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Report on IRIS Graduate Student Summer Fieldwork Award

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With the generous support of the IRIS Graduate Summer Fieldwork Award, I was able to travel to Myanmar this summer where I conducted pre-dissertation research by scouting out archives and developing in-country contacts. My dissertation project examines the social and intellectual history of Burma during the 1950s, tracing the social commentaries that Buddhist monks and lay intellectuals made through reappraisals of fundamental Buddhist concepts on mind and matter. These social commentaries by the Burmese intellectual elite suggest their distinct political stance vis a vis the anti-communist Burmese government and the communists who were powerful armed opposition at the time. Studying this group of intellectuals then is to complicate existing knowledge of the Burmese subjectivities of the Cold War, which have only been approached in state-centric terms.

During my pre-dissertation research this summer, I focused on finding materials that are not available in the US libraries such as the Library of Congress. Given my focus on the social history of the Cold War in Burma, I sought out periodicals, books, films, and other media produced during the 1950s. I found many periodicals at the Universities' Central Library in Yangon from where I continued to build my network of contacts through librarians and fellow researchers who pointed me to other archives and libraries for my research. This was particularly helpful because archives in Myanmar do not yet have a developed web presence, and so it is challenging for a new researcher to know where to look for sources. The connections I made at my first research site – the Universities' Central Library in Yangon – proved invaluable to me by providing helpful pointers for my subsequent research.

In Yangon I also visited the National Archives where I found government records of Buddhist functions, religious policies, and internal communication documents concerning the communist insurgency. For the latter half of my research time in Myanmar, I went to the well-known *Ludu* Library (Library of the People) in Mandalay. In this small library tucked away in a back alley, I came across a large stash of anti-communist and pro-communist literature written by intellectuals from Mandalay in the 1950s. Mandalay being a center of Buddhist activities in Myanmar, this library held a number of books on Buddhism that I did not find in Yangon. Reading these books enriched my understanding of how the Burmese intellectuals understood Buddhism during the 1950s, what they saw as threats to it, and how they tried to combat such threats. In sum, the materials that I collected over the summer not only helped me revise my MA thesis on the religious policies of the Burmese prime minister, U Nu, but it has also helped me write my dissertation proposal.

My Graduate Student Summer Fieldwork Award was thus indispensable in helping me progress in my research project. My trip to Myanmar, made possible by this award, provided me with an orientation of the kinds of materials that are held in the libraries and archives there. Moreover, it has helped me get a taste of what fieldwork is like, how to survive in a foreign country so that I can be more prepared when I go abroad again for my dissertation research.