BURMA SINCE THE 1988 UPRISING:
A SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

by

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INTRODUCTION

Before the advent of a new democratic movement under Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, Burma was largely neglected by the scholarly community. The difficulty of gaining access to primary sources, and of reading them in the Burmese language, tended to deter all but the most dedicated researchers. Also, from the time the Burmese armed forces (or Tatmadaw) first seized power in 1962, until they took back direct political control of the country in 1988, Burma retreated into isolation and strict neutrality in international affairs. Tourists were actively discouraged and foreigners wishing to study the country tended to be viewed with suspicion. Even Burmese academics themselves found it difficult to gain access to official records. With some notable exceptions, during this period there were few serious works published in the major Western languages about Burma's history, government, culture or contemporary society. Occasionally, travel books featured a chapter or two on Burma, but they tended to deal only fleetingly with the state of the country and its people.

However, since the dramatic events of 1988, when widespread pro-democracy demonstrations were crushed by the armed forces, there has been a resurgence of interest in Burma among journalists, scholars and strategic analysts. A wide range of new and important studies has appeared. Researchers have uncovered or revived hitherto forgotten aspects of Burma's history. The struggle against military rule by both democratic political parties and the country's many ethnic minorities has been the subject of several books and monographs. A large number of new publications have appeared, devoted to different aspects of Burmese culture and society. There have also been some notable contributions to Burma studies in broader works, covering such subjects as the involvement of armed forces in the politics of Southeast Asia, and the economic development of new states. This increased level of scholarly interest has been matched by a greater awareness of Burma among the populations of Western countries, prompting the publication of numerous books designed for the mass market. These include collections of photographs, and a number of memoirs and biographies.
The major publications about Burma written before 1988 have been listed in Patricia M. Herbert's comprehensive and detailed bibliography (Burma, Clio Press, Oxford, 1991), but no comparable guide has been produced since then. Since 2001 the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London has periodically produced a very useful list of sources entitled Bibliography of Burma (Myanmar) Research: The Secondary Literature. It was last updated in 2004, as a supplement to the SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research. This bibliography makes no claims to completeness, but it does include journal articles and book chapters about different aspects of Burma, categories of publication not covered by Pat Herbert’s bibliography.

The following list represents a selection of books, monographs and reports devoted to Burma that has been published (or republished) over the past 20 years. All have been personally sighted and the relevant details verified. The list is not intended to be exhaustive — either in its listings or in its coverage — although an attempt has been made to include publications representing all the main subject areas and political viewpoints. No specific claims are made regarding the academic or literary merit of any of those publications listed. Rather, this selection is intended simply to highlight a range of publications on Burma which have appeared since 1988 and which may be of interest to both the scholar and general reader. Those who wish to pursue the subjects covered below are also advised to consult the growing literature on Burma in academic and professional journals.

The broad categories into which these publications have been divided are largely based on those found in the Herbert bibliography. Sub-headings have been included in some places to help readers find books on subjects of particular interest. Where a publication could fit into more than one category, it has been placed according to its main themes. Each publication has been cited as it has appeared in print. Hence, the country is referred to both as Burma and as Myanmar (the name officially adopted by the new military government in 1989). Similarly, the capital has been shown as both Rangoon and Yangon, depending on the choice of the authors and publishers.

For those wishing to explore this subject further, a survey of the state of modern Burma studies, with illustrative examples taken from the literature, can be found in Andrew Selth, Modern Burma Studies: A View From the Edge, Southeast Asia Research Centre, Working Paper No.96 (City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR, 2007), available on line at http://www.cityu.edu.hk/searc/WP96_07_ASelth.pdf. For a selection of recent publications on subjects of particular interest to people intending to visit Burma, it is recommended the reader consult Books to Read Before Visiting Burma: Some Suggestions, found on the website of the Asia Bookroom.

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