what these standardization projects appear to have done is to raise the question of what the Burmese tradition is. Previously, this question was not asked, indeed, did not need to be asked. By raising the question, which creates confusion and a quest for authority, the government is now able to step in and solve this legitimacy crisis

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[34] Interestingly, all three of these new media for transmission (the Sokayeti competition, the University of Culture and Standardized notations) are foreign to Burma.

through these standardizations. As Attali writes: "the game of music thus resembles the game of power: monopolize the right to violence; provoke anxiety and then provide a feeling of security; provoke disorder and then propose order; create a problem in order to solve it" (Attali 1985: 28). Despite this question, most musicians continue to perform and teach independent of these new notations. A profound irony, thus, remains as musicians, who had no need for notated music prior to these projects, still proceed to practice their art without regard for them.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS:

POLITICAL OBJECTIVES AND CULTURAL CONSEQUENCES

> We are never as steeped in history as when we pretend not to be, but if we stop pretending we may gain in understanding what we lose in false innocence. Naiveté is often an excuse for those who exercise power. For those upon whom that power is exercised, naiveté is always a mistake.
>
> Michel-Rolph Trouillot[1]

Throughout this work I have tried to show how the SLORC and SPDC governments have chosen aspects of Burma's history to emphasize a particular type of tradition and further their political agenda. Burma's political turmoil over the past forty years has led many observers, both Burmese nationals and the international community, to question the ruling generals' right to rule. With their political legitimacy in doubt, the ruling junta has gone to great lengths to represent and establish a particular view of national heritage that justifies and reifies their leadership position. Political authority, as distinct from power by force, must be earned from the people. Each of these projects three projects can be understood as an attempt on the part of the regime to earn the

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[1] Trouillot 1995: xix.

consent of the governed masses. Selective re-organization of history has brought into bold relief certain elements of the country's past; yet, simultaneously, has marginalized and silenced other traditions.

For many people, "tradition" is conceived of as simply an inert document of the surviving past. Though informing the present, tradition is frequently regarded as something handed or passed down; an unproblematic legacy from days past or a simple collection of historic facts. This narrow understanding of "tradition" is precisely what allows it to be so powerful as a political tool. In practice, "tradition" is selectively determined and emphasized, and is an active shaping force of contemporary society. While certain elements of a past can be intentionally emphasized or exaggerated, others are forgotten or even intentionally silenced. There is not simply "a tradition" but, rather, a *selective tradition* (Williams 1977: 115). In addition to the present being shaped by forces of the past, the past is also shaped by forces of the present. "Tradition" is operative in the construction of present day political identities, becomes a conduit for the realization and execution of power relations, and is central to the construction of cultural identity.

All of the cultural patronage projects discussed in this work are manifestations of a tightly-controlled and narrowly-selected tradition. In the broadest sense, there is a strong emphasis on the court traditions of the Burmese kings. This emphasis is selected at the expense of other non-Burman histories of the ethnic minorities, and also at the expense of the independence-era history of Aung San and its legacies. The seeming re-

creation of the royal court strikes at many commonly shared symbols of Burmese monarchial authority now resurrected for use in the present. This is a contemporary version of the past, constructed to affirm the present. Student demonstrations, Aung San, and the pro-democracy uprisings are marginalized from Burma's official history and are excluded from any sanctioned view of what is "traditionally Burmese." Instead, elements of the royal dynasty, its official culture, and its authority are favored symbols of history ratifying the present.

Turning our emphasis to the music traditions, the three sites of patronage discussed above aim to present a music tradition that is unified, cohesive, and national. Contrary understandings of this traditional music culture, found in the importance of variation and amongst its multiple authorities, are ignored or assertively silenced and are offered little opportunity to contest the state view. Beyond a merely selective tradition that has marginalized other musics, there is a recurring reconstruction and re-organization of this new tradition. It is interesting to note that all three of these new conduits of musical transmission—the Sokayeti competition, the University of Culture, and the standardized notations—are media that were not part of the historical reality of the Burmese court. These are modern institutions that arrange and simplify the tradition in specific ways and can be found in most all modern nation states. In the Burmese case, however, the degree to which these new modern institutions are used to facilitate hegemonic control is exceptional. In addition to selectively highlighting various corners of the court tradition, it is important to note the reorganization and simplification of the

tradition that has followed this state intervention. This reorganization has, ultimately, turned much of the tradition into something new.

State-imposed simplifications, as James Scott asserts, are the basic givens of modern statecrafts (Scott 1998:3). They make the world not only more 'legible,' but also more controllable. State simplifications, however, acting somewhat like abridged maps, do not successfully represent the actual activity of the society; they represent only that slice of it that interests the official observers. These maps, Scott continues, are "maps that, when allied with state power...enable much of the reality they depict to be remade" (Scott 1998:3). The Sokayeti competition, the University of Culture, and standardized notations, as state *selections* of tradition, are chosen to present, or to map, Burmese 'tradition' for the nation and international community. They also serve to make Burmese musical culture more controllable. These projects, I have shown, do not effectively recall historical modes of musical transmission, performance, or even musical sound. Indeed, accurate recall of the past is not their intent. They instead enable much of the traditional reality that they claim to depict, to be remade. What they aim to accomplish is the depiction of a single unified tradition to which all Burmese can commonly refer. A tradition revered, regardless of practice.

Tradition, thus, serves as a primary tool—and I would say in the Myanmar case, *the* primary tool—of constructing a hegemony that establishes the authority of the regime with the consent of the masses. Tradition, it is hoped by those re-creating it, grants

authority to the SLORC/SPDC and establishes a right to their political power as distinct from power by military force.

Hegemonic power, as distinct from power by force, gains its effectiveness through the consent of the subjects. "'Hegemony' is in operation when the dominant class factions not only dominate but *direct*—lead: when they not only possess the power to coerce but actively organize so as to command and win the consent of the subordinated classes to their continuing sway" (Hall 1979: 332). By way of these culture patronage projects, the regime attempts to win the consent of the populace by resurrecting a common history, or a selected portion of it. These alliances to the past that affirm this acquiescence are built on the local level through the activities of particular individual players in each of these newly institutionalized musical projects.

But has this consent been won? Do these state patronage projects actually contribute to building political authority in the Burmese context? Tradition is created and recreated in accordance with its function in the present. Similarly, hegemonic power, through its use of tradition, is also always in flux and continually negotiated. In order for this power to be effective, consent must be earned; it is not given, and it can also be lost. In present day Burma, a "totalising patronage" presents a wide variety of cases that reveal this approval being granted and denied to varying degrees.

In so far as consent is won from the public, it is not won equally across the masses but rather in varying degrees, given the personal agendas, investments, positions,

etc., of individual citizens. Traditional musicians respond to the three projects discussed in this dissertation with a wide array of approving and disapproving voices and a multitude of unvoiced thoughts. These opinions are necessarily somewhat different from the non-musicians opinions of these projects. In my opinion, the view of these projects from the perspective of the average citizen is somewhat more critical than that of the musicians with whom I spoke. Several of the benefits accrued directly to traditional musicians are significant and do not impact the general populace in the same direct, economic manner.

The Sokayeti competition, I believe, appears to be the most successful of these projects at reviving the tradition publicly and placing the generals in positions of authority. While many of my informants realize the overt political posturing behind the activities of Secretary 1, Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt and other generals, the competition also appears to be highlighting their livelihood in many valuable ways that result in increased social and economic prestige for many musicians. The pride that performers and judges have in the competition and their participation in it is significant. Of the classical musicians with whom I spoke, even the most politically critical of them appreciated what the competition appeared to be doing to their livelihood and the status of traditional music. The prominent display of awards and diplomas in the homes of performers and judges attests, I believe, to an approval of this politically inspired patronage.

The University of Culture, through its ability to build future patrons and by way of the jobs that it has provided, has won the favor and approval of somewhat fewer musicians. As an institution for training future musicians, the opinions of all the musicians with whom I spoke (including several who lecture and teach there) were consistently critical. The university, while completely ineffective at creating musicians, is realistically only developing the hobbies of many young students. The potential of the university, however, to grow into a musically-productive educational facility is certainly possible yet its value appears inconclusive given its infancy.

Finally, I encountered very few musicians, other than those directly involved with the project, who showed any appreciation for definitive notations of the repertoire. No musician that I encountered had used, or had any intention of using, any standardized version of a piece of music that was not already his or her own. The belief that these standardizations had the potential to actually destroy the tradition, as perceived by individual musicians, was apparent. The standardization of an oral, improvisatory tradition and the creation of definitive versions of songs marginalizes much of the essence of the tradition in the minds of its practitioners. Of the government patronage endeavors discussed, the standardization and notation project, I believe, has the lowest regard amongst musicians. Though many agree that standardization is, perhaps, a good thing on paper, as something concrete to be shown to the rest of the world, no musician with whom I spoke would ever use it.

The degree of approval and consent that musicians bestow upon the three projects seems to correlate with the degree of involvement or participation that each individual musician is permitted in the realization of each. The Sokayeti competition, while tightly orchestrated by a select few people, involves a great deal of participation by audience members, thousands of performers, and hundreds of judges. In contrast, the standardization project includes relatively few musicians while marginalizing the talents and voices of others.

In attempting to decipher the relative placement of these projects in the state hegemony, it must be noted that these projects are all interrelated in significant ways and cannot be understood independently of one another. While the level of musician participation varied between the projects, the overlap of personnel across these three locations is notable. All of the musicians involved in the standardization project are judges at the Sokayeti competition, and many teach or consult at the University of Culture. The university has plans to use the completed standardizations in future classes, and students of the university are all encouraged to participate in the competition. Each of these three projects draws attention to the others, and subsequently contributes to the legitimacy of the others. By relating to and justifying the others' existence, each of these projects serves to fashion a modern authority for Burma's 'new' classical music tradition.

As the current SPDC regime gains credibility with the very public presentation of these projects, it must be noted that the musicians also gain a certain type of credibility

from the regime. Musicians wishing to procure jobs are most publicly visible when participating in these new projects. Approval from the government, as recognized in the frequent news media reports of the Sokayeti competition or of a general's visit to the university, serves to lend a degree of credibility to a traditional musician. An obvious parallel with the royal court is significant here, as the most revered and the most publicly lauded musicians of the last dynasty were also the ones who had the most significant access to the king's ear; performing for him in the royal court. In practical terms, a musician gains some of his/her legitimacy directly from the patronage of the dictatorship. A co-legitimation then exists between the government in their quest for political legitimacy, and the musicians in their pursuit of artistic/social status.

All musicians that I interviewed recognized that these projects were changing the tradition, and also that many of the projects were providing opportunities for the generals to strategically position themselves as keepers of the royal tradition and as protectors of Myanmar heritage and Myanmar identity. Despite this, many agreed that there were more job opportunities for traditional musicians than ever before. Many of the older generation looked at the younger generation of musicians enviously, perceiving that the opportunities available today are far greater than they were forty years ago.

Although my presentation of these projects is somewhat critical of the military regime, given the manipulation of tradition for political purposes, such cannot consistently be said for the musicians who participate in them. Though many artists understand the politics of their musical system, they must tolerate it in silence in order to

maintain their livelihood. This silent participation, however, does contribute to the recreation of the very system that they themselves struggle with. As Vaclav Havel writes on living under a dictatorship:

> Individuals need not believe all these mystifications, but they must behave as though they did, or they must at least tolerate them in silence, or get along well with those who work with them. For this reason, however, they must live within a lie. They need not accept the lie. It is enough for them to have accepted their life with it and in it. For by this very fact, individuals confirm the system, fulfill the system, make the system, *are* the system (Havel 1991: 136).

Though the opportunities for individual expression are greatly suppressed in contemporary Burma, many feel that participation in these new projects advances their economic and social status and raises public awareness of their art. It is also believed by certain players that in order to change this difficult political situation, one must penetrate it and work to change it through interaction with it. Indeed, within the military and the ruling council itself, there are many who wish for change and progress toward democratic political representation. Participation within the structures of the hegemonic politic is, by some accounts, necessary in order to realize change. Though I met no musicians who heartily endorsed the SPDC government, there were certainly individuals that believed these projects were aiding in the construction of a better society by creating and

celebrating a shared history independent of the individual aspirations of particular generals.

> The artist is a social planner. He not only inspires but also organizes his public. Artistic enjoyment is complete, and the work of art judged healthy, only in terms of History. The aesthetic merit of a work of art is measured by the extent to which, in its structure, fantasy world, and passions, it conforms to the needs of concrete social action; otherwise, the artist's commitment would not be credible (Haraszti 1987 39).

As emphasis on the traditional arts has apparently reached a high point, it is not unlikely that a shift to democratic representation could lead to a demise in state patronage of traditional music resulting, perhaps, in fewer career opportunities and a decline in the social prestige of traditional performing artists.

The political crisis in Burma is a moral crisis. Tradition, as represented by the SPDC, is selectively chosen and presented publicly to be a defining characteristic of cultural and self identity. The struggle over this tradition is a struggle of identity and history and strikes directly at the personal values and identities of all people in this society. Daily propaganda implores the populace to maintain these traditions, for only in loyalty to this heritage will enemies be conquered. Some of the most significant of the enemies confronted, however, are different traditions and contrary visions of Burmese history. These other perspectives, histories, and traditions are silenced, but they are not

yet forgotten. A stain remains on the walls of many office buildings where once hung pictures of both Ne Win and Aung San. These silenced periods of the country's recent past are remembered precisely because they are not spoken.

The Sokayeti Performing Arts Competition, the University of Culture and the standardized notations are all new projects. It remains to be seen what long-term effects these new institutions will have on both the Burmese classical musical tradition and the government that uses them to further their agenda. As the SPDC continues to build its army to unprecedented levels, having grown more than 300% in the past thirteen years while continually claiming cordial relations with its neighbors, it is apparent that the most significant threats to the present regime are not foreign nations or neo-colonialists, but rather, other silenced traditions within its very boundaries. It is in the service of this national defense that these state projects are enlisted.

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Vita

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