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Why is Peace Elusive in Myanmar? An Answer from the Perspective of Thai Philosopher Prawase Wasi

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We re-evaluate Burmese history from the perspective of Thai philosopher Prawase Wasi who asserts that the basis for society is not simply individuals but the "self-forming group." He discusses the essential nature of a self-forming group which is embodied in the Thai Buddhist concept of *taam*, which are sacred virtues emerging from self-organizing groups. In between the taam and self-forming groups are institutions of the state, economy, and education, etc. Prawase Wasi's approach has been used in Thailand to guide government policies for the last twenty years. In this article, we apply this model to the history of conflict in Burma. We contrast this approach with the more traditional focus on individualism and utilitarianism in western high modernism which typically shapes development policies.

Keywords peace studies, Prawase Wasi, Burma/Myanmar, Thai philosophy, development studies

Introduction: Development Policy and Social Theory

Behind any public policy is a theory of social action. Such theories are typically unspoken and reflect taken-for-granted assumptions about what is good, natural, and legitimate. For example, in the modern world the theory of action assumes that a growing economy is good, unemployment rates should be low, and democratic elections and governance are just. Property rights are important and rule of law is critical. Individual self-interest is often assumed to be at its heart. This theory of action is summarized by James Scott (1998, 4-6) as being "high modernism." High modernism emerged from the European Enlightenment, which self-confidently assumes the effectiveness of science underpins human progress. In high modernism, politics are democratic and emerge from "the people," and the individual is the basic social unit as individuals vote in elections. It is also focused by market-based capitalism, or, in the case of communism and

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fascism, a reaction to that capitalism. The methodology of what Scott (ibid.) calls high modernism is discussed by many authors who highlight the individualism embedded in survey research in the United States, and used in places like India. Rudolph (2005) in particular calls this the "imperialism of categories."

High modernism emphasizes assumptions about technology and progress that are widely accepted by both leftist and rightist regimes. But are there alternatives that address the limitations of this view? One philosopher who has done this is Thai philosopher Prawase Wasi.[1] He created a model that assumes that society's basic building block is not the individual but the "self-forming group." He posits that the cohesion that holds a larger society together, what in Thai is called *taam*, emerges from such self-forming groups.[2] Prawase's approach is outside the tradition of the western Enlightenment and has been used by the Thai government to create development policy for at least the last twenty or thirty years while also preserving the central authority of Bangkok. The result is an emphasis on development at village and canton (*tambol*) levels which are assumed to be the "self-forming groups" out of which the essence of the nation, i.e. the taam, emerges. Thailand's "One Tambol One Product" (OTOP) economic policy is the most obvious concept emerging from Prawase ideas about the importance of local self-forming groups in development policy. The policy assumes that every tambol in Thailand (which are made up of a small number of villages) will contribute "one product" to the national economy.

In this article, we describe Prawase's approach and then ask if it is useful for understanding governance outside of Thailand, starting with large countries like the United Kingdom, the United States, and China. We then more specifically use it to evaluate the continuing conflict in Myanmar, Thailand's neighbor which shares similar roots in Buddhism and Hindu Kingship.

Theoretical Reflections on the West's High Modernism in Myanmar

Burma/Myanmar[3] has had the attention of development theorists attempting to create what James Scott (1998) calls "high modernism" for decades. The free market policies of mercantile colonialism were first introduced to Burma by the East India Company in the nineteenth century by Europeans assuming that free markets are economically transformative, a self-serving assumption that justified the conversion of the Irrawaddy River Delta into a granary for the world market beginning in about 1845 (Myint-U 2006, 166). Using this theory of social action, highland Burma was turned into teak concessions for adventurous British companies. The principles of high modernism were used by the mercantile colonial powers in perhaps their rawest forms in colonies like Burma, where the demands of the "cash nexus" trumped the search for community and local society.[4]

High modernist theories are ultimately about politics and what today is known as "good governance." Good governance advocates assume that elections, universal enfranchisement, free markets, and respect for individual rights are the best way to ensure political legitimacy and the peaceful transfer of political power. In adopting such policies today, donors and others typically point to the "East Asia Tigers" like Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and perhaps Singapore where such policies are credited with both rapid economic growth and democratic institutions. The question is then, why has this not worked in Myanmar?

Indeed, for one hundred years elections were conducted in Myanmar with such principles in mind. Many of these elections were underwritten and often funded by outside donors. The results of course are at best mixed. Decades of exclusion and political authoritarianism by British colonial authorities were papered over with quick pro-forma elections and vague promises of "federalism." Irrespective of such a technocratic formula, the Burmese military began assuming power in the 1950s, and in 1962 pushed out the civilian government and dreams of federalism. The authoritarian Burmese military ruled without civilian participation in the country between 1962 and 2010. Elections funded by the international community in 1990 and won by Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) were perhaps the biggest failure for the high modernists, since instead of assuming office she remained under house arrest. This pattern seems to have repeated itself as elections carefully monitored by the international community were followed by a coup and the house arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi on February 1, 2021.

So what was the economic result of the high modernism introduced in the colonial period? In the context of these plans, Burma shifted from being a net exporter of rice before the 1940s to being a net importer in the 2000s. And, of course, the spread of free markets and modern governance in the highlands was slow and problematic. Concession-based teak cutting and gem mining, initiated by the British, morphed into concessions for the Myanmar military and armed ethnic groups. Opium, methamphetamine production, and arms trading also became central to the highland economies, all activities outside the formal international economic system. None of these results of course reflect very well on modernist policymakers promoting free markets, federalism, and democratic elections, irrespective of the virtues found in such approaches elsewhere.

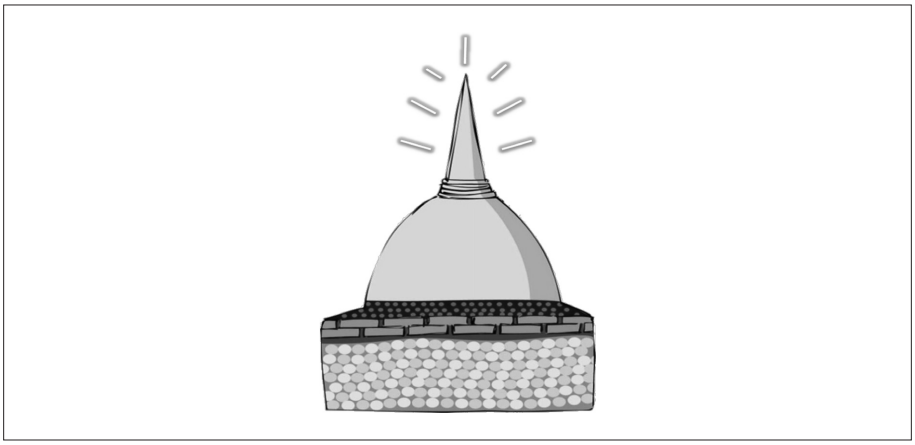
Despite such shortcomings, as recently as 2015 this high modernist spirit was expressed in a "nation-wide ceasefire" facilitated by Norwegian diplomats and signed by the military government and eight ethnic armed groups. In this context, yet another "transition to a democratically elected government" occurred. But the pattern even for that change seems similar to that in the past. The economic policies funded by the West (and China) continued to assume that commerce and free trade are central to successful nation-building. But still the stubborn insurgencies continued, and in the case of Rakhine State (where

armed groups are not party to the ceasefire negotiations), over 600,000 Muslim Rohingya were violently expelled by the xenophobic military, supported by many Burmese Bamar, to Bangladeshi refugee camps in 2017. And, of course, rural Myanmar remains poor, with few modern benefits trickling down from the international planners to the distant village farmers, particularly those living beyond the power of the military government which, despite losing the 2015 election, still dominated governance from 2016-2021 after the National League for Democracy (NLD) won a super-majority in Parliament. The military took total control following the February 1, 2021 coup.

Further Theoretical Reflections from Thailand: Philosopher Prawase Wasi

Prawase views society as a relationship between an abstract sense of shared virtue (taam in Thai) and "self-forming groups" (*chumchon* and *thongtin* in Thai[5]) that form the "base" of society (see Figure 1). Prawase Wasi (born 1931) developed models of society, the state, and development, including for the OTOP program, which are well known in Thailand and used there for policymaking. Prawase's theory emphasizes that society is made up of collections of those small-scale self-forming groups which are the base of society. Prawase's insistence on self-forming groups is fundamentally different than western categories rooted implicitly

Figure 1. Taam, Stupa, Base.



The Prawase model emphasizes taam which are the arrows above the stupa, emanating from the base which are the levels on which the stupa sits. The stupa includes particular social institutions (economy/marketplace, education, politics, administrative apparatus, and justice system) which need to fit between the taam and base.
Source: Prawase (n.d.)

in individualistic utilitarianism, such as "one-man-one vote," "economic self-interest," and even "stakeholders."

These self-forming groups are voluntary associations which form out of convenience, mutually affinity, and other self-recognized attributes, rather than an ethic of utilitarianism. In traditional Thai society, these include small local groups, such as clans, ethnies, local organizations, and the monkhood, etc. In traditional Thailand with its rice-based agriculture, such groups were often people of a particular watershed who organized padi rice cultivation and formed themselves into villages. The villages in turn form themselves into tambol, and the tambol into provinces (*jangwad*) (Prawase 2014).

The Base and Taam in Prawase's Model

The "base" in Prawase's model is made up of old and enduring structures, which in Prawase's terms are "self-forming." The self-forming units making up the base are cohesive, and the identities produced seemingly primordial. To borrow Emile Durkheim's term (1902/1973, 163-189), they emerge from a "mechanical solidarity" rooted in a shared sense of sacred morality. Specifically, taam is what is "sacred" and unassailably good. In Prawase's formulation, this taam emerges from the base where the self-forming groups exist. In Thai terms, taam holds together the heavens and the earth (Thongchai 1994).

But today, social life in Thailand extends well-beyond the mechanical solidarity of self-forming groups, as it does in all modern countries. The modern Thai nation asserts that the three pillars of religion, nation, and king hold the country together and make up the taam. In essence, Prawase asserts that the taam is abstract shared ideals that hold the aggregations to a shared morality which is the cohesiveness that is solidarity. Unlike Weber and Durkheim, though, Prawase specifies that this taam rises from the self-forming groups of people at the base, even in a modern country like Thailand—there is no such specification in traditional western sociology which is more atomistic.[6]

Stupa

In Prawase's formulation, while all small groups have a taam to hold them together, not all small groups form into a cohesive base held together by a shared taam. In Prawase's model, this only happens in the case of societies in which there are the organizing institutions of the stupa, which in Prawase's definition include the economy/marketplace, education, politics, administrative apparatus, and justice system. These institutions are the product of larger societies which are strong enough to have trained technocrats and a division of labor—they are not found in small amorphous societies (self-forming groups) at the base. Only when institutions are held together by the state, e.g. what Weber (1919/2015, 136) called the monopoly over the use of legitimate coercive force in a particular territory, are they no longer simply self-forming groups. Rather it means that they combine to

comprise a larger polity and create the institutions between a larger base and its taam (see Figure 1).

Admittedly, what Prawase describes is similar to the "systems" theory of modern western sociologists like Parsons, Luhmann, and Durkheim. However, Prawase's formulation is still different because of the emphasis on, firstly, self-forming groups and, secondly, the taam. High modernist theories generally focus on the internal workings of the stupa, particularly economy and politics, and assume rational utilitarianism. In Prawase's formulation, local institutions are separate from those of the stupa. And, perhaps most importantly, the stupa is not the source of taam. The base is.

Can the Concept of Taam Be Applied to Myanmar Too?

Taam is a sociological abstraction in Prawase's model of society. And in the best tradition of social theory, its utility is in providing a general understanding of society not just in the country in which it was developed (in this case Thailand), but also elsewhere. In this article, we argue that Prawase's social theory is useful for understanding societies outside of Thailand, particularly that of modern Myanmar. In writings about Burma, emphasis is instead generally on the authority embedded in the kingship, or, in modern times, the military government. This authoritarianism is typically reduced to an abstraction like "Burmese culture" rather than a general social theory (Gyi 1983). Prawase tells us that the authoritarianism may be "legitimate," but it is in the structure of the stupa, not the base. Violence and ill-fit occur because of the inability of the stupa to situate itself between base and taam, a distinction missed by a vague term like "culture."

Taam as a General Theory of the Nation-State

A quick review of Thai history using Prawase's approach illustrates how this model might also apply to Myanmar.

Base: Self-Forming Groups in Thailand

The first Thai kings emerged around Sukhothai in the thirteenth century. The kings were nobility from southern China and established their dominion using traditions already in place and inherited from Cambodia and India (Wyatt 1984/2003, 17-25). Their base was rooted in the cultivation of padi rice in the lowland valleys, as were earlier kingdoms organized by the Mon and Khmer. This peasantry in turn was tied to improved padi lands, which needed to be protected from pillage. Such protection emerged from the "terrible compromise" found around the world where settled peasantries were provided security from raids in exchange for relinquishing their freedom to own private land and maintain private grain stores (Chirot 2010). In this context, land "belonged" to the king.

As for the loss of freedom, this means the peasantry provided tribute from their harvest to the king, and their sons as soldiers for the king's military adventures. As James Scott (2009) in particular notes, the nature of Asian lowland rice cultivation makes this system particularly oppressive for peasants.

But still, Prawase emphasizes, the villages that formed under the Thai kings, oppressed or not, were the basic unit of society. Social and cultural life was village life, and the clan and other small units were the basic unit of the countryside (Nartsupha 1982/2000; Waters 2007). Sitting on top of this base was a stupa which was a system of nobility, and later also a bureaucracy. In this context, the idea of Thai sacred kingship emerged in fourteenth century Sukhothai, and was codified under the laws and incipient bureaucracy of the Ayutthaya kings, later re-emerging in the Rattanakosin Era after 1785. In this system, the supportive base underneath the stupa remained the farming villages which produced enough rice to feed themselves and supported the feudal-like Thai *Sakdina* system (Kukrit 1957-1958; Reid 1983; Somsamai 1957/1987; Baker and Phongpaichit 2017). Indeed, this system persisted until Siam's 1932 revolution, and the traditional padi subsistence agriculture persisted until recent years. Only in the most recent decades has village life declined in Thailand as the most basic social unit in law, even as the mega-city of Bangkok and provincial capitals take their place in the larger global order.

Stupa: The Five Means for Social Organization in Thailand

But by themselves, Prawase writes, neither villages nor the taam they generate create a stable "base" for a larger society. Villages attached to padi rice production, while potentially very productive, are also exceedingly vulnerable to raids by more powerful polities. Ripening grain stored in fields or in woven bamboo granaries behind houses are very attractive targets for raiders who can swiftly attack across the wide-open valleys suited to rice production (Chirot 2010; Scott 2009). Anywhere farmers settled down in the valleys of this world, they encountered the problem of how to protect, manage, and trade their crops. Accumulation and redistribution of wealth becomes regulated in the context of the five institutions Prawase writes about: economy, education, politics, administration, and justice. Or to borrow Durkheim's term, it required an elaborated "division of labor," particularly in rice-growing societies like Thailand which are dependent on the timely and equitable distribution of irrigation water.

These institutions preserved a peace of sorts in which anarchic raiding and expropriation are prevented by the presence of soldiers and law, or in a word the "king's peace" where farms, markets, and trade routes are protected and commerce takes place without fear (Kukrit 1957-1958; Weber 1919/2015, 136; Scott 1998). The superstructure (stupa) of the Thai government and civil society presided over padi farming which permitted the country to prosper, albeit in a fashion in which wealth was sent away from the villages at the base and toward the center.

Such a functional description though belies a problem. What moral system justifies organizing the villages into a larger unit? The answer for Prawase is that this is the cohesive power which emerges out of rural villages in the first place—the taam which is above the body of the stupa.

Base-Stupa-Taam as a Theory of the Thai Nation-State

Those studying Thailand are familiar with the "three pillars" of Thai society—the king, religion, and people. This symbolic iconography of Thailand reflects the morality binding the Thai people to an idea that is greater than themselves and their individual villages. This taam is for Prawase the moral cosmology that holds the Thai people together. In Thailand, such morality extends to a *habitus* of symbols which includes food (rice), musical preferences, the Thai language, family forms, and attitudes toward hierarchy which distinguish Thailand from other countries like Myanmar and Cambodia. Such abstractions are positioned above the stupa as taam, even though they emerge from the Base.

Base-Stupa-Taam as a General Social Theory of the Nation-State: Other Examples

Plausibly, Prawase is proposing a general theory of state which goes beyond Thailand, in the same way that Weber's theories about politics and the state go beyond the primarily European-American data he used. To test this, we briefly analyze the United Kingdom, Japan, China, and the United States before shifting to the main case this article addresses: Myanmar/Burma.[7]

Monarchies and Technocratic Bureaucracy: Countries which have monarchs are the easiest to relate to Prawase's model. For example, in the United Kingdom, Queen Elizabeth II has dominion over the realm. She calls and dismisses governments, and presides over a great number of self-forming groups rooted in geography, noble status, professional status, religion, and so forth. In this sense, the constitutional monarch in the United Kingdom is similar to Thailand—both countries find taam in the monarch and place little emphasis on a written constitution; England has none and Thailand has had only weak constitutions. In both cases, the modern monarch rarely is involved in politics while retaining a capacity to rally the nation, call governments, and dismiss governments.

Typical high modernist analyses regard such monarchical institutions as vestiges of the past—illogical and not relevant in a modern world where human progress is measured in financial and technocratic terms rather than with reference to Durkheim's social cohesion, Weber's *geminschaft*, or Prawase's taam. But the pattern is indeed found elsewhere. For example, the conqueror of Japan, General Douglas MacArthur, ruled from "behind the curtain" implicitly recognizing the sacred importance of the taam that the emperor held even after World War II. MacArthur intuitively knew that dismissing or trying the emperor would be viewed as a profane assault on the taam holding together Japanese society and

risked civil disorder at the base.

Taam in the United States: The United States did away with any pretense of a monarchy in 1776 and explicitly adopted constitutional rule in 1789. The US Constitution asserts that "We the People" are sovereign. Unlike in Thailand where constitutions are frequently modified and discarded, the US Constitution became a sacred document of unquestionable legitimacy in American political discourse. Thus, while you may get reams of discussion about the twenty-seven words of the second amendment restricting the power of Congress to regulate firearms, the fact that the sentence itself is awkwardly written is irrelevant, since challenging the legitimacy (i.e. taam) of the Constitution (and the Supreme Court's reading of it) is viewed as profane. The Supreme Court operates "behind the curtain" like the Japanese emperors of yore, and indeed there are still no cameras permitted in the Court. On the few occasions it speaks about an issue, there is a finality in the ruling, in a similar fashion to how King Phumiphol Ayudalej (Rama IX) exercised power the few times he intervened to stabilize Thailand's politics.

But What about Myanmar?

If Prawase Wasi's ideas are useful for analyzing societies outside Thailand, probably nowhere is more appropriate than neighboring Myanmar, which, like Thailand, emerged from traditions of Hinduism, Theravada Buddhism, and Southeast Asian concepts like taam. Like Thailand, classical-age Myanmar was ruled by Buddhist kings in the context of a taam reflecting the accumulation of virtue from their earlier lives. Across the Irrawaddy Basin, peasant rice farmers were the base, and between them and their taam, a stupa of nobility and its bureaucracy. A quick review of Burmese history provides some indication of how taam and base shifted over several hundred years.

Burma in the mid-eighteenth century invaded neighboring Thailand, laid siege to its capital in Ayutthaya, and sacked it in 1768 (Myint-U 2006, 98-99; Scott 2009, 146-147; Baker and Pasuk 2017, 261-268). But the invasion of Thailand was followed by an invasion of Burma by China. Revenge attacks by the Thai in the early nineteenth century further weakened Burma. The British East India Company in 1823-1824 won the First Anglo-Burman War, leading to the cession of control over what are today the southern provinces of Myanmar. Further defeat in the Second Anglo-Burman War in 1853-1854 and the Mandalay-based Kingdom's final collapse in 1883-1885 after a third Anglo-Burman War resulted in the decapitation of the Burmese kingdom and replacement with the Indian Empress Victoria of Great Britain (Aung Thwin and Aung-Thwin 2012, 177-186).

Demographically, the mid-nineteenth century was catastrophic for Burma, as population in the river deltas and mountains declined, probably reaching a

nadir about the time of the British conquest in 1885. This meant that groups living in what is today Myanmar became ever more isolated from each other. The Irrawaddy River Valleys and Delta were revived as the new British authorities made land grants to farmers from their Indian colonies between about 1835 and the 1930s. As for the new capital at Rangoon (Yangon),[8] it too expanded rapidly as the British brought businesspeople from India rather than developing the indigenous Burmese population; by the 1930s half of the population of Rangoon was of Indian origin (Myint-U 2006, 182-187).

The Burmese highlands though existed apart from the more densely populated padi rice-dominated lowlands. There, labor extensive techniques of slash and burn agriculture persisted in remote areas inaccessible to lowland tax collectors, police, and soldiers. People there escaped the exactions of lowland conquerors—be they Burmese nobility or British colonialists—and made a living in remote highland areas (Scott 2009, 147-148). The polities in this context—the self-forming groups—were small, the institutions simple, and, in the remote mountains in particular, the division of labor was limited. Identity was wrapped into relationships between a clan and the local environment, i.e. that world Durkheim called "mechanical solidarity." Thus a "Karen" child, like the co-author of this article, knew only the few households nearby, all of whom shared kinship and language. They farmed in isolation from others, and nobles were kept at bay with periodic tribute payments in labor or grain.

Then after 1885 in British Burma, there were two very different groups of small holding peasants in British India's new colony. There were demoralized peasants of the lowlands who were no longer protected by a tyrannical king's peace from Mandalay. Tyrannical though it was, the Burmese kingdom was also probably imbued with the authority of a taam emanating from the self-forming villages of the padis, and the Buddhist temples which the British never co-opted. But separately, there were highland groups which the British called "tribes." Both peasantries were undifferentiated farming masses. But the different taam that each had in the past affected how the British administered their empire and how contemporary political divisions in Myanmar persist today.

Colonialism and Decapitation of Burmese Taam?

In the lowlands of the Irrawaddy River Basin by the mid-1800s, the Burmese kingdom established a feudal-like bureaucracy, squeezing revenue from productive lowland padi farmers. The clans and local groups were held in check by the king's tyrannical bureaucracy which protected commerce, impressed soldiers, seized surplus, and even invaded Ayutthaya, i.e. the functions of a feudal state. There was enough rice to support not only the peasantry, but also the court and the bureaucracy, i.e. the institutions of Prawase's stupa. The bureaucracy was brutal in its exactions; but as an indigenous court, army, and Buddhist monkhood it was presumably legitimated via the values, languages, and mores of

their kingdom. That is, it was a product of the self-forming groups at the base of eighteenth and nineteenth century lowland Burmese society. The British never drew on this pre-existing cosmology for legitimacy and the Buddhist hierarchy disintegrated from neglect (Aung Thwin and Aung-Thwin 2012, 190).

The rich rice production of Burma was the reason that the British sought to replace the king of Burma with the Empress Victoria of India. Upon capturing Mandalay in 1885, the Burmese king was exiled to India, and the British brought civil servants from their Indian colony to the Irrawaddy Delta to establish a colonial system of governance known as "direct rule" (Myint-U 2006, 188). In doing this, indigenous institutions were decapitated as the center moved from the Burmese heartland in Mandalay to Rangoon, Calcutta, and London in a "rational and scientific system" of high modernism. In this context, villages resisting were typically burned for what the British labelled "dacoity." The large Buddhist monkhood radicalized in response to colonialism when royal support disappeared under the British (Aung Thwin and Aung-Thwin 2012, 190-194). Burmese nobility and bureaucrats were replaced with Indian civil servants.

By the 1920s, resistance to the British was widespread within the Buddhist monkhood. A former monk, Saya San, led a millenarian-based rebellion in 1930-1932. Resistance emerged among the students at universities too. Students like Aung San were attracted to communist ideas, Pan-Asianism, and especially Burmese nationalism. When Japan invaded British Burma in 1942, the Burma Independence Army (BIA) commanded by the former student Aung San accompanied them. This alliance between the Japanese and BIA lasted only about two years when it became apparent to the free Burmese that they were exchanging the colonial domination of Britain for that of Japan.

But the lowland Burmese rice farming kingdoms were not the whole story in British Burma. Highland Burma was much less densely populated and large rice harvests were not possible. But, forest goods, especially teak, jade, and gems, were available and could be exploited by license concessions issued to British trading monopolies with little involvement from Britons who feared malaria and the harsh forest life. In this context, the British declared the highland areas to be "tribal areas," which were to be ruled by "traditional rulers" who paid tribute to the lowland British, as many had done to the Burmese, Thai, and Chinese kingdoms in the past. The polities were small and ephemeral, and raiding and fighting were common (Scott 2009, 167-172). Charismatic leaders emerged frequently and then just as commonly disappeared. In exchange, traditional rulers were ennobled by the British as "princes," and permitted to rule territories; there was no decapitation. In this context, they established a legal-bureaucratic attachment to the British state while preserving independence from Burmese, Chinese, and Thai encroachments.

Christianity brought by the British and American missionaries also spread, particularly among the Karen, Chin, and Kachin (Scott 2009, 319-322) who

embraced the new faith as an alternative to the Theravada Buddhism of their powerful neighbors, Thailand and Burma. This distanced them from Buddhist states while providing a veneer of modernity. During World War II, the Christian Highlands aligned with the British King's Burma Rifles regiment against the Japanese. Indeed, the British forces were dominated by the Karen who provided 17 percent of the King's Burma Rifles force, including substantial parts of the officer corps which was led by the Karen General Smith Dun. Meanwhile, the Burma Independence Army of Aung San fought with the Japanese until early 1945, and was largely ethnic Bamar/Burmese.

Burma's Self-Forming Groups at Independence

Thus, at independence in 1947-1948, there were probably in Burma a range of "self-forming groups," each with different varieties of taam. The colonial state's institutions of the stupa in the lowlands were strong, but in the highlands, where the polities were smaller and rules rooted in the charisma of traditional rulers, were weaker. Particularly in the hills among the plethora of small polities, there were few schools, markets, administrative offices, or other markers of institutional authority (Leach 1954/1964).

When framing Prawase's ideas about governance, the refocus of taam from Mandalay after 1885 to Calcutta, Delhi, and London was particularly problematic for the remnants of the Burmese kingdom. But this did not necessarily happen for the highland peoples in the same way, whose institutions shifted from one patron (Burmese, Thai, or Chinese) to another (British). In effect, their base, stupa, and taam persisted, and, for some, Christianity emerged as a legitimate oppositional category of taam relative to the dominant Buddhist taam. The British looked at these tiny polities and oddly equated them with a high modernist idea of the bureaucratic state—an attitude reflected by the British with their policies of indirect rule in which they sought to anoint and manage compliant "princes" who could protect British trading monopolies. Dozens of such princes were appointed in the Shan State and more in Karenni State. Divorced by language, history, and with memories of Burmese slave raiding (and contemporary forced labor), the highlanders did not necessarily look to the Burmese state (royal, colonial, or independent) for taam, but to oppositional religions, e.g. Christianity in Karen, Chin, and Kachin and Islam in Rakhine. The Shan and Mon States, on the other hand, created their own type of Buddhism. Militias emerged beginning in the 1940s to protect these small polities and keep raiders at bay.

Burma at Independence: Searching for Taam

The Burmese theater of World War II was a battlefield for Japanese, Chinese, Thai, and British forces and witnessed high casualty rates. By the end of the war, the British Empire had committed one million troops to the war in Burma, and civilian dead may have been as high as 250,000 to 1 million in a population

of about 16 million. The cities were left in rubble; Burma had suffered more damage than any other British colony (Myint-U 2006, 242). Military deaths were estimated to be about 400,000, of whom about half were Japanese.

The end of World War II also brought a rapid conclusion to British colonialism in South Asia. General Aung San deftly switched from being a Japanese to a British ally, and negotiated the exit of the British from the colony and independence.

Aung San: General Aung San himself was hailed as a national hero at the end of World War II, having organized opposition to the British in the 1930s as a student leader and allied with the Japanese occupation from 1942-1944 as a Major General within the Burmese Independence Army. As a popular leader, Aung San became the de facto prime minister of British Burma after World War II. In January 1947, he travelled to London where he negotiated an exit from the Empire, including walking away from membership in the British Commonwealth.

Aung San's meetings in London were quickly followed by a further meeting in Panglong, in the Shan States of northern Burma (South 2008, 24-25). The resulting agreement signed in February 1947 established a government in Rangoon which would directly administer the ethnic Bamar lowlands of the Irrawaddy Delta (which included about two-thirds of the population of the new country), while seven highland states, putatively comprising some 134 other ethnic groups, were established as a federal union of an unspecified nature. Notably, two of the highland "states," Shan State and Karenni State, were explicitly promised an independence referendum within ten years. Representatives of the Karen, Mon, and Rakhine were not invited to the conference because they were considered to be part of Burma proper, and therefore represented by Aung San. However, armed groups in all three states emerged to resist incorporation into the centralized Burmese state. Chin and Kachin States were organized as political entities at that time, and a number of smaller polities were folded into Shan State. Burma's Independence came on January 4, 1948.

But six months before the declaration of independence, Aung San and six of his cabinet ministers were assassinated in Rangoon in a plot organized by political rivals within the ethnic Bamar community. In this context, Burma headed toward an independence in which there was no longer a strong leader from the military or elsewhere. Sharp political distinctions inherited from the British between the Bamar of the central plains, and Karen, Shan, Karenni, Mon, Kachin, Rakhine, and others remained. In this context, a revolt by the Karen National Union began in 1949 only one year after independence and led to attacks into the suburbs of Rangoon. In this respect, the new Burmese Army, named Tatmadaw (Royal Army) began to isolate and expel elements inherited from the King's Burma Rifles, particularly the Karen. The 900,000 to 1 million Rohingya living in Bangladeshi refugee camps today are undoubtedly also establishing new state-

like institutions, as have refugees in many other parts of the world (Waters and LeBlanc 2005).

Military Rule: The Burmese dominated military was tightly organized in newly independent Burma. Its very name, "Royal Army," is a reminder to Karen, Kachin, and others of Burmese army oppression of past centuries. The eruption of insurgency in Karen State in 1949, an invasion of Chinese Nationalist forces into northern Burma following their defeat by the communist People's Liberation Army in 1949, and occupation of northern territory by the Burmese Communist Party presented immediate security challenges to the new government. The government itself was led by U Nu, a university lecturer.

In this context, the commander of the Tatmadaw, General Smith Dun, a Karen who served with the British King's Rifles, went into exile, and command of the Tatmadaw fell to his deputy General Ne Win, a Burmese companion of Aung San before and during World War II (South 2008, 27-31). U Nu's government was ostensibly secular, but he also reached back to Buddhist traditions in order to establish Burmese/Bamar legitimacy and reverse British colonial drives to secularize (ibid., 190, 201-204). In Prawase's terms, he was re-establishing the legitimacy of the ethnic Burmese taam.

Independence referendums for the Shan and Karenni promised by Aung San in the Panglong Agreement of 1947 were ignored in 1957-1958, and in 1962 General Ne Win conducted a coup. This signaled the movement of the military into all levels of government and the sealing off of the country to most foreign relations. This was done in the context of an intensified emphasis on a top-down "Burmanization" of minority groups and the violent expulsion of Indian and Chinese minorities in 1962-1964 as the military adopted the symbols of the old royal regime asserting that the pillars for prosperity and peace rested on Buddhism, Burmese culture, and the military (Eh Htoo, forthcoming). This can be framed as an attempt to assert that Burmese taam corresponded to the borders of the country and not simply the Burmese-speakers of the Irrawaddy River Valley and Delta.

Ne Win's three-decade long military rule (1962-1988) was legitimated through appeals to the mysticism at the heart of the ethnic Burmese/Bamar identity, Theravada Buddhism, and even numerology. Aung San was honored as the founder of both the military and nation. Ne Win's "Burmese Socialism" emerged in an isolated world where security was perceived as threatened from alternatively the Communist Party supported by China in the north, the highland independence movements in Mon, Karen, and other states, or the American Central Intelligence Agency which was deeply involved in northern Myanmar and neighboring Laos.

With isolation from the Burmese lowlands, the highland groups, particularly the Karen, Mon, Wa, Shan, and Kachin, began establishing structures of modern

society by the 1980s—the stupa of Prawase's model. Among them were incipient market regulation, school systems, health care, justice system, administrative systems, and most importantly armies (Alwyn 2021; Yeo, Gagnon, and Hayso 2020). These armies were a direct challenge to the assertion of Burmese dominance asserted by the Tatmadaw.

Religious and ethnic identities developed independently in the highlands and were important for the mobilization of small groups throughout the highlands of Burma and the fragmentation of the nation immediately after the 1948 independence. The result was a decline in economic capacity, as access to international markets provided via the British disappeared. Highland products controlled by various armed ethnic groups, including teak, jade, gems, and opium, surged. The many small identities/polities, i.e. "self-forming groups," proliferated. In this context, the ethnic armies collected taxes, forced labor, and monopolized markets in the hills, much as British, Chinese, and Indian traders had done in previous decades. Resistance from small groups is known today as "armed ethnic groups," warlords, liberation armies, communists, smugglers, and any number verbal successors to the British dysphemism, dacoity.

Taam and Burma

Aung San Suu Kyi as Taam?

Aung San's daughter Aung San Suu Kyi emerged from demonstrations organized by Burmese students at the University of Rangoon in 1988 as an apostle for non-violent change in Burma. Suu Kyi was from the Rangoon elite and married a British academic in 1972. She returned from the United Kingdom to care for her ill mother in 1988, the same time as the auspiciously timed August 8, 1988 (8.8.88) demonstrations began. The demonstrations brought hundreds of thousands onto the streets, protesting decades of military authoritarianism in Burma's lowlands, property confiscations, forced relocations, and restrictions on the press and speech. Further demands were for democracy. Suu Kyi was pushed to the front as the charismatic heir of her assassinated father, Aung San, and she became the leader of a new party, the National League for Democracy (NLD) (Myat 2019; Larkin 2005, 14-16; and Lintner 2012).

Ne Win was pushed into retirement by the military, and elections were called for in 1990. In this context, Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD party easily won an election that outside observers considered fair and open. But instead of entering parliament, much less the state house, she remained under house arrest, and Ne Win's military successors re-asserted themselves. Suu Kyi was not released until 2010, and then only after the military promulgated a 2008 Constitution banning her from ever seeking the presidency because she had married an Englishman and had British sons. The 2008 Constitution also guaranteed a special role for the

military securing it 25 percent of the seats in Parliament and permanent control of the ministries dealing with security issues, i.e. the Ministries of Defense, Border Affairs, and Home Affairs. The NLD boycotted the elections organized by the military in 2010 but participated successfully in 2012 by-elections when Suu Kyi herself re-emerged as the representative for democratic opposition to the government. In this context, Suu Kyi was a hero to her fellow Burmese.

In the nation-wide 2015 elections, the NLD won a super-majority in Parliament, and for the first time governed, albeit in only a limited fashion. Ironically, this happened at the same time a "Nation-Wide Ceasefire Agreement" was completed by the military government, and eight of the twenty or thirty "ethnic armed groups" battling the Myanmar government were legalized. There were agreements to stop fighting and acknowledge the territories the groups controlled. The government recognized only sixteen groups and concluded agreements with eight of them.

For the international community, there was a giddy consensus in 2015-2016 that they had midwifed a new peaceful Myanmar under a multi-ethnic NLD. Travel restrictions on foreigners were relaxed, international sanctions against the country were lifted by the United States and Europe, and Chinese companies also arrived seeking contracts to take advantage of natural resources and cheap labor. Hopes were high for a new high modernist social order in which Myanmar would become a "normal country."

But, the question for Aung San Suu Kyi after winning the election of 2015 was not whether she pleased the foreigners and the armed ethnic groups. It was, rather, could the NLD expand the taam of the Buddhist Bamar into the highlands where insurgency and autonomous government long persisted? To do so would require a fancy trick on the part of the NLD. They first needed to maintain support among a lowland Bamar majority convinced of the centrality of Buddhism, the Burmese language, Burmese civilization, and the military all embedded in lowland rice cultivation. In Myanmar, they also needed to do this in the context of the Tatmadaw's centralized military rule inherited from the British and the earlier Burmese kingdoms, while acquiescing to demands of highlanders for independence and federalism. In other words, could a base made up of "self-forming groups" including students, the military, ethnic minorities, and other polities be held together by a taam of some sort? This trick needed to be performed in the context of western donors who asserted "high modern" interests in property rights, global markets, gender equality, religious freedom, and human rights. Attempting this trick resulted first in the catastrophe of the expulsion of 600,000 Muslim Rohingya in 2017, and, second, the persistence of insurgency on the borders. Finally, there was a total collapse in the capacity to maintain the National Ceasefire Agreement of 2015 following the February 1, 2021 military coup.

By 2017-2018 there was a reversal in the international community's optimism

about Myanmar with accusations that Aung San Suu Kyi collaborated in genocide and ethnic cleansing against the Rohingya. The fancy trick made the ever-suspicious Bamar majority warier of the West and sensitive to criticism of Aung San Suu Kyi who in her person came to be a source of taam for the Bamar majority.

The taam of the Burmese lowlands remains closely tied not only to Buddhism, but also the Burmese language and identity and the rhythms inherited from lowland rice culture. The history and habitus emerging from this taam came from differences cultivated during the Ne Win era through decades of fear (Eh Htoo, forthcoming). This habitus was undertaken in a context of the sacred values which long held the self-forming groups of lowland Burmese society together under symbols including the Burmese monarch, Buddhist Sangha, Aung San, the Tatmadaw, and Aung San Suu Kyi herself. The problem of course is that the geo-political entity that is the internationally recognized Myanmar/Burma is not only Bamar but includes a substantial population whose self-forming groups are outside the base that is Bamar/Burmese society.

The Taam of the Highlands

As for the highlanders described by Leach (1954/1964), South (2008), and others, there is little evidence that they were ever aligned with the taam of the Burmese court in Mandalay, the British Raj in Rangoon, Calcutta, or London, the Burmese Buddhist monkhood, the Burmese military, or Aung San or his daughter Aung San Suu Kyi. This lack of integration goes back at least to British colonial times when the colony was separated into a central area staffed by foreigners from Calcutta and London and the highlands where indirect rule and rudimentary local administration were encouraged. In the highlands, such policies permitted the proliferation of small weak self-forming groups, each with their own criteria for membership and relationships with outsiders.

Micro-polities each with their own small base and taam still abound in the highlands, with and without the institutions of the stupa. This is one reason why the Myanmar government had fifteen "armed ethnic groups" to negotiate with for the ceasefire of 2015 and not a unified opposition.[9] Each had its own arms stash, but only the few well-established groups had the enduring structures of modern government, i.e. the structures of Prawase's stupa which focus on education, economy, politics, administrative apparatus, and justice, etc. Each had its own incipient base and taam which is different from that of Mandalay, Yangon, Nyapidaw, or even sometimes the next valley. These institutions failed to coalesce into the identity of the Burmese Buddhist taam. Assertions of the importance of Burmese culture, the glories of the Burmese kingdoms, Buddhism, and opposition to the British were not plausible claims for a shared Burmanized identity organized from the Bamar center; nor for that matter was it enough to legitimate the high modernism of the British during the colonial era.

Prawase Wasi as a Social Theorist and Why Peace Is So Elusive in Myanmar

This is an article first of abstraction and social theory, and only secondarily of public policy. Can a theory of social action developed for Thailand provide an effective and robust means for understanding an elusive peace in ways theories of high modernism have not? We of course think that Prawase's approach provides insights not found in what James Scott calls high modernist theories. We urge policymakers to reframe their ideas away from conventional development theories and pay closer attention to how the morality of society—the taam—is connected to a base made up of "self-forming groups." Creating a stupa without a base and taam was not particularly effective in Myanmar, as the British Empress Victoria and her successors discovered between 1885 and 1942. In fact, judging from durability, it was not even as effective as state-building efforts taken by Rangoon and Naypyitaw since 1948.

Prawase Wasi's approach highlights things that conventional neo-classical and Marxist theories miss: i.e. that the basic economic unit is not the individual, family, or social class but the "self-forming group." It also assumes a functional relationship between the cohesion of the base and an overarching taam, similar to the cohesion Durkheim called "the sacred." However, unlike Durkheimian traditions, Prawase assumes that the "systems," i.e. the government and economy of the stupa, are not the "brains" within a division of labor, as Durkheim asserted in his model of "organic solidarity." Rather Prawase asserts that the base which generates taam is more important. The institutions of the stupa, including politics, need to fit the pre-existing base and not the other way around. "Profane" elements, which are positioned between both the taam and base, are where the "mistakes" are actually made.

In developing this description, we think that Prawase's insights are relevant for understanding past and present in Myanmar, and therefore the future. In particular, Prawase's approach goes beyond simplistic materialistic understandings of society, state, and politics generally put forward by high modernist westerners who privilege the role of economics. Such market-based policies have underpinned Burmese development since colonial times including the mercantile colonialism of the British East India Company, the communist reaction to which Aung San was first attracted, ideas of pan-Asian unity proposed by the Japanese, the market economy and property system bequeathed by the departing British, and the anti-communist reaction of the United States. Or to bring the story up to the present day, the human rights plans and market reforms of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Even the isolationist Burmese socialism of Ne Win with its emphasis on Burmanization polices assuming Burmese Buddhism, Burmese language and culture, and military control ultimately focused on the

materialism of high modernism. All focus was technocratically on the "means of production," not taam. In this context, it is perhaps useful to re-think the nature of cohesion (i.e. base and taam) and where tensions occur in a place like Burma.

But What Are the Units of the Base in Myanmar?

Prawase Wasi points to the Thai village or hamlet as being at the base of society (Nartsupha 1982/2000). It is understandable how he reached this conclusion for the rice-growing regions of the greater Chao Phya and Mekhong valleys in Thailand. But if he had reached into the hills, he probably would have recognized the even smaller clan-like groups of swidden agriculturalists, pastoralists, and other social groupings as being "self-forming groups" too. The Buddhist monkhood and other professions and associations are perhaps "self-forming groups" too, as indeed Max Weber (1919/2015, 48-56) does explicitly state in his description of *stände* (status groups).

Prawase's self-forming groups in Myanmar are traditionally organized around clan membership, villages, ethnic groups, the Buddhist monkhood, Christian churches, armed militias, and mosques, i.e. identities that people coalesce around in times of joy, stress, and threat. These are also the bases for the groups who enter into political negotiations for peace and the establishment of government. As Weber notes and negotiators in Myanmar found, such political formations can be both permanent (e.g. the Tatmadaw, Buddhist monkhood, and Karen National Union) and ephemeral, such as the since forgotten local militia who signed ceasefires in the 1990s.[10]

But the important point for recognizing self-forming groups in the first place is to note that in the aggregate they are produced (or reproduced) in the context of a greater taam. And again, Prawase's key point is that the morality emerging as taam comes from the base, not the stupa. In the vocabulary of a theologian, base and taam are immanent and transcendent at the same time. Prawase explicitly points out that the stupa is subordinate to both base and taam. The high modernist institutions of the stupa are irrelevant to any question of immanence or transcendence!

How Do the Limits to the Base Reflect the Content of the Taam?

In Prawase's formulation, taam and base are different sides of the same coin. Changes in either are reflected in the other. Thus, definitions of a social and geographic sense of belonging emerging from taam reflect how self-forming groups "belong" together. Alternatively, when changes in the definition of taam emerge, they are reflected in the base but not necessarily in the stupa. When these shifts happen, an irritation occurs, or, as Goffman (1971) notes, "it itches," and society seeks a way to "scratch" uncomfortably. Still policy necessarily is introduced via the stupa, not the base nor taam. The stupa is ultimately a collection of technocratic laws, habits, and programs, rather than the content of the base or

taam. In modern stable countries, the stupa is where visible political contestation like elections occur, and a visible political machine can be seen. Technocratic policy in a well-positioned stupa can drive and even anticipate shifts in base and taam. But pronouncements from the political center of the stupa are not by themselves enough to sustain the relationship between the base and taam, as the British and their successors in Myanmar discovered. Politics emerge out of the morality of the base and its taam, not just technocratic elections. Nor does it arise out of coups, as the military government is discovering in the post-2021 coup period.

What Happens When the Taam Shifts?

Taam is always shifting. And as it shifts, a period of confusion and even anarchy is risked. The Burmese Empire is a case in point. In 1767-1768, it was at its most powerful, conquering the neighboring Thai capital at Ayutthaya which was one of the world's wealthiest cities, probably larger than London at that time (Baker and Pasuk 2017). Still by 1823, Burma itself was on its knees, following a Chinese invasion and retaliatory invasions from Thailand. In this context, the British East India Company conquered Lower Burma in 1823-1825, and by 1885 the king of Burma with his base in the villages of the Irrawaddy River valleys was expelled along with any connection to base or taam which he sustained. The geo-political entity that became modern Burma/Myanmar today then re-emerged after decades of British colonialism, raw authoritarianism, and anarchy; a situation that in many respects continues today. The base of the villages of the Irrawaddy River Delta never encompassed the geographical territory that are Myanmar's geographical boundaries.[11]

The point is that a taam unconnected to a base is unlikely to be stable. And since this is an article about Burma, it is relevant to note that the taam there is particularly precarious. Assaults on the taam of Burma have occurred repeatedly since 1823, with catastrophic consequences for unity and territorial integrity. Such catastrophe is perhaps the underlying reason that Burmese groups such as the Tatmadaw, NLD, Buddhist monkhood, Karen National Union, etc. have such a difficult time looking beyond their own base for solidarity. And in turn, there is a reactive response from the ethnic minorities themselves who are well aware that the Burmese/Bamar version of taam, whether it comes from the NLD or Tatmadaw, does not include them. The expulsion of the Rohingya in 2017 illustrates this well.

What Does a Well-Fitting Stupa Look Like? What Does a Poorly Fitting Stupa Look Like?

A well-fitting system between the taam and base is by definition ideal. And the best fitting stupa is one which reflects the values of the base. But the stupa is always profane relative to the sacred that is the taam. This is why the stupa is also

the locus of corruption. Corruption happens when bureaucratic elites emerge who are isolated and therefore unaware of shifts in the base and taam. The stupa is the only place in Prawase's formulation that corruption can exist since the source of the values—i.e. the base and its taam—are by definition not profane, irrespective of what foreigners may assert about "culture." This is because taam is morality itself, even if it is not emerging from a high modernist paradigm. In the case of Myanmar, the absence of any over-arching taam means these divisions between ethnic groups remain. No amount of political-technocratic fixes to the stupa paper over the separated bases, each producing their own taam. The best engineers, accountants, bankers, educators, and lawyers in the world, steeped as they may be in technical competency, address only what happens in the stupa and nothing of the base and its taam. They are in effect an "anti-taam machine," or what anthropologist James Ferguson (1990) calls an "anti-politics machine." This is the case particularly when they are brought from outside. This is also why Prawase's model of a polity is useful in evaluating how and why past development efforts have failed in Myanmar. Peace remains elusive.

Implications for Peacebuilding in Burma

The close relationship between base and taam in Burma's situation mitigates toward centralized polities rather than the decentralized federal systems of a Switzerland or Canada. Thailand of course is the most obvious example of such a centralized polity. Power has radiated from the center in Bangkok outward since at least the nineteenth century (Chaiyan 1994, 7-13). This is irrespective of the ethnic diversity of that nation. This happened at times violently (as in the case of northern Thailand during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), and at other times through a slower extension by Bangkok administrative elite into the northeast and south; only the far south with its persistent insurgency resisted this logic into the twenty-first century. Federation with other plausible partners outside the taam of Bangkok is implausible given this focus on the sector—there is no movement to expand Bangkok's central rule into Laos, Cambodia, or Myanmar and create a "federation" which would promote multi-lingual schools, justice system, etc., as in Switzerland.

What might an expansion of the Yangon/Naypyitaw "base" look like in a federation? Recognition of independent school systems, decentralized taxation authority, decentralized policing authority, and natural resource management are typical of federal countries from Christian Switzerland to Hindu India. Yet, multi-lingualism, independent school systems, and other federal structures never emerged in lowland Burma, despite decades of opportunity. The Burmainzed base of the Irrawaddy River Valley reflexively seeks through its action and cultural activities to reproduce itself, and restore the taam of the pre-1885 Mandalay court. Ne Win's Burma explicitly reproduced these norms by isolating highlanders between 1962 and 2010, a period roughly the same as British dominance from

Rangoon between 1885 and 1942. The Burmese-speaking NLD government (2016-2021) assumed limited control of a bureaucracy steeped in such norms. The post-2021 military government today of course assumes that they can return to the days of dictatorship, in which the Tatmadaw dominates explicitly through a specifically Burmese base. For example, never was there a serious attempt to introduce the Karen language school system present before aggressive Burmanization policies finally eliminated after 1962 (Yeo, Gagnon, and Thako 2019; Eh Htoo, forthcoming; Alwyn 2021).

The current military government will one day end—but what will come after such a Burma-centric polity? The logic of Prawase Wasi points to a fragmentation of the country, as the various self-forming groups—Shan, Wa, Kachin, Mon, Karen, Rakhine, etc.—look within their own bases and establish polities which preserve the institutions of stupa created by rebels over the previous decades. Whether this results in a loose confederation of independent polities is an open question. What is not so open is the hope for a single centralized government or a weak federal system. This would have already emerged if the base(s) were ready for it. Failing that, the highly centralized Burmese military with its arrests, military attacks, and assassinations is seeking simply to decapitate the defiant highlanders—in the same fashion the British decapitated the Burmese king in 1885.

The international community, including the United States, ASEAN, China, the United Kingdom, the European Union, and India are of course reluctant to encourage decentralization, fearing that it will legitimize independence movements globally in places like Scotland, Catalan, Somaliland, Chechnya, Kashmir, and elsewhere. Such a globalized concern though, does not necessarily reflect Myanmar. The problem is that the underlying political culture in Burma emerges from a multitude of polities, each resting on their own base and producing their own taam. For decades, an "in-between federalism" has been proposed but never taken up enthusiastically by the habitually centralized Burmese with its own base, or for that matter the independent polities with their own base and taam. The question is whether they will be allowed to expand the institutions of politics, justice, economy, etc., that fit between that base and its taam.

Notes

1. Prawase Wasi has written extensively about philosophical issues. However, the vast majority of his writings are in Thai, and not translated into English. The sections used here are primarily from his essay "One University, One Province" (Prawase 2014). Below are the titles of just a few of his other philosophical works. The translated titles are included here to give the English reader a sense of the breadth of Prawase's philosophical writings: Prawase, W. (January 11-13, 1999). "Way of Integration." Paper presented at the Thailand Strategies, Sirikit Convention Centre; Prawase, W. 2001. *The National Crisis and the Survival of Thai Society*. Bangkok: SE-EDUCATION Public Company Limited; Prawase, W.

2002. *New Human Development for Sustainable Future*. Bangkok: Doctor for Local People; Prawase, W. 2003. *Development Must Be Based on Culture*. Bangkok: Ministry of Culture, Royal Academy; Prawase, W. 2007. *Humanity and Access Ultimate Highest: Truth, Beauty, Goodness*. Bangkok: Green-Intellectual; Prawase, W. 2012. *New Direction Thailand: A New Direction of Local Community Studies*. Bangkok: Department of Cultural Promotion; Prawase, W., Ariya, S., & Jattana, N. 2001. *Way of Thai: Intellectual, New Paradigm and New Imagination*. Bangkok: Klad-Thai Ltd.

2. The word ธรรม is often transliterated as "dharma," particularly when discussing Hinduism and Buddhism. However, as any Thai-English dictionary notes, there are many ways to translate the term. Prawase is using the word here in a specifically secular Thai fashion, and for that reason we are using our own transliteration which also reflects common pronunciation in Thai. In this article, we emphasize the very specific use of the word "taam/dharma" that Prawase uses in his article "One University, One Province." Elsewhere he writes more generally about the Buddhist concept of Dharma, which he defines as "Dharma is nature. Dharma is the law of nature. Dharma is the order for how it works. That law of nature is how things are tied together, and are correct. That is the underlying reason that nature emerged the way it does, and how it emerges in a healthful harmony, as things should be" (Prawase 2009).

3. The name "Burma" in English was changed by a military junta to "Myanmar" in 1989. This name reflected the name of the country in the Burmese (Myanmar) language. The word Burma is always used to refer to British Burma and independent Burma before 1989. The word Myanmar is widely used within the country today in both the Burmese and English languages. There remains a preference for the name Burma in English though among some rebel groups who do not recognize the change made by the unpopular military junta. The United States Embassy still calls the country Burma in English. The British Embassy uses Myanmar.

4. Scholars from Alexis de Tocqueville who wrote about the United States in the 1830s to Robert Putnam who published the now-classic *Bowling Alone* in 2000 write about how important such cohesion is—the problem in colonial societies is that the colonial power is not aware of such elements, and instead focuses resolutely on the financial bottom line.

5. The Burmese equivalents according to journalist Mon Mon Myat (2019) are roughly the following: *Chumchon* in Burmese means *pyithu* or *ludu* (mass, community). If *thongtin* means "base," the meaning of the term might be "community-base." In Burmese, *ludu aahkyaybute* refers refer to civil society groups or models. *Aahkyaybute* means Base.

6. Taam is used by Prawase to help people think about the meaning of nation, social unity, and shared destiny. Such unity was on display very recently in the outpouring of grief following the passing of the beloved King Rama IX Phumiphol Ayudalej in October 2016. Narrative history forms around such concepts, which reinforces the capacity of the taam and base to cohere. The concept *barami* is closely related to taam (see Jory 2002). Barami is wielded by the king and is actually the power sung about in the Thai King's Anthem which is played before movies and other public events. Barami is often translated as "charisma," but it also assumes the inherent goodness of the monarchy.

7. The Burmese language has the same Sanskrit based words for stupa (*jedi*) and taam as Thai. Both words are common in in both languages and apply to religious contexts. The languages are different when it comes to defining "base," which in Thai are thongtin and chumchon (roughly translated as locality and community), and is Prawase's innovation.

In Burmese cosmology (as well as traditional Thai cosmology), the king's authority/taam comes from the heavens, and is the result of virtue (dharma) accumulated in past lives. Prawase's use of a stupa as a metaphor makes intuitive sense in Thai. It is not generally used in this way in Burmese, though we suspect there would be a similar intuitive affinity.

8. In 1989, the military government changed the English spellings of Burmese cities to match more closely the Burmese language sound system. At this time, the name of the capital "Rangoon" was changed to "Yangon." Standard practice in English-language writing about Myanmar/Burma is to refer to the city as Rangoon before 1989 and as Yangon after 1989.

9. At the time of the ceasefire negotiations, there were twenty to thirty armed ethnic groups in highland Myanmar. Fifteen of these groups were invited to the negotiations. Eventually in 2015, eight of these groups signed the ceasefire agreements.

10. For example, see Myint-U's (2006, 321-348) descriptions of the ephemeral and permanent interest groups in Myanmar/Burma. See Weber (1919/2015, 56-57) for a description of how political parties coalesce around pre-existing interest groups. See Somboon and Waters (2020) for descriptions of the Karen.

11. See Yeo, Gagnon, and Hayso (2020), and Alwyn (2021) for specific descriptions of how Karen education institutions developed separately from the larger Burmese system over the last 150 years.

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