Title: Shan Studies: Shan Buddhism and Material Culture: Current Issues of Identity

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The Shan are a minority Tai people living in the eastern Shan State of Myanmar. The current military and political situation in Myanmar brings increasing pressure on Shan cultural identity. There is a saying among minority people ‘To annihilate my culture and identity; you must first destroy my language and writing.” Policies of the military junta aim to prevent the use of Shan language and to undermine Shan culture in general. That includes material culture and Buddhist and animist rituals held during annual festivals. When Aung San Suu Kyi was in office as State Counsellor (2015-2021), foreign and local scholars worked in Shan State. On the return of the military junta a policy of suppression has gained momentum.

This panel will assess the current situation in Shan State and the ongoing efforts to conserve Shan culture through educational and religious networks supported by small funds from international organizations. What effect is increasing instability and poverty having on existing Shan cultural programmes. What part do monasteries and education institutes play in ensuring the survival of local Shan Theravada Buddhist and spirit religion customs. What is the role of the Shan living in exile? This panel welcomes papers associated with ethnography, anthropology and religious and cultural studies.

Possible Participants contacted (the panel abstract will be circulated.

Dr Jotika Khur Yearn, Manuscript Curator, School of Oriental and African Studies, London.

Dr Jana Igunma Cambodia, Lao and Thai Collections, the British Library.

Dr Olivia Porter Teaching Fellow, Roehampton University. Shan religious traditions.

Dr Francois Tainturier, Manuscripts Collections for Future Digitization, Director, Inya Institute, Yangon.

Dr Susan Conway, IDS Sussex University, Shan spirit belief systems