

TEACHING CITIZENSHIP UNDER AN AUTHORITARIAN REGIME:  
A CASE-STUDY OF BURMA/MYANMAR

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I dedicate this dissertation to the citizens of Burma. May your efforts bring about a more just and peaceful society.

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Brooke A. Treadwell

Teaching citizenship under an authoritarian regime:

A case-study of Burma/Myanmar

What does citizenship education look like in a society ruled by an authoritarian military regime? This dissertation seeks to answer this question by examining official citizenship education policy in Burma/Myanmar and how it is implemented in contemporary government primary schools.

Using critical qualitative methodology, I identify the government's key citizenship education policies by analyzing the civic messages in the Myanmar Readers. These are Burmese reading textbooks, mandated for use in all state-run primary schools, which contain more citizenship education-related content than any other primary school textbook. Then, through conducting and analyzing in-depth, ethnographic interviews with former teachers and students from Burma, I identify how these policies are brought to life in Burma's classrooms.

Findings suggest that, the government's civic education policy prioritizes the teaching of moral values relating to discipline and obedience. In the majority of cases, teachers seek to implement this official policy as faithfully as possible, as they whole-heartedly agree with these moral messages and they believe it is in the best interests of their students to learn and adhere to them. Thus, the textbooks' civic content is mirrored in teacher-student interactions. However, in the rare instances when teachers disagree with a particular component of government civic education policy, they demonstrate their agency by implementing the policy in an altered form, so that it better fits their views.

Findings also indicate that teachers train their students in areas of citizenship education unaddressed by the textbooks. Most prominently among these is 'protective coaching,' a form of participatory citizenship education that all teachers engage in. This involves teaching students how to participate in civic life without provoking the ire of the Burmese government, so as to remain 'safe' from government retribution.

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## Chapter 1 Exploring the nature of 'citizenship education' in authoritarian Burma

In August and September 2007 I watched news footage of what is now referred to as the 'Saffron Revolution.' A sea of Buddhist monks, former student leaders and other Burmese citizens walked peacefully in protest through the streets of Yangon and other cities and towns across Burma. The protestors were making a number of requests of the government, including a decent standard of living, the release of political prisoners, as well as an end of government corruption and human rights abuses. At the protests' height, eyewitnesses reported seeing up to 100,000 peaceful demonstrators marching in Yangon (BBC, 2007c). As the protests grew, so did the severity and violence of the government's response. It was clear that many would be wounded and killed in the government's imminent crackdown. The last protest of this size to occur in Burma took place in 1988 and ended after government soldiers killed between 3,000 and 10,000 peaceful protestors (Fogarty, 2008; Skidmore, 2004). This historical precedent made it all the more awe-inspiring to watch these individuals make such an incredible civic sacrifice. They were putting the betterment of their country ahead of their own personal safety.

Although I was watching the Saffron Revolution from afar, I could not have felt more deeply moved and personally invested in what was occurring. Several close Burmese friends were in the crowds of protesters I watched on screen. I had spent 5 years working with Burmese refugees living in Thailand. Over this period I spent a considerable amount of time inside Burma and I developed close relationships with individuals currently living under the Burmese government's authoritarian rule. They had told me stories of how they and their families had suffered at the hands of the regime. These stories included accounts of forced labor, forced relocation, imprisonment for peacefully voicing political opinions, in addition to other human rights violations. We had talked at length about their desire to bring about democratic change in Burma and their belief that this was in the best interests of the country as a whole. It was an incredible feeling to watch them turn their ideas into actions.



(BBC, 2007a)

**Figure 1.1 Burmese monks and lay-citizens protesting in Yangon in 2007**



(BBC, 2007b)

**Figure 1.2 Burmese monks praying as a form of protest in Yangon in 2007**

As I watched them carry out their peaceful demonstrations, I felt that they were 'citizens' in the truest sense of the word. Then, several days later, as I watched video of government soldiers opening fire on the protestors, it struck me that many of those very soldiers likely considered their own actions to be the utmost display of true citizenship. After all, their 'civic' acts corresponded much more closely to the government's ongoing messages about 'good citizenship' than did the actions of the protestors.



For instance, government-sponsored, red and white billboards dot Burma's urban landscapes with slogans meant to encapsulate the values, actions and aspirations of the 'ideal' citizen. A typical billboard of this type is depicted in figure 1.3. With threatening overtones, much of the billboard's text vilifies anyone who holds opinions that are not entirely in line with the military government's views. For example, its first line calls for the people of Burma to "oppose those relying on external elements, acting as stooges, holding negative views." This line suggests that any person who disagrees with the Burmese government is being controlled by a malevolent external power that wishes to harm the Burmese nation, such as a foreign government. The billboard ends with a call to 'crush' such people "as the common enemy." Similar statements are emblazoned on the cover of Burma's most widely available newspaper and in the front of nearly every book published in Burma.



(Meurders, 2006)

**Figure 1.3 Photo of people's desire billboard in Mandalay, Burma**

By cracking down on the protesters, the soldiers were carrying out the very civic duty detailed in these slogans. A handful of articles about the protests, published in the government-run newspaper, *The New Light of Myanmar*, reinforced this view that the demonstrators were bad citizens as their actions were destabilizing the peace and stability of the country. The articles emphasized that the protesters' demands didn't originate from these Burmese protesters



themselves. The text implied that these individuals had been tricked into criticizing the government's actions by 'foreign radio stations' such as Voice of America and the BBC.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the articles characterized the Burmese military's violent actions against the protesters as valiant efforts to preserve national stability, for the greater good of the country (New Light of Myanmar, 2007a, p. 9, 16).<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, the 88 Generation Student Group, which played a key role in the protests, issued statements that suggested a counter-narrative to the government's negative characterization of them and the other demonstrators. Implying that they were not enemies of the nation, but good citizens working to bring about a better future for Burma, they said "The 88 Generation Students are aligned with the people and are working for a peaceful resolution to the political and economic problems the people of Burma are encountering. In particular, they are making efforts to change the dictatorial system that is the root cause of impoverishment in the country" (88 Generation Student Group, 2007).

The Burmese government held firm to its initial characterization of the protesters as military and other government security personnel brought the protests to an end through arrests and violent assaults. Over the next several months, my friends and many of their democracy-minded colleagues were arrested on charges including "intent to cause fear or harm to the public" (Union of Burma, 1957). They faced long prison sentences, many of which were 65 years and higher. Other demonstrators were killed or 'disappeared' (Amnesty International, 2008; Democratic Voice of Burma, 2007).

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<sup>1</sup> The headline of one such article read "Destructive elements inciting instigation to grab power through short cut—foreign radio stations airing exaggerated news, trying to instigate public, launching propaganda campaigns—due to exaggerations, tricks and instigation by bogus monks, violent demonstrations break out in Pakokku, some monks stage protest walk in Sittway—Some Buddhist monks also march in procession in Yangon—people oppose any attempt to destroy peace and stability, wish Sayadaws to guide monks to follow Vinaya rules in interest of people." (New Light of Myanmar, 2007a, p. 16).

<sup>2</sup> For instance, one article stated the following: "Then, the protesters became violent. So in order to control the situation, the officials threw a tear-gas bomb into the group and opened fire in the air to threaten them... The people are opposed to any attempt to destroy peace and stability and they are also concerned that if there is instability of the State, their livelihood and social affairs might be affected." (New Light of Myanmar, 2007a, p. 9).

These events revealed a struggle going on between various components of Burmese society over what constituted good citizenship and who best embodied those ideals. While all sides purported to be acting in the country's 'best interests,' they seemed to have vastly different interpretations of what those best interests were. Is a 'good citizen' one who preserves the unity and stability of the country by abiding by all of the government's laws and policies without comment or complaint? Alternatively, is a 'good citizen' one who openly critiques the government in an effort to encourage improvements? Given the lengths to which all parties went to either foster or hinder the Saffron Revolution, it seemed that all sides agreed that the way the people of Burma conceptualize and operationalize 'good citizenship' has the potential to significantly alter the nation's political path.

Given the pivotal role they will play in shaping Burma's future, I chose to focus this dissertation study on the civic education youth are receiving in Burma today. What kind of citizen are they being urged to become? While messages about 'good citizenship' are communicated to youth in a variety of settings, my research addresses the civic messages conveyed in contemporary Burmese government primary schools. Public schooling is one of the first and potentially most powerful opportunities the Burmese government has to shape how youth conceptualize 'good citizenship,' especially given that the vast majority of Burma's population spend at least some of their childhood in government primary schools.<sup>3</sup>

Since Burma's authoritarian government tightly controls the school curriculum, policies and environment, primary schools provide an excellent context through which to explore the intricacies of the government's civic education messages. I explored this issue by analyzing the set of government-produced textbooks designed to teach students to read and write Burmese. Commonly referred to as the 'Myanmar readers,' their use is mandated in all state-run primary schools.

In addition, through interviews with teachers and former students with extensive experience

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<sup>3</sup> While the primary school enrollment ratio is unavailable, UNESCO (2010) reports that 70% of students in Burma complete primary school through grade five. While barriers to primary school enrollment and completion remain significant, it is clear that exposure to primary schooling in Burma is widespread.

working and/or studying in government primary schools, I analyzed the meanings of ‘good citizenship’ emphasized in teacher-student interactions. This was essential to understanding the civic education provided in this context since the students, teachers, headmasters and other school staff have their own agency. Thus, they play an influential role by shaping messages communicated to students according to their own opinions, life experiences and worldviews.

Examining the meanings of ‘good citizenship’ emphasized in teacher-student interactions as well as those advocated by the government-produced texts, enabled me to explore to what extent teachers reinforce, contradict and/or subvert the textbooks’ civic messages in their interactions with students. In this way I was able to gain a picture of what civic education looks like within Burma’s public primary schools—complete with its array of contradictions and complexities.

### **Research Questions**

This dissertation study is guided by one overarching research question, which encapsulates the focus of this dissertation study as a whole, as well as three sub-questions that address the specific sources of civic education I examined within the primary school environment, and how they build on and/or contradict one another.

- What practices of good citizenship are conveyed to students in Burmese primary schools?
  - What is the authorized civic education policy in the Myanmar readers?
  - How do teacher-student interactions reinforce authorized civic education policy?
  - How do teachers modify authorized civic education policy as they apply it in teacher-student interactions?

### **A Changing Burma?**

This is a particularly interesting time to explore notions of citizenship in Burma. After nearly half a century of authoritarian military rule, the country’s leaders have made a series of reforms over the last few years that indicate a possible turn towards a democratic future. In 2008, the government released a newly drafted constitution that called for the establishment of a

parliamentary system of governance with democratically elected representatives. The people of Burma approved the new constitution by national referendum. In November 2010, a general election was held and the new parliament convened its first session in January 2011.

In addition, the government released an unprecedented number of political prisoners between 2010 and 2012. By conservative estimates, the government has reduced the number of incarcerated political prisoners by 70% (Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma), 2010, 2012; M. F. Martin, 2012). Just days after the general election, the government released Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest. An ardent advocate for democracy in Burma, Aung San Suu Kyi was one of Burma's most well-known and longest-serving political prisoners. She is also the leader of the largest opposition political party in Burma, the National League for Democracy (NLD).

Another significant move towards possible democratization was the election of Aung San Suu Kyi and 42 other members of the NLD to parliament during by-elections held in April 2012. Although they hold only 6% of seats in parliament, the NLD's inclusion within Burma's government is noteworthy, particularly given that the Burmese government had, until very recently, sought to shun and silence the NLD since its founding in 1988.

Other notable changes that occurred in 2012 include ending the government's pre-publication censorship requirements, previously mandated for all media in Burma (Fuller, 2012). In addition, the government published a list of over 2,000 names that it had removed from its infamous 'blacklist.' This indicated that a ban that was previously in place against these individuals entering Burma had been lifted. The published list of names included many Burmese democracy activists living outside of Burma as well as human rights advocates and journalists from other countries such as former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Riz Khan, a former CNN news anchor (Barta, 2012; Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2012).

While these changes suggest a turn towards a more democratic future, many people, both inside and outside Burma, remain unconvinced. Indeed, there are countless examples of the Burmese government taking similar 'democratizing' steps in the past, only to backtrack shortly

after. The government has a history of enacting such changes at politically strategic times, only to reverse course when the government is under less intense international scrutiny. This begs the question of whether the recent changes are an indication of true democratic reform or whether they are merely temporary— an elaborate means of garnering broader legitimacy in the international community to woo foreign aid dollars from bilateral and multilateral donors and encourage the lifting of US sanctions.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, upon closer inspection, many of the ‘reforms’ the government has made are not wholly democratic. In fact, many of them seem to have been designed to create an illusion of democratization, while actually solidifying the power of the military in Burma’s political system for the long term. For instance, the new constitution requires that 25% of representatives in parliament be appointed from the ranks of the military. Moreover, it gives the military the power to disband the civilian government at any time. Since constitutional amendments cannot be passed without approval from the military, its political power cannot be reduced unless the military desires it (Williams, 2011, p. 1202-1203). In addition, the largest and most powerful political party in the legislature, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), is largely made up of high-ranking military personnel who only recently resigned from the military for the purpose of taking part in the ‘civilian’ government. Currently, over 85% of parliament is either active military personnel or is a member of the USDP or other political party closely affiliated with the military (Mizzima News, 2012). Thus, numerous academics, Burma activists and others point out that despite recent changes, the military remains in control of the country. The country’s leaders have merely exchanged their army uniforms for civilian clothes (Nyein, 2009; Whelan, 2011; Williams, 2011).

Additional issues that cast doubt on Burma’s supposed democratization include overwhelming evidence of vote tampering during the constitutional referendum, the general election and the by-election. There have been widespread reports of stuffed ballot boxes and people being

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<sup>4</sup> For instance, the government will release political prisoners just before foreign dignitaries visit Burma or just before Burma’s head of state addresses the UN General Assembly, only to quietly re-arrest them later. In this way, the government uses political prisoners as pawns to garner goodwill and support from the international community when needed, while maintaining an atmosphere of political oppression within the country.

pressured to vote for military-backed political parties (Mydans, 2008; New York Times, 2010). In fact, during the interviews I conducted for this dissertation study, one teacher described how the government compelled all the teachers at her school to 'teach' community members to vote in favor of the constitution and to explain to them that a vote against the constitution was unacceptable.<sup>5</sup> Thus, what may have looked like a democratic process seems to have been heavily skewed in favor of the military. Similarly, while ending official pre-publication censorship of media may have appeared to be a democratizing step, the government has maintained laws allowing the government to ban publications and arrest journalists that publish any work that criticizes the government (Hindstrom, 2013). Thus, the press remains unfree, the media forced to censor themselves for their own safety.

It is not yet clear whether or not Burma will become a democracy. If the country is democratizing, it is occurring in fits and starts. Progress has been and will likely continue to be uneven, with periodic back-slipping towards more authoritarian forms of governance. However, regardless of how things turn out, Burma's political landscape is undoubtedly undergoing a major transformation. Already, the number of democratizing steps the government has taken and the length of time they have remained in place is unprecedented since the beginning of military rule in Burma.

However, it is also important to note that despite the dramatic political changes, many aspects of life in Burma have remained unchanged. Daily life for most Burmese people involves coping with severe economic hardship, often whilst enduring successive human rights violations. Jobs are scarce, corruption is widespread and severe discord between ethnic and religious groups persists. Most recently, violence has broken out between the Muslim Rohingya and the largely Buddhist Arakanese ethnic groups in Northwestern Burma (Ritu, 2012). Despite these difficult conditions, critiquing the government, its policies or its actions is still considered highly risky. Individuals weigh their words and restrict their activities so as not to appear critical of the ruling regime. Those who have not been careful enough in this regard have been subject to surveillance, interrogation and sometimes arrest and imprisonment. This has been well

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with 'Sayama Yi Yi' (pseudonym), July 2008.

documented in the recent past (Fink, 2001; Skidmore, 2004) and continues to be true today (Buncombe, 2012). Despite the recent political shifts and the easing of some censorship restrictions, several broadly-worded laws remain in place that enable the Burmese government to arrest and imprison people at will. Furthermore, in Burma's eastern border regions, the world's longest civil war continues to rage. Violent skirmishes continue to erupt between the Burmese army and ethnic minority armies such as the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) (Phanida, 2013).

### **A snapshot of 'citizenship' at a decisive point in Burma's history**

Fieldwork for this dissertation study took place in 2007 and 2008, during which time I conducted and later analyzed a series of in-depth, ethnographic interviews with former teachers and students who reflected on their experiences teaching in and/or attending government primary schools between 1990 and 2008. The government-produced Myanmar readers that I analyzed were those published in 2009 for use during the 2010-2011 school year. Thus, this study has captured a snapshot of how 'citizenship' was conceptualized and taught in Burmese government schools before there were any notable indications of democratization in Burma.<sup>6</sup>

Having data from this particular point in time provides an opportunity to explore teachers' and students' fundamental understandings of 'citizenship' whilst living and working under an authoritarian regime, just prior to the initiation of democratizing steps. As additional democratizing steps are anticipated soon in the Burmese political system, and since the government is planning a major overhaul of the public school curriculum and national education policy (Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2012, p. 7), the Burmese school system may soon look significantly different than it did at the time the data for this study was collected. Thus, it is likely that this time period is one of the very last opportunities to explore the civic values, skills and attitudes that Burma's youth were

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<sup>6</sup> Even though the new constitution had already been drafted and approved by national referendum by mid-2008, there were few, if any, individuals or organizations that believed these were signs of Burma's democratization. Due to the undemocratic nature of the constitution drafting process and irregularities during voting, only those affiliated with the Burmese government heralded these steps as democratic.

encouraged to adopt under authoritarianism. Furthermore, as the Myanmar readers have undergone very little change over the last several decades, the textbook analysis portion of this study speaks to the civic education of most of Burma's citizens living today. Thus, this study reveals the civic tools that Burma's youth, and to some extent the Burmese population as a whole, are equipped with as they enter a new democratic era.

In the future, politicians, political scientists and others will undoubtedly wrestle with questions about how the people of Burma and their existing notions about citizenship may have hindered, facilitated or otherwise shaped the country's transition to democracy. This study will provide some keys to this puzzle by outlining how government primary schools trained the country's population to conceptualize and operationalize citizenship. In addition, this study provides key information for those planning to make changes to Burma's current government school curriculum to one that better equips youth for a more democratic society. It is important for the nation's educators, policy makers and others involved in drafting new curricula to be well aware of the civic messages currently being communicated in Burma's classrooms—including those embedded in textbooks and those shared in teacher-student interactions. This will facilitate a more informed selection of civic messages to include in the new curricula and may enable curriculum designers to incorporate these messages in a way that builds on the concept of citizenship as it has been taught in classrooms over the last several decades. This could facilitate the transition to the new curriculum, particularly for students who began their schooling using the textbooks mandated under authoritarian rule. Also, as this study looks at the civic messages conveyed in both the explicit and the hidden curriculum, the findings of this study may make Burma's future curriculum writers more aware of the multitude of ways civic messages are knowingly and unknowingly communicated to students. Thus, the findings of this study may encourage teachers to ponder, and discuss with their students, the complex and sometimes contradictory messages about citizenship communicated within their own classrooms and throughout Burmese society.

### **Growing international focus on citizenship education**

Not only does Burma's changing political situation make this an apt time to examine how



citizenship is taught there, this topic is also particularly relevant now given that civic education has gained increasing prominence in recent decades, both in the academic literature and in popular parlance—especially among educators and international development practitioners. Civic education has become increasingly visible, in part, because it is becoming more common for it to be explicitly identified within curricula used in formal and non-formal educational settings, particularly in the democratized and democratizing world. National governments, international aid organizations and individual educators are turning to civic education curricula as a way to foster democratic values and skills in youth around the globe.

For instance, in 1999, in the midst of Mexico's endeavor to transition from authoritarianism to a more democratic system of governance, a new, stand-alone civic education course was initiated in secondary schools across the country to help students gain the necessary skills to participate in a democracy. While some components of civics had previously been covered within 'social studies,' teaching civics as a separate subject served to emphasize its heightened importance, given the country's ongoing democratization (Levinson, 2007, p. 245). Similarly, as South Africa turned from apartheid towards a democracy in the early to mid-1990s, nonprofit groups began providing civic education to adults in communities across the country (Foley & Putu, 2007, p. 173). Recently, new civic education initiatives have been launched in Afghanistan and Iraq in hopes that it will help democracy take root across these nations (Asia Foundation, 2005; Kippen, 2008, p. 14; Levine & Bishai, 2010). 'Project Citizen' is one civic education program that has gained enormous popularity at a global level. Developed in 1992 by the Center for Civic Education, a U.S. nonprofit organization, 'Project Citizen' consists of a curriculum to teach civic education that has now been implemented in 80 countries (Center for Civic Education, 2012a, 2012b; Vontz, Metcalf, & Patrick, 2000, p. 8).

Civic education's rising prominence has been accompanied by increased spending on these educational endeavors. Civic education initiatives make up a growing percentage of international aid funding in Africa, Latin America and Asia, from organizations such as USAID, DFID, and UNESCO. From 1990 to 1999 USAID spent approximately \$30 million per year on civic education projects in nations across the globe, totaling \$232 million over the decade as a whole

(USAID Office of Democracy and Governance, 2002, p. 5). While an exact figure for USAID's more recent civic education spending is unavailable, by 2008 USAID's spending on 'democracy assistance' had increased to \$1.5 billion per year, much of this dedicated to civic education initiatives (Carothers, 2009, p. 6).

There has also been a growing interest in civic education among academics and education researchers. The number of books and articles pertaining to civic education has increased dramatically. Results from Google Scholar indicate that scholarly publications on this subject jumped from 280 in the 1980s, to nearly 3,000 between 2000 and 2009.<sup>7</sup> In 2010, Hahn published an article emphasizing the dramatic expansion of civic education literature, both in terms of the sheer number of studies as well as their geographic spread (Hahn, 2010). The mounting popularity of civic education has been both mirrored by and fostered by three large, international studies published in 1971, 1999 and 2009 by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), which assessed the state of citizenship education around the world (Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr, & Losito, 2010, p. 3). Also reflecting this trend, a number of academic journals have been founded in recent years that focus primarily or exclusively on civic education, the most recent of which is the *Journal of Global Citizenship & Equity Education* established in 2011.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, well established academic journals have begun publishing 'special issues' dedicated to citizenship education in recent years in both the field of education and beyond. These include the *Journal of Social Science Education's* 2005 special issue, *The European Year of Citizenship through Education*, as well as the 2011 special issue of *Education Sciences* entitled *Civic and Citizenship in its Global Context*.

### **What is 'citizenship' and 'citizenship education'?**

Before delving into the meaning of 'citizenship' and 'citizenship education' in the context of Burmese government schools specifically, I will provide an overview of what these terms have

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<sup>7</sup> To arrive at these figures I searched for all articles and books that contained the word 'education' as well as either the word 'civic' or 'citizenship' in the title.

<sup>8</sup> Additional journals focusing on civic education founded recently include Citizenship, Social and Economics Education founded in 1996, International Journal of Citizenship Teaching and Learning founded in 2005 and Education, Citizenship and Social Justice, first published in 2006.

come to mean more generally in the academic literature. This is particularly important since the way I define and use these terms for the purpose of this dissertation study builds on aspects of these long-established definitions. Yet, my interpretation of these terms also breaks away from these prevailing definitions in important respects. First, I will discuss the meanings of 'citizenship' that are commonly employed in the scholarly literature, followed by an explanation of how I conceptualize this term for the purposes of this dissertation study.

*Citizenship: A diversity of meanings across the globe*

At its core, citizenship is about belonging. It is about being part of a community larger than oneself. In most cases, the term 'citizenship' is used to refer to a person's membership in a political community of some form, be it global, national or local in scale. Citizenship is most often talked about in relation to one's country. One can be a citizen of the United States, or a citizen of the Union of Myanmar. Citizenship is a status as well as a practice. Usually, people are entitled to a passport from their country of citizenship and they can reside there without obtaining a visa or other form of special permission. As Shafir (1998) notes, this logistical understanding of citizenship has its roots in the ancient Greek conception of the 'polis,' which refers to the city-state in which the people engaged in communal political life. 'Citizenship' then became a recognized as a legal status associated with certain protections under the Roman Empire (p. 3-4). Today, citizenship in the legal sense relates to paperwork, permissions and one's ability to cross borders. It is becoming increasingly more common for people to hold multiple citizenships, indicating that, at an administrative level, at least, they belong to more than one country (Faist, 2007). A person obtains 'citizenship' in this sense, by virtue of being born in a particular country, being born to parents who hold certain citizenship(s), or by meeting requirements to become a naturalized citizen.

The term 'citizenship' is also frequently used to refer to the rights one is entitled to from one's country and the duties one is legally required to fulfill for one's country in return. As Patrick (2003) notes, citizenship rights may be enshrined in the country's constitution or expressed in other national laws. The right to participate in the country's political process, the right to free speech and the right to basic education are some of the rights that many national governments

pledge to provide their citizens. Paying taxes, performing military service and abiding by national laws are responsibilities citizens are often required to fulfill for the benefit of their country as a whole and its population (p. 8-9).

However, in many contexts, the concept of 'good citizenship' refers not only to fulfilling what the law requires citizens to do for their country, but also to what one *should* do for one's country, regardless of legal requirements. This aspect of citizenship usually consists of actions and choices that are believed to be in the 'best interest' of one's fellow citizens. For instance, according to Sherrod, Flanagan, and Youniss (2002), "a key aspect of citizenship includes the ability to move beyond one's individual self-interest and to be committed to the well-being of some larger group of which one is a member" (p. 265). As Callan (1997) describes, citizens should have "an active commitment to the good of the polity, as well as confidence and competence in judgment regarding how that good should be advanced" (p. 3). What is in a society's 'best interest' is interpreted in various ways, from community to community and person to person across the globe. Research conducted by Westheimer and Kahne (2004) revealed three different types of citizenship. Each one involves striving to achieve what is in society's best interest, but they involve doing so in different ways. 'Personally responsible citizenship' consists of engaging in small-scale, personal acts, on one's own, that benefit one's immediate community. This could include living an energy-efficient lifestyle, reaching out to community members in need or volunteering at a local organization. It also encompasses cultivating positive character traits such as self-discipline and respect for others. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) contrast this with 'participatory citizenship', which refers to making one's voice heard on political matters through actions such as voting and conducting community meetings. Lastly, 'justice oriented citizenship' encompasses being critically aware of political and social forces that result in injustice for certain members of the community or nation and seeking to rectify those injustices (p. 240-243).

It is important to note that most of the academic scholarship that explores the meaning of 'citizenship' in relation to a country presupposes that the political context is a democracy. For instance, Patrick (2003) makes this explicit in his definition of citizenship when he states, "the

status of citizenship involves very important obligations and responsibilities such as...demonstrating commitment and loyalty to the *democratic* political community and state” [my emphasis] (p. 8). The fact that so many scholars illustrate ‘good citizenship’ with examples such as abiding by national laws and government policies, reveals that they are assuming that the nation has laws that are fair and just, presumably because the nation they have in mind has a government that is responsive to the will of the people. Essentially, the existing scholarship on the meaning of citizenship provides thoughtful and extensive research and discussion on what ‘citizenship’ means in a democracy, but very little academic literature addresses what ‘citizenship’ means in non-democratic settings. Thus there has been little exploration of what citizenship means in contexts, such as Burma, where the government has acted with brazen disregard for the desires of its people.

Some scholars go so far as to say that people who live in non-democracies don’t qualify as ‘citizens’ because they are denied many rights associated with democratic citizenship, such as the right to vote, the ability to criticize those in power and participate in public discourse on social issues. For instance, Kymlicka (2003) posits that these “aspects of citizenship...are precisely what distinguishes ‘citizens’ within a democracy from the ‘subjects’ of an authoritarian regime” (p.49). However, I dispute this narrow conception of ‘citizen.’ For one, people have the capacity to act in accordance with democratic values in their interactions with individuals within their communities, irrespective of the political system in place at a national or community level. Secondly, the term ‘citizen’ was not always solely associated with democracy. For instance, the terms ‘citizen’ and ‘citizenship’ were used in ancient Greece and under the Roman Empire, both of which were non-democracies (Woodruff, 2005).

A small number of scholars break from this trend of equating ‘citizenship’ with ‘democratic citizenship,’ such as Brighouse (2006), who reminds us that in some societies, such as those under authoritarian governments, a ‘good citizen’ may be someone who breaks the government laws that they view as unethical or unjust. “Whereas I think that good citizens in a liberal democratic society should have an overridable disposition to obey the law, it is possible that good citizens in Hitler’s Germany would have had no such disposition, and would merely

calculate, for each law, whether to obey it or not” (p. 63). This example vividly highlights the broad range of possible shapes ‘citizenship’ can take across diverse contexts.

Furthermore, while being a citizen of a particular country is the type of citizenship that is most often referred to in everyday settings, ‘citizenship’ can pertain to communities of many sizes and forms. As Nussbaum (1994) posits, one may think of oneself as a global citizen, who should act in the best interests of the world’s population as a whole. On a smaller scale, one may consider oneself a ‘citizen’ of a particular region, state, town or neighborhood. Kymlicka (2003) posits that individuals often have multiple citizenships connected with their “multiple loyalties and identities, operating at various levels from the local to the regional, national and global” (p.56). Anthony Smith enriches this idea by adding other dimensions in addition to the territorial. In chapter one of Smith’s book, *National Identity*, he notes, “the self is composed of multiple identities and roles – familial, territorial, class, religious, ethnic and gender” (p.4). So, in a sense, people may see themselves as being a ‘citizen’ of their gender, religion, class and/or ethnicity. A person’s ‘citizenship’ within these various communities—both territorial and beyond—can encompass the same aspects of citizenship that we typically associate with citizenship to a country. There are the logistical aspects of membership, certain rights and responsibilities often outlined by law or policy, as well as a series of unwritten rules about how one should act, for the well being of the community as a whole.

‘Citizenship’ may be viewed from one or all of these various perspectives. Furthermore, there are likely meanings people associate with these terms that fall far beyond those mentioned here. What is certain is that people make sense of these concepts in different ways, the world over. Therefore, for this study, I draw on Levinson’s (2011) definition of ‘citizenship,’ which stands out in the academic literature for its breadth.

Citizenship is constituted by the meanings, rights, and obligations of membership in publics, as well as the forms of agency and modalities of participation implicated by such membership (Levinson, 2011, p. 280)

This definition is broad enough to encompass all the aspects of citizenship outlined above, including national and other forms of territorial citizenship in all political settings in addition to

non-territorial forms of citizenship. Furthermore, while Levinson's definition gives a nod to the concept of citizenship as a status, as it is one of the possible 'rights' of citizenship, this definition emphasizes the *practice* of citizenship, which is the focus of this dissertation study.

Defining 'citizenship' in such broad terms enables me to remain open to discovering the variety of forms this concept may take in the Burmese context. I consider this particularly important given the country's long-standing authoritarian military government. For one, little is known about the meanings of citizenship that Burma's military government has advocated through the formal education system and by other means, nor how it has shaped the peoples' conception of citizenship. In addition, it is not known what role, if any, the government's harsh treatment of large swaths of Burma's population has played in determining how the people of Burma conceive of 'good citizenship.' Could widespread human rights violations have encouraged Burmese citizens' definition of 'good citizenship' to encompass elements of Brighouse's (2006, p. 63) interpretation, where being a 'good citizen' may be acting against the wishes of one's government—perhaps even seeking to topple one's government—in the event that this is deemed to be in the best interest of the nation as a whole? It is important that I be open to these and other potential definitions of citizenship that may be vastly different from the meanings of citizenship that have been addressed in the literature to date. I now turn to the meanings of civic education common in the academic literature and a discussion of the various frameworks scholars have used to examine this topic. This will be followed by a description of how I define civic education for the purposes of this dissertation study.

### *Components of citizenship education*

At its most fundamental level, 'citizenship education' is the preparation people receive that enables them to fulfill the role of 'citizen' in their society. But, what does civic education look like in practice? What does its content consist of? Since the political system and common notions of citizenship can look drastically different from context to context, as noted above, the content of citizenship education varies accordingly.

However, while citizenship education looks different the world over, there are certain types of civic education content that have gained prominence as a result of being included in the civic

education of many nations and being highlighted in the academic literature. While they overlap and intersect to some extent, I have identified six components that appear often in formal civic education curricula: political literacy, historical literacy, participatory citizenship, moral education, multicultural education and human rights education. I will describe each of these categories in turn. I will then outline four well-known frameworks that have influenced how scholars have analyzed these components of civic education and how educators have conveyed them to students: political socialization, cognitive development theory, moral education and transformative learning theory.

The **political literacy** component of civic education encompasses all the politically-oriented information a person needs to know about their country to fulfill their role as a citizen. This often includes learning how one's national and local governments work, how laws are passed as well as what citizenship rights are enshrined in the constitution. Learning who one's political representatives are and what they do falls into this category (Dudley & Gitelson, 2002, p. 176). Political literacy also encompasses learning about current events taking place, on a local, national and global scale, which affect one's community and nation (Government of the United Kingdom, 1998, p. 13).

I use the term 'political literacy' as opposed to 'political knowledge,' because this component of civic education encompasses not only knowledge, but also skills. The civic skills in this category include how to make one's opinions heard in the political process. Depending on the political context, this could encompass how to vote, lobby the government for policy change and/or protest. Also included are the skills one needs to keep one's political knowledge up-to-date to maintain political literacy throughout one's life.

A number of scholars and policy makers stress the importance of political literacy as part of all individuals' civic education. The 'Crick Report,' a document noted for introducing formal civic education into British public schools, emphasizes the importance of political literacy, identifying it as one of three strands of citizenship education that should be taught in British schools (Government of the United Kingdom, 1998, p. 13). Carpini and Keeter (1997) also stress the importance of political literacy. "We are not arguing that contemporary democracy requires



that all citizens be expert on all facets of national politics, but we do suggest that the more citizens are passingly informed about the issues of the day, the behavior of political leaders, and the rules under which they operate, the better off they are, the better off we are" (p. 61, emphasis in original). Niemi and Junn (1998) express a similar sentiment. "In short, political knowledge helps citizens operate effectively in a democracy, heightens their awareness of the limits of both governmental and citizen behavior, increases attainment of democratic goals by promoting more equal access among citizens, and contributes to the extent to which citizens regard their government with confidence and satisfaction" (p. 11).

The **historical literacy** component of civic education pertains to learning the history of one's nation and how it has shaped what the country looks like today. This often includes learning about the major events and processes that have taken place in the history of one's country, such as those that shaped the birth of the nation and led to the development of the particular political system presently in place (Gagnon, 1996, p. 242). Historical literacy also encompasses learning about the diverse groups that have come to make up the nation over time, such as different ethnic and/or religious groups. Another important part of historical literacy is learning to seek out multiple interpretations of key historical events and time periods from minority and majority groups in one's society. Then, one should strive to understand history from these various viewpoints (Virta, 2007, p. 19).

In many schools, historical literacy is fostered through history or social studies curricula, while in some cases it is integrated across the curriculum even more broadly using thematic units about particular historical events or time periods. However, As Zinn (2005), Marciano (1997) and others have pointed out, the formal history curricula taught in schools is shaped to fit the narrative that those in power feel most comfortable with. Therefore, there are often sizable omissions. The motivating factors leading to wars or other major historical events are often selectively chosen to fit with the narrative that the most powerful people in society approve of being taught. Historical events and particular historical figures may be left out. Thus, it is important to continue cultivating one's historical literacy beyond the school curriculum.

Gagnon (1996) is one of several scholars who has emphasized that developing people's

historical literacy is an essential part of their civic education. In fact, he posits that without historical literacy, other areas of civic education cannot be mastered. “Civics and government courses are undeniably useful, but only when added to the student’s confrontation of reality: What has happened to people, how and why? Historical knowledge is the precondition for political intelligence” (p. 242). Furthermore, he notes that people should become historically literate in regards to three ‘realities’—their national history, the history of their world region as well as world history more broadly. “To leave out any of these realities is to leave citizens civically ill-educated, unfree to make informed choices about public life” (p. 242).

**Participatory citizenship education** consists of training students to put their civic knowledge and skills into action. Many scholars, such as Kymlicka (2003, p. 50), claim that it is not enough for people to merely learn how to be a good citizen in theory. He argues that civic education is incomplete if individuals are not mobilized to actively fulfill their citizenship responsibilities. For instance, instead of just being aware of political candidates and policy proposals, individuals should be encouraged to participate in this process by voting, running for public office, volunteering for political campaigns or lobbying candidates to take a public stand on issues they consider important (Walker, 2002, p. 184). Participatory citizenship can involve advocating for an expansion of the rights the government grants to citizens. Mohan and Hickey (2004) point out that this form of participatory citizenship opens up the possibility that “citizenship can be claimed ‘from below’ through [citizens’] own efforts in organized struggles, rather than waiting for it to be conferred ‘from above’” (p. 67). However, participatory citizenship can take many other forms, including those that are less overtly political. For example, participatory citizenship could include encouraging people to donate money to or volunteer at local organizations tackling social or environmental issues (Lister, 1997, p. 33-34).

Often, schools’ formal civics curriculum includes an element that focuses specifically on this participatory aspect of civic education. In practice, this could involve in-class activities to stoke students’ motivation and drive to engage actively in their citizenship responsibilities. It could also include outside-class activities where students have the opportunity to pick up litter at a local park, volunteer at a local organization or participate actively as citizens in other ways. In

some cases, schools require students to engage in ‘service learning,’ which involves spending a certain number of hours engaged in active, participatory citizenship on their own time, which is then documented for course credit (Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999; Walker, 2002, p. 184). In short, this component of civic education is designed to get students to become active citizens, as opposed to passive citizens.

**Moral education** is “concerned with character and molding a student into becoming a good person” (Chi-Hou, 2004, p.561). The field of moral education was primarily understood to mean religious education until the early 1900’s, when Émile Durkheim (1961) delivered a series of lectures advocating that moral education could be taught from a secular perspective. Kohlberg (1967) built on this idea, positing that every person has a sense of morality that can be cultivated over time and that this was separate from a person’s religious beliefs and practices. He stated that “the goal of moral education is the stimulation of the 'natural' development of the individual child’s own moral judgment to control his behavior” (p. 189). Also commonly referred to as ‘values education’ and/or ‘character education,’ today the term ‘moral education’ is used to refer to both religious and non-religious forms of moral teaching.

While the field of moral education developed separately from the field of civic education, these two fields have become increasingly intertwined—both in schools and in the academic literature. For instance, for over a decade Macau and Taiwan have explicitly tied these two topics together, by establishing school subjects entitled ‘Moral and Civic Education’ and ‘Civics and Morality’ respectively (Chi-Hou, 2004, p. 561; Morris & Cogan, 2001, p. 110). Similarly, Cambodia now has a subject in government schools, entitled ‘Civics & Morals’ (Tan, 2008, p. 560). In 2008 Harvard University established the Civic and Moral Education Initiative, a community of scholars who collaborate to advance research in these areas (Nash, 2008). These topics are frequently linked together because a person’s morality—the values they hold and their sense of what is ‘right’ and wrong—shapes what type of citizen they are and will continue to be throughout their lives. A person’s morality has enormous implications for whether or not they are able to perform their role as a ‘citizen,’ as it is defined in their local context. Thus, moral education is a key component of civic education.

Morals and values cultivated in civic education programs often include those that are essential to establishing an environment of civility when citizens interact with one another, such as honesty, respect, tolerance, discipline and hard work (Gopinathan, 1980; Wynne, 1989). Students are also taught 'good' moral habits such as respecting elders, being obedient and abiding by laws (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004, p. 240). Other values commonly advocated in civic education programs include those that are essential to cultivating citizens' sense of patriotism. These often include loyalty to one's country and pride in the country's military strength. It can encompass a willingness to defend actions taken by the government of one's country as well as a sense of loyalty to the set of ideals one's government espouses, be they democratic, socialist, authoritarian or other (Thomas, 1993, p. 2-3).

Nearly all scholars agree that moral development is an important aspect of civic education. For instance, Althof and Berkowitz (2006) posit that citizenship education and moral education are eternally intertwined for one central reason. "Societies need moral members. They need children to develop into moral adults. It is not enough for a society to be populated with benign hedonists, as a truly civil society needs citizens to care about the general welfare and those who cannot advocate for themselves" (p. 496).

However, many note key drawbacks of civic education programs that focus largely or entirely on moral education. They argue that cultivating certain values in youth, such as obedience and unquestioning patriotism, can hinder other aspects of civic education that these scholars believe are crucial such as the ability to critique society. For example, in Singapore "the model of the ideal citizen that is promoted [in and outside of schools] is one with strong elements of moral virtue, and service to society and country, but it is also one that is passive and unempowered" (Han, 2009, p. 117). In China, "one of the Party's very first educational initiatives following the crushing of the Student Movement of 1989 (seen as a consequence of moral breakdown) was to convene a 'National Morality Conference' in 1990" (Vickers, 2009, p. 67). Through this action the Chinese government hoped that a stronger focus on moral education would increase students' sense of loyalty and obedience to the government and discourage them from voicing their critiques of government policies. Furthermore, in their

study using data from the 1971 international IEA civic education study, Torney-Purta and Schwille (1986) found that in civic education programs, “stress on patriotism may actually harm support for civil liberties” (p. 35).

However, not all forms of moral education hinder critical thought. On the contrary, in many respects, morality plays a key role in enabling people to grapple with civic issues that require extensive critical thinking skills. Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, and Stephens (2010) highlight a number of examples in which this is the case.

“We have referred to both *moral* and *civic* values, development, and education. We do so to underscore the point that the moral and the civic are inseparable... The problems that confront civically engaged citizens always include strong moral themes. These include fair access to resources such as housing, the obligation to consider future generations in making environmental policy, and the need to take into account the conflicting claims of multiple stakeholders in community decision-making. No issue involving these themes can be adequately resolved without a consideration of moral questions and values” (p. 15-16, emphasis in original).

Thus, while moral education is a field unto itself, it is also a crucial component of civic education.

**Multicultural education** is a form of civic education that provides the tools to recognize and respect people from varied backgrounds, while also establishing a sense of unity in that diversity. As James Banks (2007) notes, through multicultural education, “students acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to participate in cross-cultural interactions and in personal, social, and civic action” (p. viii). Like the field of moral education, the field of multicultural education developed separately from civic education. However, scholars have argued that multicultural education and civic education “are not two things but two aspects of the same thing” (Parker, 2003, p. xviii). Multicultural education is recognized as essential to civic education in many contexts, as all societies have diversity in some form, be it racial, socio-economic, linguistic or other. Referring to the importance of having multicultural education make up a prominent part of civic education curricula, Parker (2003) posits that “the central citizenship question of our time [is] *How can we live together justly, in ways that are mutually satisfying, and which leave our differences, both individual and group, intact and our multiple*

*identities recognized”* (p.20, emphasis in original).

Within the civic education literature, considerable attention has been paid to resolving the tension between the existence of diversity in society and the need for everyone to be united as citizens. Rosaldo (1994) explores this issue through the lens of ‘cultural citizenship,’ which he defines as “the right to be different and to belong in a participatory democratic sense” (p. 402). Rosaldo suggests that since classrooms are becoming more diverse and ‘The Other’ is beginning to disappear, civic educators and the population as a whole should cease to see diversity as a threat and expand their concept of ‘citizen’ to include “once-excluded and now- ‘new’ citizen-subjects who demand recognition as full citizens”(p. 403). Amy Gutmann (1995) also advocates for civic education that is inclusive of all groups and believes that diversity is an essential strength in a democracy. In fact, she believes that “civic education is repressive when it fails to teach appreciation and respect for the positive contributions by minorities to a society's common culture” (p. 2). Thus, while neither field subsumes the other, clearly, there is an important intersection between civic and multicultural education.

**Human rights education** encompasses teaching of the content of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as the reasons behind the establishment of this document and how this set of rights shapes contemporary societies across the globe (Lohrenscheit, 2002, p. 175). The right to freedom of opinion and expression, the right to peaceful assembly, the right to freedom of religion and the right to education are just a small handful of the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN General Assembly, 1948). Tibbitts (2002) posits that the aim of human rights education is “to strengthen respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and to ensure that respect in all societies” (p. 160). Human rights education is a form of civic education in that it provides a widely accepted, international standard for the rights governments should provide to their citizens. It “links each nations’ own experience with international reference points,” enabling comparison of citizenship rights between countries (J. P. Martin, 1997, p. 601).

Human rights education programs have been implemented in over 100 countries and it has been integrated into the formal school curricula in several countries, including Albania,

Australia, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Norway, the United Kingdom, as well as the Ukraine (Koenig, 1997, p. xv; Tibbitts & Fernekes, 2011, p. 89). Programs that teach this component of civic education often encourage people to identify gaps in the rights they enjoy as citizens in their society and urge them to engage in advocacy work to push for these gaps to be addressed. These gaps could be rights that are not conferred on the population as a whole, or they could be rights that are enjoyed by some groups in society, while they are denied to other groups. J. P. Martin (1997) notes, “incorporating human rights into civic education brings an emphasis on the individual citizen’s rights and claims against society, emphasizing the fact that no individual citizen or group of citizens should experience discrimination and that there are restrictions on the powers of government” (p. 601). In this way, human rights education is a process of citizen empowerment (Meintjes, 1997).

It is important to note that while the six elements of citizenship education described here appear in civic education programs most often, they are not present in all civic education curricula. When one or more of them do appear, the relative emphasis on each component varies between settings. In some places, civic education may be made up predominantly by moral education and historical literacy, while in another country the strongest emphasis may be on political literacy and participatory citizenship. In this way, each context has its own unique blend of civic education components.

Furthermore, I would like to emphasize that this is far from an exhaustive list. Indeed, not only are there other, less widely used civic education components documented in the academic literature, I anticipate that there are many more civic education components that have yet to be documented. In fact, due to the worldwide variation, it would be exceedingly difficult to map all possible topics that could be considered civic education across the globe. In this dissertation I will attempt to map out what civic education consists of in Burmese primary schools. As I discuss my findings I will note which of these popular categories of civic education are prominent in the Burmese context. I will also discuss the civic education topics emphasized in Burma that fall outside this list of internationally common components.

*Frameworks for understanding citizenship*

Just as there are a variety of different components that can make up a civic education curriculum, researchers from various scholarly traditions have analyzed citizenship education using a variety of different frameworks. Associated with the scholarly approach they are coming from, policy makers, educators, academic researchers and others hold certain assumptions about how civic education is, or should be, conveyed to students, and this shapes how civic education is taught and researched. Here, I will outline four frameworks often employed to understand citizenship education: political socialization, cognitive development theory, moral education and transformative learning theory.

Originating from the field of political science, **political socialization** is one of the most prominent frameworks used to understand how civic education takes place. From this perspective, civic education is a life-long process that begins in early childhood, in which people gradually absorb the civic values, knowledge and skills that make up the political culture in their society. In other words, political socialization is the idea that “people are inducted into [political culture] just as they are socialized into nonpolitical roles and social systems” (Almond & Verba, 1963, p. 13). Therefore, from the point of view of this scholarly tradition, civic education doesn’t only occur through formal learning at school, it also comes from implicit and explicit civic messages individuals receive about the meaning of ‘good citizenship’ from media and in everyday settings from their friends and coworkers, their parents as well as other peers and authority figures. As such, civic education is ever-present in all societies.

Academic scholarship that approaches civic education from a political socialization perspective stretches back to Merriam’s (1931) comparative study of civic education in the 1920s and 1930s in eight countries—England, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Austria-Hungary, Russia and the United States. However, political socialization became more well-known several decades later, after the publication of scholarship from now prominent researchers, Hyman (1959) and Almond and Verba (1963).

Political socialization is most often used to analyze and discuss how people gain political literacy. However, it can also be used to understand how people acquire any aspect of civic education—from human rights education to moral education—since all civic education



components are all ultimately interconnected to people's political knowledge, values and skills. For example, a person's views on human rights issues in their country are intricately tied to their attitude towards the government in power. Similarly, a person's moral perspectives and sense of right and wrong can be used to judge the adequacy of the system of government in place in one's country. Thus, the concept of political socialization is relevant to all components of civic education. Greenstein (1968), a prominent scholar from the political socialization tradition, emphasizes this point, noting that the information learned through political socialization encompasses the many aspects of political literacy as well as topics that are not obviously political. "Political socialization is... all political learning, formal and informal, deliberate and unplanned, at every stage of the life cycle, including not only explicitly political learning but also nominally nonpolitical learning that affects political behavior such as the learning of politically relevant personality characteristics" (p. 155).

Originating from the field of psychology, **cognitive development theory** is another framework scholars use to understand how people learn civic values, knowledge and skills. Scholars who come from this perspective believe that "young people—often in dialogue with others—actively construct meaning of the political realm" (Hahn, 1998, p. 20). This perspective contrasts with that of political socialization, in that within cognitive development theory youth are viewed as actively engaging with the information proposed by socialization agents such as family, teachers, media and others. They connect new learning to prior knowledge and often integrate this knowledge within their current understandings. Furthermore, when new information doesn't fit with existing knowledge, individuals may reassess and potentially change their mental models. Scholars who work from this perspective include Coles (1986), Connell (1974) as well as Haste and Torney-Purta (1992).

These scholars critique the political socialization approach for being "limited by its tendency to assume that young people passively receive messages from their environment" (Hahn, 1998, p. xi). Judith Torney-Purta (2000) elaborates further on this critique. "Few researchers [from the political socialization perspective] considered that the messages of these [socialization] agents might contradict each other or investigated how the young person's own cognitive structures or

affective predispositions influenced how an agent's message was interpreted" (p. 88-89). Cognitive development theory leaves open the possibility that individuals' civic values, knowledge and skills could continuously change throughout their lives. Furthermore, this framework can be used to understand all aspects of civic education, since from this perspective, people actively construct meaning in relation to all civics topics, from multicultural education to political literacy and beyond.

Not only is **moral education** a common component of civic education curricula, as mentioned in the section above, it is also a field of study that contains a number of different perspectives scholars have drawn on to understand and analyze civic education. The most prominent of these perspectives include character education, values clarification and moral development theory.

First popular in the 1930s, character education emphasizes "the teaching of specific virtues and the cultivation of good conduct" (Mclellan, 1999, p. 89). From the character education perspective, youth should be taught to adhere to a fixed set of civic and moral virtues such as honesty, generosity, kindness and bravery (Mclellan, 1999, p. 90). Some educators implement this form of moral education using a rote memorization approach, where students are asked to recite texts that list or extol the benefits of a particular set of morals. This form of moral education is also implemented by setting and enforcing a set of pre-written rules (Hamm, 1977). Starting in the 1960s it became more common for educators to use other pedagogical techniques to convey character education, such as discussion, role-plays and case studies (Mclellan, 1999, p. 90).

In contrast to character education, the values clarification perspective posits that no fixed list of morals could be sufficient to enable individuals to navigate the diverse civic and moral quandaries they come upon in their life. This is because what qualifies as 'good' morals can differ substantially over time as well as across communities and individuals. Thus, appropriate application of civic and moral virtues is highly situational. Adherents to the values clarification perspective believe youth should develop their own list of civic and moral virtues that they will strive to apply in their own lives. Educators support this process by cultivating youths' moral

reasoning skills through dialogue and interactive activities that help students ‘clarify’ the values they consider most important. Furthermore, youth are encouraged to periodically reassess the civic and moral values they choose to follow, as their relevance may change over time (McLellan, 1999p. 79).

Moral development theory is a third moral education-related framework that scholars have used to understand citizenship education. Originating from the field of psychology and attributed largely to Lawrence Kohlberg (1984), moral development theory has been used to understand how people acquire the moral and value-oriented aspects of civic education. It is similar to cognitive development theory in that it is composed of a series of stages and it presupposes that instead of passively absorbing civic messages, people actively grapple with them. Kohlberg posits that individuals develop morally as a result of coming upon situations that cannot be accommodated by their thinking at their current level of moral development. These experiences cause individuals to change the way they think, which propels them to a higher level of moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1984).

**Transformative learning theory** is another scholarly approach one can take to understand and/or implement civic education. It is the concept that individuals can, and should, be given the skills to critically reflect on their own views and assumptions, so that they can recognize and challenge unjust political and social issues in their society. Mezirow (2000) defines it as a “process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide actions” (p. 7). As a result of such critical reflection, people gain the ability to recognize widespread bias in society, for example, toward certain groups such as women or people of a particular race, ethnicity or socio-economic status.

Transformative learning theory is closely linked to the concept of critical pedagogy, which posits that individuals should be educated using methods that encourage them to question elements of their environment, instead of being taught to accept the social, economic and political realities as established and unchangeable. Scholars of critical pedagogy, such as Paulo Freire

(1990), Henry Giroux (1980), Donaldo Macedo (1993) and others criticize formal schooling the world over for largely failing to empower students to see the exploitative reality of society. They assert that schooling has become complicit in the maintenance of current power relations between groups that differ in terms of social class, race, gender and sexual orientation. For instance, Paulo Freire (1990) remarks on the passive role students have in formal schooling, noting that schools turn students “into ‘containers,’ into ‘receptacles’ to be ‘filled’ by the teacher” (p. 12). Similarly, Macedo (1993) criticizes schools in the United States for operating “under a pedagogy that perpetuates the inability to think critically” and that formal education “sets the stage for the anesthetization of the mind” (p. 16).

Like many scholars, Dam and Volman (2004) argue that critical thinking is “a crucial aspect of the competence citizens need to participate in society” and therefore must be included in civic education programs (p. 359). Henry Giroux (1980) acknowledges the grave difficulty of integrating truly transformative learning into formal civics curricula, but then gives a particularly impassioned plea for educators to strive for this goal.

Students must be taught to think critically...That is, rather than being enslaved to the concrete, to the facts, they must learn to move beyond viewing issues in isolation. Facts, concepts, issues, and ideas must be seen within the network of connections that give them meaning ... The task of developing a mode of citizenship education that speaks to this challenge appears awesome. But when one looks at the consequences of not meeting this challenge, there appears the possibility of a barbarism so dreadful that we can do nothing less than act as quickly and thoughtfully as possible (Giroux, 1980, p. 358-360).

Without the ability to critique society, people are unable to accurately assess what to advocate for, to make their community and nation a better place. In contrast, equipped with critical thinking skills, people would be able to practice what Westheimer and Kahne (2004) refer to as ‘justice-oriented citizenship,’ in which they can identify and begin to rectify inequality and other forms of injustice in society.

Any aspect of civic education can be taught from the perspective of transformative learning theory. For instance, there is ample research that explores how participatory civic education is often taught using a transformative learning theory approach (Strain, 2006). In addition,

Ukpokodu (2009) examined how a university in the mid-western United States taught a multicultural education course using a transformative learning approach which equipped students with the skills to recognize practices in their society that implicitly discount the importance of minority groups (p. 6-7). Essentially, teaching any civic education component using a transformative learning approach can be achieved by designing activities that encourage students to think critically about the content being taught and challenge their existing views and underlying assumptions about these topics.

The frameworks used to understand civic education that I have described here are some of the most common in the academic literature, but this is by no means an exhaustive list. For example, Levinson (2011) notes the important contributions anthropology has made to elucidating aspects of civic education and he makes the case that these anthropological frameworks are poised to make an even bigger impact on civic education research as they become more developed.

For the purposes of this dissertation study I do not examine civic education in Burma from any one of the frameworks mentioned above. Instead, I attempt to remain as open as possible to understanding all the various ways that civic education content is conveyed to students in Burmese government schools. While reviewing my key findings, I make note of instances where educators appear to implicitly view civic education through one or more of the scholarly frameworks mentioned above.

#### *‘Civic education’ and ‘education for democracy’: Confluence in terms*

Before outlining the definition of civic education that I use for this study, it is first important to point out a key, overarching characteristic of the existing civic education literature that stands in contrast to how I conceptualize this concept. Just as the term ‘citizenship’ is commonly equated with ‘citizenship in a democracy’ throughout the majority of academic literature, the terms ‘civic education’ and ‘citizenship education’ have become virtually synonymous with ‘education for democracy.’ For instance, the three international IEA civic education studies, designed to ascertain the civic education of youth around the globe, have focused primarily on

students' knowledge, skills and values related to democracy and democratic institutions (Schulz et al., 2010, p. 21; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001, p. 9, 14). The development of the student assessments upon which the results of the IEA studies are based began with consulting "what country experts considered 14-year-old students should know about a number of topics related to democratic institutions and citizenship, including elections, individual rights, national identity, political participation and respect for ethnic and political diversity" (Torney-Purta et al., 2001, p. 9). Thus, from their very beginning, these studies have been oriented towards assessing democratic civic education, as opposed to civic education in a broader sense.

This assumption that 'civic education' and 'democratic civic education' are one and the same is also common in much smaller studies. In recent research into civic education in the Ukraine, the author implies these terms are synonymous when he states the following. "For it to be effective, civic education must capture the principles of democracy within the context of the particular country where it is to be implemented... at its core, civic education is democratic political socialization of young people" (Craddock, 2007, p. 127). In addition, most of the edited volumes pertaining to civic education are dedicated wholly to exploring this topic in its democratic forms, such as Stevick and Levinson's (2007) *Reimagining civic education: How diverse societies form democratic citizens*, as well as the *SAGE Handbook of education for citizenship and democracy* (Davies, Hahn, & Arthur, 2008).

Occasionally, scholars make passing reference to the existence of non-democratic forms of civic education, but they rarely elaborate on what these alternative forms might consist of. For instance, while Sim and Print (2005) focus on democratically-oriented citizenship education in Singapore, they do note that "Citizenship education has been, in some form, an overarching goal of public schooling in every society... And while citizenship education takes many forms, there is a growing trend across the world that it is based upon the concepts, processes and values of education for democratic citizenship" (p. 58).

The scholars who do examine forms of civic education that are not oriented towards democracy or democratic values seem to shy away from using the terms 'civic' or 'citizenship education' to

describe these educational practices. This may suggest that they do not feel entirely comfortable placing the inculcation of non-democratic values and skills into the category of 'civic education.' Therefore, they reserve this term solely for democratic civic education. For example, while John Lott's (1999) article "Public schooling, indoctrination, and totalitarianism," grapples with citizenship education issues under totalitarian governments, the term 'citizenship education' is not used and no civic education literature is referenced. Similarly, Kim and Kim's (2005) book, *Human remolding in North Korea: A social history of education*, details the North Korean government's efforts to shape the population's understanding of 'good citizenship' through the government school curriculum. However, the authors choose not to refer to these issues as 'civic' or 'citizenship education.' Instead they frame this practice as 'political socialization' and, here again, the authors don't bring their findings into conversation with other civic education literature (p. 2-4).

In addition, John Marciano (1997), who explores various ways schools in the United States engage in non-democratic civic education, refrains from identifying these practices as 'civic education.' Instead, when he explains how schools encourage youth to be blindly patriotic and deprive youth of the skills they need to critically reflect on the actions of the U.S. Government, he refers to it as 'civic illiteracy.' He contrasts this with 'civic literacy,' which Marciano defines as "the ability to think critically and objectively about the nation's fundamental premises and practices" (p. 1). So, he is suggesting that to have absorbed democratic civic education messages, such as the importance of critical thinking, is to have attained civic *literacy*, while if one absorbs non-democratic forms of civic education, one remains in a state of civic *illiteracy*.

Moreover, much of Lall & Vickers' (2009) edited volume, *Education as a Political Tool in Asia*, is dedicated to civic education issues. The compilation includes case studies that showcase the teaching of democratically-oriented civic values, knowledge and skills as well as those designed to shape civic life in non-democratic settings. It is interesting to note that not only is civic education not referred to in the title of the volume, it is almost entirely absent from the body of the book. As in the title, the phrase 'education as a political tool' is used where they could've used the terms 'civic' or 'citizenship education.' For instance, the preface states, "This book

offers a fresh and comparative approach in questioning what education is being used for...Education has been used as a political tool throughout the ages and across the whole world to define national identity and underlie the political rationale of regimes” (Lall & Vickers, 2009, p. i). Clearly, one is hard-pressed to find scholarly articles or books that provide an in-depth examination of a non-democratic form of civic education, which refers to it in these explicit terms. As such, findings pertaining to citizenship education in non-democratic settings have rarely been brought into conversation with the larger body of democratic civic education scholarship.

Furthermore, the assumption that ‘civic education’ corresponds only to democratic knowledge, values and skills is not confined solely to the academic literature. This was a belief I encountered occasionally in the field while conducting this study. When speaking to Burmese scholars and educators and mentioning that the subject of my dissertation is ‘civic education in contemporary Burma,’ a few of them responded with an apologetic tone, noting that Burma doesn’t have any civic education. Some would explain further, noting that Burma’s schools don’t have a ‘civics’ subject in the curriculum and that the content for the existing subjects don’t include topics such as human rights, current events or critical reflection on contemporary or historical Burmese society. However, it is important to note that this was not a universally shared perspective. In fact, this perspective was largely limited to those who were familiar with how the term ‘civic education’ is commonly used in English. In contrast, many other Burmese educators indicated that, in their view, civic education makes up large portions of the Burmese government curriculum.

This suggests that while the type of citizenship education going on in Burma’s schools may not match the type that is advocated in many democratic nations, these omissions do not indicate a lack of citizenship education. Like in all nations, in Burmese government schools there are ample messages being communicated to students about what ‘good citizenship’ consists of and how they should strive to achieve it.

### **The case for a broader interpretation of ‘citizenship education’**



I wholeheartedly agree that democratic citizenship is an important and legitimate form of citizenship and I agree that education for democracy is a form of civic education. However, I do not believe 'citizenship' and 'citizenship education' come only in democratic forms. Although it dominates in popular parlance and in the academic literature, democratic citizenship is just one form of citizenship, just as democratic civic education is just one form of civic education. Schools in both democratic and non-democratic contexts teach civic values, skills and knowledge through implicit and/or explicit means. Torney-Purta and Schwille (1986) note, "education by its very nature implies the taking of stands laden with values. Teachers consider some things worth learning and others not, some student behaviors constructive and others not" (p. 31).

I propose that civic education becomes *democratic* civic education when it is structured and delivered in a way that promotes the skills, values and knowledge relevant to supporting a democratic political system. In addition, I propose equivalent forms of civic education that support civic engagement that is appropriate to other political contexts. For instance, in Burma, a nation that has been under authoritarian military rule, we may find 'authoritarian civic education.' However, it is also important to bear in mind that the values, knowledge and skills necessary for life under one political system, often overlaps with those needed to live under others.

Even the widely accepted goals—fostering honesty, good-neighborliness, and so on—are not inherently about democracy. Indeed, government leaders in a totalitarian regime would be as delighted as leaders in a democracy if their young citizens learned the lessons put forward by many of the proponents of personally responsible citizenship (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004, p. 244).

In addition, simply because the civic education is taking place in a certain political environment, does not necessarily mean that the civic education content supports the political system in place. For instance, Westheimer and Kahne (2004) posit that some variations of civic education implemented in U.S. schools seek to instill in students the values of "obedience and patriotism that are...at odds with democratic goals" (p. 244). Similarly, in some cases, one may find elements of democratic civic education in authoritarian societies, such as critical thinking or

deliberative debate. This may particularly be the case when one takes into account civic education messages in the informal and hidden curriculum, including those that may not be condoned by the government. For example, while Burma is ruled by an authoritarian military regime, it is possible that the civic education in government schools is not wholly authoritarian in nature. There may also be democratic or other forms of civic education taking place in Burma's classrooms.

Civic education has been consistently portrayed as a social 'good' that develops 'good' citizens with 'good' values. Therefore, for those of us who believe that democracy is the most fair and just form of government that has been developed so far, the notion of 'authoritarian civic education' may seem sinister and out of place within the body of civic education literature. However, while I share the view that democracy is a far more just form of government than authoritarianism, I would argue that viewing 'civic education' and 'democratic civic education' as wholly synonymous is a narrow view tied to one particular political context. It is ethnocentric in that it holds democratic values as a standard that all civic education must meet. Should civic education cease to be called such if it does not conform to the ideals and values of Western democracies? Have Western democracies claimed civic education for themselves by defining it as only that which aligns with what its own citizens consider to be morally right? With this dissertation study I hope to challenge this assumption by using a much broader definition of civic education than that which is typically proposed or assumed in the academic literature.

Furthermore, we must bear in mind that civic education is not absent when a formal civics subject is missing from the curriculum. While civic education may be most visible when it is explicitly included in official government documents such as textbooks, students absorb civic knowledge, skills and attitudes from a multiplicity of sources. For example, just within the school itself, students' civic education likely comes from their interactions with both their peers and teachers as well as with other authority figures. Their observations of teachers' interactions with each other are another source of students' civic education, as are teachers' interactions with other students and with the school principal.

Bearing in mind the countless possible permutations of 'civic education,' how can we define

this term? I consider the terms ‘civic education’ and ‘citizenship education’ to be synonymous, and I propose the following definition.

**Civic education and citizenship education** — all forms of education, formal and non-formal, intended and unintended, that develop values, knowledge and/or skills necessary to engage in society.

The values, knowledge and skills that qualify as ‘necessary to engage in society’ will vary according to the socio-cultural and political context in which the civic education is taking place. Using such a broad conceptualization of this term enables this study to examine a wide range of forms of civic education, from democratic civic education to authoritarian civic education and beyond. It enables me to be open to the variety of forms citizenship may take in the context of Burma and helps me avoid prescribing what form(s) of citizenship education I expect to find there, before conducting the necessary research.

### **Theoretical Framework: A socio-cultural approach to policy**

I have chosen Sutton and Levinson’s (2001) concept of ‘policy as practice’ as the overarching theoretical framework guiding this dissertation study, which the authors further elaborate on in Levinson et al. (2009). Policy is often thought of as static, authoritative written text that dictates rules people must adhere to. The ‘policy as practice’ framework contrasts with this traditional view by framing policymaking as an ongoing, dynamic process that both shapes and is shaped by all policy actors, including those who initially develop the policy and those who implement it. Policymaking doesn’t stop with the ‘completion’ of a written text, it continues as people engage with the policy in various ways. Policy actors reinforce it, reinterpret it, struggle against it and so on. In every case, their actions are part of the policy-making and policy-shaping process.

This is a more democratic conceptualization of policy that recognizes the role that all policy actors play, continuously making and remaking policy throughout its period of implementation. While formal, written policy is often set by the most powerful in society, the ‘policy as practice’ framework emphasizes that they do not hold a total monopoly over the creation of policy. Viewing policy through this framework recognizes the agency of policy actors, such as Burmese teachers, and gives legitimacy to their perspectives and choices. While the more traditional

view of policy encourages one to judge what policy actors do primarily based on whether it conforms to the written policy, the 'policy as practice' view encourages more reflection on how and why policy actors interact with and implement policy in the way that they do. There is a greater focus on understanding and contextualizing policy actors' choices (Levinson et al., 2009, p. 769-770).

The 'policy as practice' framework is particularly salient in the context of Burma, where the government has made very little written education policy publically available to Burmese government schoolteachers, school administrators, or others. Therefore, much of the policy being used to guide civic education in Burmese government schools is policy *in practice*. Based on relatively little written civic education policy from official government sources, Burmese educators are interpreting and extrapolating the information they need to implement civic education in their own classrooms. By doing this, the Burmese teachers are continuing the policymaking process, adding details and adaptations they consider necessary for their particular students and classroom environment. Therefore, although a study of Burmese civic education policy that looks solely at the static texts of official policy documents would be important and revealing, conducting an analysis using the 'policy as practice' framework provides a much fuller, more complete picture of the civic education policy being made and remade in schools across Burma. This is one of the primary reasons I have chosen to examine Burma's civic education policy using the 'policy as practice' framework.

Throughout this dissertation study, I draw on a number of Sutton and Levinson's (2001) key terms and concepts, which add further detail to their 'policy as practice' framework. For one, these scholars draw a distinction between 'authorized' and 'unauthorized' policy. They posit that policy is authorized when it originates from an official, recognized policy-making authority such as a ministry of education, a local education association or a school's administrative council. Policy is unauthorized when it originates from an individual or group that has not been officially tasked with setting policy and which is not endorsed by an official, recognized policy-making authority (p. 2). For example, Burmese schoolteachers who are tasked solely with implementing policy as it is written, create 'unauthorized' policy when they make significant

adaptations to the policy as they implement it.

‘Policy appropriation’ is another central concept within the ‘policy as practice’ framework, which Levinson et al. (2009) describe as the “creative interpretive practice” that all people necessarily perform as they operationalize policy (p. 768). Appropriation “highlights the way creative agents ‘take in’ elements of policy, thereby incorporating these discursive and institutional resources into their own schemes of interest, motivation, and action” (Sutton & Levinson, 2001, p. 3). In other words, policy actors are never passive purveyors of policy. Even when attempting to faithfully implement authorized policy, they must first seek to understand the policy as it was originally intended. To do this, they make sense of the policy through their own worldview and in relation to their own life experiences. Due to variations in worldviews and experiences between individuals, this results in various interpretations of the policy that differ from one another, at least slightly. Policy actors then critically engage with their understanding of the policy, grappling with whether and how best to implement it in their particular setting. This results in a range of implementation configurations that may differ widely across a nation, a community or even within the same school.

As policy is often implemented iteratively over time, policy actors often take into account their past experience implementing a policy as they critically reflect on whether and how to implement that policy in the future. Their experience may cause them to implement it differently than they previously did, or it may encourage them to implement the policy repeatedly in a similar way. In some cases, policy actors may also revisit the official policy text, or they may receive new authorized policy, in which case the policy appropriation process would begin anew. Below is a graphic that illustrates these stages of the policy appropriation process and notes the distinction between ‘authorized’ and ‘unauthorized’ policy.

# Policy as Practice Framework



As teachers engage in policy appropriation while implementing policy iteratively over time, new implementation patterns emerge. Once these patterns of altered practices are identified and made explicit, either verbally, in writing or in the mind of the teacher, the policy is, in a sense, remade anew. In this way, policies are continuously remade throughout their period of implementation, as teachers “‘make’ policy through practice” (Sutton & Levinson, 2001, p. 4).

I also draw on Levinson et al.’s (2009) view that policy is ‘a practice of power’(p. 767). However, I differ with the authors on one minor point. The authors posit that policy is a form of power

and that each time policy is made and enacted it exerts power over others. I agree that there are many cases in which policy is used to wield power. Indeed, in the Burma context, policy is used in this way a great deal of the time. However, I do not believe policy is a form of power in and of itself, since there are cases where policy does not exert power over others. For example, if a policy is mutually agreed upon as legitimate and feasible and all policy actors are given the opportunity to rationally discuss the policy as well as challenge and change it as needed, then the policy is not exerting power over the policy actors. Therefore, instead of viewing policy as a form of power, I believe policy is a tool through which power can be, and is often, wielded.

I concur with Levinson et al. (2009) on all other points they make regarding policy's relationship with power. For instance, they state that by using policy, people can exercise power over others, conditioning their actions and controlling them to various extents. They posit that policy can serve to exacerbate and entrench inequality and power imbalances since "policy, even in the most apparently democratic polity or institution, codifies and extends the interests of those who disproportionately wield power" (p. 769).

These characteristics of policy are highly relevant to the Burma context where many government schoolteachers expressed that they felt their choices and actions were strictly controlled and confined by government policies. In many cases teachers felt policies were unjust or unfeasible, but they felt a great amount of pressure to implement them as the government instructed.<sup>9</sup> Several teachers expressed fearing that not doing so would result in severe punishment, such as being fired from their teaching position.<sup>10</sup> These teachers stated that they did not know of a venue where they could have an open, rational discussion about the legitimacy and feasibility of such policies with government officials, without fear of reprisal. Therefore, it is clear that the relationship between power and policy is tremendously important to fully understand civic education policy in Burmese government primary schools.

While all scholarly traditions and approaches to policy research inform and enrich our understanding of policy, using the 'policy as practice' framework is particularly appropriate in

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<sup>9</sup> 11 participants expressed this.

<sup>10</sup> 10 participants expressed this.

the case of Burma, for the reasons noted throughout this section. Using the ‘policy as practice’ framework to design and carry out this dissertation study, I have chosen to analyze the Burmese government’s primary level reading textbooks, often referred to as the ‘Myanmar readers,’ as they are the most extensive and most ubiquitous source of authorized policy available to Burmese educators. To examine how teachers appropriate this civic education policy as they implement it in their own classrooms, I chose to conduct and analyze in-depth, ethnographic interviews with teachers and students with extensive experience in Burmese government primary schools. I provide further detail about these sources in the methodology chapter of this dissertation.

### **Textbooks as curriculum policy**

As noted above, for this dissertation study, I analyze government reading textbooks as the primary source of Burma’s authorized civic education policy. While textbooks are an important source of policy, they may not be the first type of document that comes to mind when one thinks of traditional written education policy. Policy has been traditionally thought of as a set of laws or guidelines, often in written form, designed to condition people’s actions. Scholars such as Lasswell and Lerner (1965), R. Porter and Hicks (1995) and many others have adhered to this traditional definition. Policy documents typically associated with the school environment include lists of school rules and discipline procedures, teacher evaluation methods as well as student assessment and grading practices.

Textbooks differ from these other policy documents in that they are primarily thought to convey curriculum content to students and, indeed, that is one of their key functions. However, it is not their only function. Furthermore, most often textbooks contain little, if any, bulleted lists of policies similar to the format of school rules or discipline procedures. Instead, the curriculum content in textbooks—the table of contents, the descriptions of historical events or scientific concepts—*is* the policy, despite the fact that it is packaged in a different format.

A number of scholars have noted how textbooks are an essential source of policy. Cohen and Ball (1990) describe national contexts where educational authorities expect textbooks to be



used as a virtual script for what occurs in the classroom. In these cases, textbooks become a highly detailed policy document guiding teachers through each and every class period. The educational environments Cohen and Ball describe are very similar to the context of Burmese government schools.

In some nations, the school system offers very prescriptive guidance for content coverage. Not only are courses required but topics within those courses are also prescribed. Sometimes methods of teaching are suggested or even strongly recommended... In such cases, textbooks and curriculum guides can offer extensive and focused guidance about instructional content... Textbooks might be quite a potent agent of policy in school systems of this sort (p. 332).

The type of policy textbooks contain is curriculum policy, which relays preferences regarding appropriate topics and pedagogical practices for a given educational environment. As Cohen and Ball (1990) emphasize, the curriculum policy in textbooks communicates priorities about what knowledge and skills students should learn, the order in which they should learn them, and the strategies teachers should use to teach them. In any educational setting, students are encouraged to study some subjects and topics, while others are discouraged or off-limits altogether. Certain teaching and learning strategies are sanctioned while others are frowned upon. In other words, “textbooks are designed to translate the abstractions of curriculum policy into operations that teachers and students can carry out...this suggests that textbooks have a strong impact on what occurs in classrooms” (Valverde, Bianchi, Wolfe, Schmidt, & Houang, 2002, p. 2). Like almost all textbooks the world over, the Myanmar readers lay out required subjects and topics for each grade level. In addition, they convey the type of teaching methods and assessment educators should use in their classrooms, as well as appropriate classroom management techniques. The term ‘curriculum policy’ encompasses all of these issues.

Like other forms of policy, curriculum policies are conditions of action that policy implementers are expected to heed. Policy is a conduit through which authorities can compel others to do certain things and act in certain ways. A number of studies show that teachers do, indeed, adhere to the curriculum policy contained in textbooks (A. Porter, Floden, Freeman, Schmidt, & Schwille, 1988; Schwille et al., 1983). In Burmese government schools, teachers are expected to teach their students information exactly as it is laid out in the textbooks, without omissions,

additions or alterations of the order in which the information is presented. Teachers believe that deviating from the textbook content will likely bring about sanctions in some form.<sup>11</sup> In this way they are encouraged to follow the curriculum policy the textbooks lay out as closely as possible. Of course, policies and the pressures they can exert do not go unquestioned. Like educators in other contexts, Burmese teachers engage with policy in various ways. In addition to presenting and analyzing the civic education-related curriculum policy in the Myanmar readers, this dissertation study will also provide a thorough analysis of how teachers in Burma reinforce it, reinterpret it, struggle against it, and so on.

### **Contribution to the academic literature**

This study provides a contribution to the academic literature in several respects. For one, by looking at civic education in Burma and by using the broader conceptualization of this term outlined above, I hope to bring the Burma case into the academic conversation concerning civic and citizenship education. Although Burma is a non-democratic state and much of the civic education that occurs there is likely oriented toward cultivating values and skills that support an authoritarian political system as opposed to a democratic one, this is not a reason for it to be excluded from the civic education literature. In fact, it will enrich the existing body of scholarship by facilitating future comparative research of civic education in vastly different political contexts. This could lead to intriguing findings on many fronts.

Secondly, this study will be a significant addition to the academic literature concerning Burma, as to date there is very little scholarship that touches on issues related to citizenship or civic education in Burma. However, there are a handful of notable exceptions, all of which have helped inform the present study. Here, I will summarize the aspects of these studies that are most relevant to citizenship education in contemporary Burmese society.

Cheesman's (2002) work, which examines the 1998 primary school Myanmar readers, has the most in common with the present research, as the textbooks he analyzed are an earlier version of the textbooks I have examined as part of this dissertation study. Cheesman explores the

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<sup>11</sup> 8 participants expressed this.

various ways the content of these textbooks serves to legitimate Burma's military government. While it is not framed as a civic education study, per se, Cheesman does reference some civic education literature and his findings speak to the political, moral, and multicultural aspects of civic education contained in the Myanmar readers.

For instance, Cheesman posits that through the textbooks, the government puts forth "a particular version of national identity that mandates [the military's] role within a greater entity, 'the Union'" (p. 1). He notes that the textbooks emphasize the moral aspects of citizenship, by including excerpts from Buddhist scripture, Buddhist folklore and Aesop's fables (p. 174-180). In addition, the textbooks' 'ideal' citizen is someone who faithfully carries out their prescribed citizenship 'duties,' which largely consist of acts of respect and loyalty to be performed towards one's elders as well as the nation. Cheesman also touches on elements of multicultural education the textbooks contain, noting that references to Burma's minorities are scarce and when they are mentioned, the text conflates and homogenizes Burma's diverse groups. Ethnic minorities are either depicted doing stereotypical 'ethnic' activities or posing in traditional ethnic dress, while Burmans are portrayed much more naturalistically. In this way, the textbooks reinforce the idea that Burman culture is the true heart of the nation of 'Myanmar,' while ethnic minorities are portrayed as having only minor, superficial differences from Burmans (p. 158). All in all, Cheesman's study has provided a map of the civic content in the 1998 Myanmar readers, against which to compare the 2009 Myanmar readers analyzed in the present dissertation study.

Salem-Gervais and Metro (2012) chart changes in the evolution of the Burmese government's history curriculum over the last 60 years. While the focus of this study is not on civic education specifically, the findings give us a sense of the civic messages that students are receiving from the Burmese government's history curriculum, which pertain primarily to multiculturalism as well as political and historical literacy. The authors' findings indicate that over time, ethnic minorities have been increasingly marginalized in the textbooks' telling of Burma's history and the prominence of national enemies has increased. The enemies most often featured are Thais, British and other non-specific references to colonialists and neocolonialists (p. 28). In addition,

the prominence of Aung San, a national hero who led Burma's fight to gain independence from colonialism, was gradually deemphasized over time. This could be because mentioning him reminds people of his daughter, Aung San Suu Kyi, who has vehemently opposed Burma's military government over recent decades. In place of Aung San, Burma's 'great kings' have been given a more prominent role (p. 35-40). The authors note that the changes have resulted in increased emphasis on national unity and a heightened sense of patriotism towards Burma's 'golden past' (p. 68). As the present dissertation study focuses on civic messages in the Myanmar readers and in teacher-students interactions, Salem-Gervais and Metro's article provides a broader sense of what civic messages are being communicated to students in other aspects of the government school curriculum.

In addition, there are two books concerning life in contemporary Burma, which do not focus on the education system, but which do explore issues that speak to how the government influences the people's notions of citizenship throughout everyday life. For instance, Skidmore's (2004) 'ethnography of fear' examines the various ways the government induces fear in the population through the use of surveillance practices, propaganda, censorship and the deployment of heavily armed soldiers at major urban intersections.

While she doesn't frame this as a form of civic education, her findings do tell us something about how fear shapes the way Burmese people enact citizenship. It influences their choices about whether and how to participate in civic life of their community. For instance, Skidmore details how fear affects what political opinions Burmese people feel are safe to hold and whom they can be safely shared with, if anyone. Skidmore's book informs this study by illustrating how fear of the government impacts people's choices and actions in everyday life. Furthermore, her work raises questions about what form that fear takes in Burmese government schools and how it affects the way teachers and students conduct themselves in the classroom. These are issues that will be explored throughout this dissertation study.

Christina Fink's (2001) work explores how the Burmese government has coerced people into living their lives in a way that perpetuates military rule. While she speaks of civic education specifically, a number of the issues she covers speak to how the government shapes the way

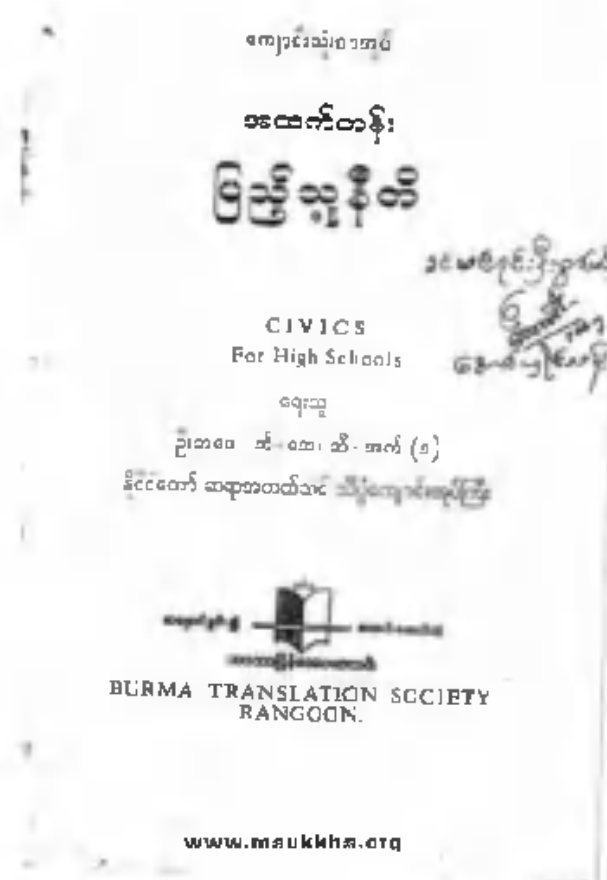
Burma's population enacts citizenship. For example, due to mismanaging the economy, the military has created a situation where employment with the military is one of the only ways to gain financial stability in the country. Therefore, even parents who disapprove of the military government often encourage their children to seek employment within the armed forces. Parents also discourage their children from criticizing the government so as not to jeopardize their chances at such employment (p. 100-101). Fink also describes strategies the military uses to compel the population to be obedient to them, such as enacting divide and rule practices on communities (p. 120-122). In addition, Fink documents ways people have enacted resistance against the government and broken free of the governments' prescribed version of the 'ideal citizen.' For instance, she describes various ways people opposed the government during the nation-wide pro-democracy protest in 1988. She also notes how prisoners of conscience disobeyed government policies by secretly holding political discussion groups while in prison (p. 171). Therefore, Fink's work calls attention to the tools, largely outside of the school setting, that the government uses to influence the type of citizen people become. At the same time, she also calls attention to the fact that the government's efforts only go so far and they are not able to predetermine how all people enact citizenship. Fink reminds us of the agency exercised by everyday people in Burma and their ability to determine the meaning of 'good citizenship' from their own perspective.

Through the present dissertation study, I aim to add to the body of literature addressing notions of citizenship and civic education in Burma. My contribution will be unique in that it will examine these issues in depth, addressing 'civic education' explicitly, while also bringing findings into conversation with the broader body of civic education literature. In addition, this dissertation will be the first to examine what civic education looks like in Burmese classrooms, by analyzing not only textbooks but also teacher-student interactions.

### **Burmese terms for civics and citizenship**

As we begin to explore the meaning of 'citizenship' and 'civic education' in the Burmese context, it is important to make a few points about the nature of these terms in the Burmese language. By looking at these Burmese terms in some detail, we gain insight into how

citizenship and civic education is conceptualized in the Burmese context. The word for 'citizen' in Burmese language is နိုင်ငံသား, pronounced 'naing-nga-tha,' it is used in everyday conversations as well as in official government documents. For instance, in the official bilingual (Burmese & English) version of the recently ratified Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, the terms နိုင်ငံသား and 'citizen' are repeatedly used as equivalents (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2008, p. iv-v). This term has two parts, နိုင်ငံ, meaning 'nation' and သား, meaning 'son.' Thus, the literal meaning of this term is 'son of the nation.' 'Son' is used in the figurative sense meaning children of both genders. Clearly, this term highlights a sense of familial belonging, as if all citizens are members of one big national family.



(Government of Burma, 1956)

**Figure 1.4 Title page of high school civics book from Burma**

The closest Burmese equivalent for the terms 'civic education' or 'citizenship education' is ပြည်သူ့ နီတိ, pronounced 'bee-thu-nee-thee.' This term was prominently used as the title of a

high school civics textbook published by Burma's military government while it was led by General Ne Win from 1964 to 1988 (Government of Burma, 1956, p. i). On the book's title page, right beneath the Burmese title, the book reads, "CIVICS For High Schools" in English (see figure 1.4). This word can be broken down into two parts: ပြည်သူ [bee-thu], literally meaning 'the people' in the sense of 'the people of the nation.' We can draw this conclusion since the preface used in this first part of the term, ပြည်, is also commonly used as a suffix after the name of a country. For instance, in informal language, the Burmese have traditionally referred to their country as ဗမာ ပြည်, pronounced 'Bama-bee.' The second part of the word of civics is နိတ [nee-thee], literally meaning duties or a set of rules that should be followed. So, taken together, a literal translation of ပြည်သူ့ နိတ would be 'the people's duties.' The literal make-up of this term reveals that 'duties' or the tasks the people of Burma are expected to perform for their country is a prominent aspect of how Burmese people think of civic education.

### **History of civic education in Burma**

Historically, the civic education that has taken place in Burma has been primarily moral in nature. From the 11<sup>th</sup> century until the colonial era, Burmese men and boys were educated in Buddhist monasteries throughout the country, where Buddhist moral teachings were a significant portion of the curriculum. There was no formal school system run by Burma's rulers at this time. The monastic schools were operated by Theravada Buddhist monks and were primarily funded through voluntary community donations so they could remain largely free of charge for students. Most were located in rural areas and accepted male students of all backgrounds. By the 1930s there were approximately 17,000 monastic schools across Burma that were attended by the majority of the male, school age population (U Kaung, 1930). Women and girls did not have access to monastic education since monks' religious guidelines forbade them from teaching females above a very young age (Cheesman, 2003, p. 48). However, from the mid-1700s until the colonial era, some Buddhist men and women established 'lay schools' which used a very similar curriculum as the monastic schools, but were open to both genders (U Kaung, 1963, p. 33-34).

Monastic schools varied in size and differed slightly in curricula and procedures but, in nearly all the schools, students learned basic Burmese literacy skills, essential Buddhist teachings and national traditions (Furnivall, 1956, p. 55). The primary purpose of monastic schools was to develop students' moral character. Additional subjects were rarely taught, as they weren't seen as essential to agrarian life in Burma at the time. Moral education at the monastic schools centered on discipline and obedience. Monks emphasized the importance of discipline and expected their students to follow a stringent moral code at all times. They also assigned students chores to complete during the times of day when they were not engaged in their studies. Monastic schools "transmitted standardized cultural and intellectual matter across all sectors of society. It instilled a valuable sense of discipline... and reinforced a respect for tradition and hierarchy" (Cheesman, 2003, p. 49).

With the advent of British colonial rule came drastic, far-reaching changes to schooling in Burma, which resulted in alterations to the nature of civic education. The British suppressed the role of monastic education by promoting secular schooling. Between 1830 and the late 1860s, the British established over 6,850 secular schools. As a result of these secular schools being perceived as superior, "the people acquiesced perforce in the desertion of the monasteries" (Furnivall, 1938, p. 81-82). Once formal education had been moved largely out of the monasteries and into the British-run secular schools, the amount of explicit religious and moral training students received dropped as the curriculum expanded to include more subjects, including math, geography, history and science.

This de-emphasis of morals led to public outcry. At the beginning of the 1900s, educated Burmese blamed a rise in crime in Upper Burma on the move to secular schooling (Thant Myint-U, 2001, p. 241). According to one government report, the decline of monastic schools in Burma was a 'national calamity' (Government of the Union of Burma, 1954, p. 16 cited in Cheesman, 2003, p. 54). However, with the establishment of the new secular school system, access to education was greatly increased for female students (Thant Myint-U, 2001, p. 241). Thus, the moral education that was being taught in secular schools, however reduced, was finally reaching students of both genders en-masse.



In the 1920s students began protesting against the colonial school system, so the British allowed for a parallel system of ‘national schools’ to be established. The new schools were run by Burmese authorities and had a separate curriculum from the colonial schools (Metro, 2011, p. 46). A key reason cited for founding the national school system was to provide students with an education that better reflected Burmese culture and moral values. Civic education in these schools emphasized one’s duties to one’s parents, teachers and nation (Saw Yee Mon, 2011, p. 3).

After gaining independence from British colonialism in 1948, the former colonial schools came under the jurisdiction of the new Burmese government. New education policy was immediately released, stating that “the five elements essential to a sound educational tradition were... religion [Buddhism], discipline, culture, athletics and service” (Ba Sein, 1950, p. 2). Thus, it was clear that aspects of moral education that had been a core part of the curriculum in monastic schools would remain central in national secular schooling. Buddhist values, beliefs and practices continue to be key themes in civic education in Burma’s public school system today. In addition, discipline and service to one’s elders and one’s nation remains a major focus of civic education in present-day government schools. Thus, with the end of British colonial schooling came the advent of civic education in its modern form.

The civic education received by today’s students is of utmost importance to Burma’s current leaders, as evidenced by the fact that two of the government’s five ‘targeted goals’ of primary schooling pertain to civic education.

(၂) ယဉ်ကျေးသိမ်မွေ့၍ ဝတ္တရားများကို နားလည်မှုရှိသော နိုင်ငံသားကောင်းတစ်ယောက် (Civilized citizen)<sup>12</sup>  
အဖြစ် ကျင့်ကြံနေထိုင် တတ်စေရန်၊

(2) To be a good citizen who is polite and understands their duties (Civilized citizen)

(၄) အဖွဲ့အစည်းအတွင်း ပြန်လှည့်ဆောင်ရွက်မှု (Social justice to community) အခြေခံများ ရရှိလာစေရန်၊

(4) To do things in a fair way by compromising and discussing (Social justice to community)  
(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2006, p. 6)

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<sup>12</sup> The text in parentheses was in English in the original document.

These goals have been listed in numerous official policy documents from 1998 to the present. They have been highlighted in ministers' speeches and in educational reports. The Burmese government has repeatedly touted that the primary school curriculum is intended to mold Burma's youth into "responsible and civilized citizens," well-equipped for the country's ongoing transition to a "discipline-flourishing democracy" (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 1998, p. 1-1; New Light of Myanmar, 2007a). It is how the government conveys its civic education policy to teachers and students and how teachers operationalize this policy in their classrooms that will be the focus of this dissertation.

### **A note about terminology**

Ever since the passage of the Adaptations of Expressions Law in 1989, the terminology used to refer to ethnic groups and locations in Burma, in all languages other than Burmese, has become contested territory. Even what name to use to refer to the country itself has been hotly debated: Burma or Myanmar? There are a number of reasons for this, foremost of which is the fact that the government passed the law initiating the name changes without the consent of the people. Therefore many Burmese people feel the name changes the government has decreed should not be followed. Over time, the term used to refer to the country became associated with one's political stance towards the Burmese government. While not universally the case, those who called the country 'Myanmar' tended to be those who were more supportive of the government, while those who continued to use 'Burma' tended to be those who were less supportive of the military's rule over the country. While the official government names of several cities, states, divisions and geographical landmarks were also changed by the 1989 law, they did not garner the same level of political contention as the Burma vs. Myanmar debate.

Another reason some people have resisted adopting the name 'Myanmar' is their belief that the government's motivation behind the name change may have been to compel ethnic minorities to identify less strongly with their ethnic group and more strongly with their membership in the country of 'Myanmar' as a whole. Along with calling for the country to be called Myanmar, the government also declared that Burmese and non-Burmese speakers alike

should use the term Myanmar [မြန်မာ] to refer to the nationality of the entire population, regardless of ethnic group (Callahan, 2004, p. 115-166).<sup>13</sup> Houtman (1999) has referred to this as part of the government's campaign for 'Myanmarification,' in which the government is seeking "to attain national unity by homogenizing all diverse peoples of Burma into a singular Myanmar culture and thereby uproot all opposition for once and all" (p. 179).

While not a cause of further contention, it should also be noted that scholars have surmised that the name changes may have been an attempt to symbolically separate the country from its colonial past. Many of the names used prior to the passage of the Adaptation of Expressions Law were established during the British colonial period, and in some cases they reflect a highly inaccurate attempt to mirror their Burmese language equivalents. Many of the names the government revised were changed to more accurately reflect the correct pronunciation of the official Burmese names of these locations (Houtman, 1999, p. 43-48).

Throughout this dissertation I have referred to the country as Burma and the ethnic majority group as 'Burman.' I use the term 'Burmese' to refer to the people of Burma, regardless of ethnic group. I refer to all cities, states, divisions and geographical landmarks that underwent name changes as a result of the Adaptations of Expressions Law, using the 'new' names decreed by the law. For instance, I refer to Burma's largest city as 'Yangon' instead of 'Rangoon,' and 'Kayin State' instead of 'Karen State.' Exceptions include direct quotes where the speaker used a different term, as well as the official titles of government documents or government departments, which in some cases use terms different than those I've indicated above. My choice of terms is not intended to be a political statement. Instead, it is an attempt to stay true to the terms used by the educators and former students I interviewed. The majority of my research participants and other people from Burma with whom I interacted with while

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<sup>13</sup> Until recently, in contemporary usage of Burmese language, the term မြန်မာ, pronounced 'Myanma,' has been used to refer to the country at a more formal register, while ဝမာ, pronounced 'Bama,' has been used to refer to the country in more colloquial settings. In the Adaptation of Expressions Law, the government decreed that the term မြန်မာ [Myanma] should be used to refer to the country, regardless of setting while the term ဝမာ [Bama] should be reserved to refer only to the country's ethnic majority group (Callahan, 2004, p. 115-166).

conducting this study used the terms in this way.

### **Overview of the dissertation**

This dissertation consists of six chapters. In **chapter 2** I describe the data sources and research methods used in this study, as well as my methodological approach. In chapters 3 through 5 I present my primary research findings.

**Chapter 3** examines the Burmese government's civic education policy embedded in the 'Myanmar readers,' which are the textbooks used to teach primary school students how to read and write in Burmese. This chapter explores the three most prominent civic themes in the textbooks, which are (1) respect elders, (2) fulfill your duties and (3) live and act in unity. In addition, this chapter details the most common forms in which these themes are conveyed—mottos, specific practices and stories—as well as the pedagogical practices the textbooks encourage educators to employ when teaching them to students. This chapter concludes that the civic education messages embedded in the Myanmar readers are primarily moral in nature and emphasize the importance of obedience and conformity.

**Chapter 4** explores how teachers implement the civic education policy in the Myanmar readers, including to what extent the civic messages conveyed in teacher-student interactions mirror the textbook content, as well as to what degree teachers contradict and/or subvert the textbooks' civic messages in their interactions with students. Findings reveal that, for the most part, teachers' implementation of the civic education policy in the Myanmar readers closely mirrors the content of the textbooks. Educators teach civic concepts from the textbooks repeatedly, often with enthusiasm, as they believe they are key to facilitating students' development into 'good' people and 'good' citizens.

In teachers' descriptions of their interactions with students, the civic concepts they describe emphasizing most ardently are the very same as those that appear most prominently in the Myanmar readers: (1) respect elders, (2) fulfill your duties and (3) live and act in unity. Furthermore, teachers often convey these moral themes using the same three forms common in the textbooks: mottos, specific practices and stories. In addition, like the textbooks, teachers

often teach these concepts to students as moral absolutes that they must adhere to at all times, under all circumstances.

However, in some cases, as teachers appropriate these civic messages, they adjust them as they implement them. When teachers do this, it is often to add nuance to students' understanding of when to adhere to certain civic virtues and when not to. In this way, the teachers encourage the students to think critically about the civic education they are learning. Teachers tend to engage in this type of policy appropriation in cases where they feel others may take advantage of their students if they adhere to morals absolutely. They make these adjustments to lessen their students' likelihood of being treated unjustly.

**Chapter 5** examines the 'off book' civic education going on in government primary schools.

These are the civic messages teachers regularly convey to their students that are not advocated in the official curricula. The majority of these 'off-book' civic messages concern how to protect oneself from the government while living in a society under authoritarian rule. In Burma, the government does not allow the population to engage in many activities that are internationally recognized as fundamental freedoms and basic human rights. However, many of the rules about what the government will and won't allow people to do are not written down.

Nonetheless, violating these rules can result in severe punishments, including losing one's job, arrest and, sometimes, imprisonment. Along with the rest of Burma's population, teachers have learned these unwritten rules over time, through a process of socialization as well as through observing and learning about what activities tend to provoke government retribution and which do not. This chapter details the ways in which teachers help their students master these unwritten rules, enabling them to more effectively navigate the precarious landscape of Burma's civic life.

Lastly, **chapter 6** concludes this dissertation by presenting an overview of the key findings, policy recommendations and directions for future research.

## Chapter 2 Methodology

This is Burma, and it will be quite unlike any land you know about.

—Rudyard Kipling, *Letters from the East*, p. 203

When I decided to research civic education policy in government-run primary schools, in a society that has been under authoritarian rule for decades, I wanted to choose a methodology that enabled me to be as open as possible to a completely new conceptualization of what civics could look like. I sought to embody the spirit of Rudyard Kipling's quote and set aside, as much as possible, my own preconceptions of what 'citizenship' and 'civic education' mean. With this mindset, I set out to learn about 'civic education' anew, through the eyes of Burmese educators and students. To best accomplish this, I took an ethnographic approach to this dissertation study, using critical qualitative methodology as conceptualized by Carspecken (1996). As Malinowski (1961) states, ethnography enables the researcher "to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize *his* vision of *his* world" (p. 25). In this chapter I will discuss the methodology and research methods I used for this dissertation study and why they were the most appropriate. I will then describe my research site, primary data sources and data analysis procedures.

### **Critical Qualitative Methodology**

I conducted this ethnographic study using critical qualitative methodology. Rooted in Habermas' (1984, 1987) theory of communicative action, critical qualitative methodology has been refined into specific research methods by Carspecken (1996). This methodological approach enabled me to privilege the meaning-making of research participants by giving me the tools to reconstruct how participants make sense of civic education, how they relate it to their world and their lived experience. These include techniques such as meaning field analysis and reconstructive horizon analysis, examples of which will be provided in the methods section

of this chapter. Thus, using this methodology allowed me to minimize the degree to which this dissertation study was guided by my own preconceived definition of ‘civic education.’ In addition, during the data collection and analysis process, it allowed me to largely set aside the various meanings of ‘civic education’ as it is defined in popular and scholarly literature. In this way, I was able to explore civic education in a way that is as authentic as possible to the Burmese context.

In addition, critical qualitative methodology enabled me to take into account the fact that, like any researcher, my perspectives and my values play a prominent role in every stage of my research—from developing research questions, to data collection and analysis. Many forms of inquiry do not recognize this reality. They presuppose that research can be conducted in a way that keeps the researcher’s values from affecting the study in any way. I do not believe this is possible. I believe that the researcher’s values and beliefs are necessarily intertwined in all aspects of research and that this is not undesirable. On the contrary, our values and beliefs are part of what enables us to make sense of our world and our research findings. However, researchers’ values should not determine what ‘facts’ the research uncovers. In other words, research findings should not be biased. It is important that, through research, one is able to discover what is truly going on in a given context, even when it is not what one ‘hopes’ to find. To guard against such bias, critical qualitative methodology provides a series of validity checks to ensure that the researchers’ own values are identified and accounted for throughout the research process so they do not overshadow participants’ values and beliefs (Carspecken, 1996). The validity checks I used include asking non-leading interview questions, using peer debriefers and member checks. Each of these techniques will be detailed later in this chapter along with examples.

Another reason this methodology is well suited to this dissertation study is that through this research I am seeking, in some small way, to foster positive social change. As Carspecken (1996) eloquently states, critical qualitative methodology can be used to “uncover the subtleties of oppression so that its invisibility to those affected by it might be removed; so that oppression might become challenged, and changed” (p. 7). Many inequities and power imbalances in

Burma are very overt and obvious. For instance, Burma's military government has imposed its will on the population through threat of force and other explicit means for decades. However, other forms of oppression are so subtle and ubiquitous that they have remained largely tacit and unrecognized. This methodology allows me to reveal the workings of oppression in Burma, in its various forms. It enables me to explore how these power imbalances affect civic education in government schools by shaping teachers' understanding of appropriate civic education and conditioning how they choose to convey civics concepts to students. By sharing my findings with others, I hope to facilitate and encourage positive change that benefits the research participants as well as others living in Burma.

### **Research Site**

I conducted fieldwork for this study in Thailand over a total period of 8 months, 4 months in 2007 and 4 months in 2008. I immersed myself in communities of Burmese refugees and migrants living along the Thai-Burma border. I lived, worked and socialized with people who had recently arrived in Thailand and had, only a short time before, been teaching and/or studying in Burmese government schools. My research benefitted from conducting fieldwork in two separate trips. I was able to foster relationships with research participants over a greater span of time, developing a more in depth knowledge of their lives and backgrounds. In addition, I was able to analyze data and draw preliminary findings from earlier fieldwork, which informed aspects of my research design and data collection methods for my second trip.

It is also important to note that my history with these communities and my immersion in Burmese culture began long before my fieldwork. The Thai-Burma border had been my home from 2002 to 2006, while I was working with international NGOs providing education-related assistance for Burmese migrants and refugees in the area. I spent a great deal of time visiting Burmese migrant and refugee schools and meeting with Burmese teachers as part of my work, which consisted largely of curriculum development and teacher training. Not long after moving to the Thai-Burma border, I had developed a strong affinity for Burmese culture and Burmese people. The Burmese communities along the border felt like home to me in a way that few other places ever have.



Having a relatively long history in these Burmese communities in Thailand had a number of benefits for my research. First, being familiar with Burmese culture and norms enabled me to develop interview questions and interact with participants in ways that made them feel respected, safe and at ease. In addition, my familiarity with the area and my existing relationships with the Burmese refugees and migrants living there facilitated my search for research participants and translators to help with this study. Burmese teachers I had been friends with for years vouched for my credibility and trustworthiness, making research participants who'd only recently arrived in Thailand more comfortable sharing their knowledge and experiences with me.

While my familiarity with the Burmese communities on the Thai-Burma border made it an advantageous research site, it was not my primary reason for choosing to conduct fieldwork there. I chose to conduct fieldwork in Thailand primarily out of concern for the safety of my research participants. It would have been ideal to conduct an ethnographic study in Burma, inside classrooms in government primary schools where I could witness, first hand, how civic education is carried out. However, based on the Burmese government's existing policies and the experiences of other scholars who've conducted research in Burma, obtaining the Burmese government's permission to conduct this research study wasn't possible. Carrying out the study without such official permission would have put my research participants and myself at risk of being disciplined by the government. Furthermore, because I had recently lived and worked with Burmese pro-democracy activists in Thailand, I was concerned that I could be under particularly vigorous government scrutiny in Burma, further heightening the risk for research participants. Unlike the Burmese government, the Royal Thai Government has a history of tolerating research activities along the Thai-Burma border. Therefore, Thailand was a much safer location to conduct this study.

In addition, many research participants repeatedly expressed that they don't feel they can speak freely in Burma. To avoid incurring negative consequences from the government, they censor their opinions and experiences, expressing only those that the Burmese government would find palatable. They explained that they feel the need to self-censor most when they are

speaking publicly, in front of a group, but they describe self-censoring to some degree in almost all situations in Burma. Research participants frequently used Thailand as an example of a place where they felt much freer to speak their minds and describe their experiences, regardless of whether they would please or displease the Burmese government. For instance Tharamu Lily Paw, a teacher from Karen State, was one of several research participants who expressed this sentiment. “They [Burmese government officials]<sup>14</sup> even limit our ideas. Here [in Thailand] it is more free. Here we can express our opinion. Over there [in Burma], there are a lot of limits. You just have to follow, step by step and do what they tell you to do. You have no right to complain.” Therefore, the fact that participants were more comfortable sharing a broader array of their thoughts and opinions than they would have been if interviewed in Burma was another benefit to conducting interviews in Thailand.

Another reason I chose to conduct my research in Thailand is that, outside of Burma itself, Thailand has one of the highest concentrations of individuals who have recently taught and studied in Burmese government schools. Access to such individuals was essential for my study, as they have up-to-date, firsthand knowledge about civic education in the public school context. The Thai-Burma border is 1,300 miles long and highly porous. People from Burma are constantly crossing into Thailand via official and unofficial routes. Some cross into Thailand for the day, while others stay for much longer periods of time. Approximately 1.5 million Burmese people are currently living in Thailand (Eberle & Holliday, 2011, p. 371). Approximately 124,000 of them have refugee status (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2009, p. 219). However, most are economic migrants who work in Thailand’s many factories. This has created demand for local Burmese-language schools for the migrant workers’ children. In 2008 there were over 50 Burmese migrant schools along the Thai-Burma border. Over 1,000 of Burma’s teachers had come to Thailand to take advantage of the employment opportunities at these schools (Oh & Van Der Stouwe, 2008).

The Thai towns and villages where I conducted fieldwork are home to both Burmese migrants

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<sup>14</sup> I inserted text in brackets within participants’ quotes to clarify their meaning in cases where the meaning, evident in the broader context of the interview segment, was not included in the quote itself.

and refugees. While their legal status in Thailand is different, they are not two completely separate communities. There is a great deal of fluidity between these groups. Both Burmese migrant workers and refugees have had many of the same experiences in Burma. This could include severe economic hardship, destruction and/or forced relocation of their home villages, along with other difficulties. Some chose to come to Burma as migrant workers, while others chose to seek refugee status. However, many have the background to qualify for either group. Furthermore, a person who enters Thailand as a migrant worker may later decide to apply for refugee status. Similarly, those with refugee status may seek to work in Thailand, though doing so is illegal. Burmese migrants and refugees are kept physically separate to some degree. Officially, Burmese refugees are required to live in one of the designated refugee camps, while migrant workers generally live in the Thai towns and villages close to the Burma border. In practice, however, refugees have some freedom of movement and some choose to live outside the camps, in the migrant worker communities along the Thai-Burma border. Research participants for this study include both refugees and migrant workers.

### **Overview of data sources**

I collected and analyzed two key sets of data for this dissertation study—the primary school Myanmar readers, which contain a great deal of civic education content, and a collection of semi-structured, ethnographic interviews with former teachers and students from Burma. With Levinson et al. (2009) holistic conceptualization of policy in mind, I chose these two sets of data so that I could examine different aspects of civic education policy at play in Burmese primary schools. The textbooks are a key source of civic education policy in written form, while the interviews reveal how civic education policy is remade as it is put into practice by educators in primary school classrooms. Furthermore, Levinson et al. (2009) draw a distinction between ‘authorized’ and ‘unauthorized’ policy. The former originates from an official, recognized policy-making authority such as a ministry of education, while the latter originates from an individual or group that has not been officially tasked with setting policy, such as teachers or other implementation-oriented policy actors. The Myanmar readers are a source of ‘authorized’ civic education policy while the interviews get at how teachers make ‘unauthorized’ civic

education policy as they reinforce, reinterpret and adapt official policy within their own classrooms. Before describing these two sources of data in detail, I would like to briefly note the array of other experiences and sources of information I had access to during my fieldwork that greatly enriched my understanding of civic education in Burma and of the research findings that emerged from my two primary sets of data.

In addition to conducting formal interviews during my fieldwork, I had many informal, in-depth discussions with Burmese education scholars and other experts who have extensive knowledge of education policy and schooling practices in Burma. I had informal conversations with dozens of Burmese former students and teachers about their experiences in contemporary Burmese government schools. Also, several teachers who had formerly taught in Burmese government schools but were currently teaching in Thailand at Burmese migrant schools, invited me into their classrooms to get a sense of how they conduct their classes and how they convey civics concepts to their students. Therefore, I spent several days during each month of fieldwork observing primary school classes at Burmese migrant schools. While the migrant school context is undoubtedly different from Burmese government schools, there are also many similarities. For one, all the teachers I observed used the official Burmese government textbooks to instruct their students, including the Myanmar readers. Observing these classes gave the research participants and I shared experiences to which they often referred during interviews to help them further explain how they taught students in government schools back in Burma. Additionally, one research participant, with whom I developed a particularly strong bond, offered to tutor me twice a week after school using the Myanmar readers, to improve my Burmese reading skills. I gladly took her up on her offer and therefore had the opportunity to experience, first hand, how a veteran Burmese government schoolteacher tutors students in literacy skills using the government textbooks. Some of these tutoring sessions were one-on-one with the teacher while, on other days, I was tutored alongside kindergarten and first grade students who were learning to read from the same textbooks as me. These were students that attended class with this same teacher during the school day. They came for tutoring after school to get extra help.

Furthermore, as noted above, due to the potential risks for research participants, I did not collect data for my dissertation inside Burma. However, I spent two months traveling extensively throughout Burma during 2007 and 2008. While in the country I met a number of teachers, both those who work exclusively as private tutors and many who work or used to work in government primary schools. I was invited into a government primary school to informally observe a full day of classes and whole-school activities. This array of experiences in Thailand and Burma, captured in my field notes, greatly enriched my understanding of how civic education is implemented in Burmese government classrooms, and further contextualized what I learned through my analysis of the Myanmar readers and the formal interviews I conducted in Thailand.

### *Myanmar Reading Textbooks*

The source of written civic education policy I chose to collect and analyze is the set of government-mandated Myanmar language textbooks used in all public primary schools for students in kindergarten to grade 4. In Burma, textbooks serve as teachers' primary source of written education policy. Other sources of written education policy exist in Burma, but they are rare, especially compared to the ubiquity of the government-produced textbooks. For instance, while searching through the archives of the Australian National Library in Canberra, I found a handful of education policy booklets published by the Ministry of Education over the last three decades.<sup>15</sup> However, Burmese educators noted that they had never seen such policy booklets. Some educators noted that their school receives letters from the Ministry of Education on occasion, outlining recent policy changes. However, government-produced textbooks are the only written documents teachers consistently receive from the Ministry of Education (MoE).

Of the contemporary primary school textbooks, the Myanmar language textbooks provided the richest source of civic education policy. There is no designated civics textbook currently in use in Burmese schools. Instead, the official, government-sanctioned textbooks for nearly all school

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<sup>15</sup> These include the following booklets: "Plan for uplifting education aimed at peace and modern development" (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 1998) and "The findings from reviewing and analyzing the basic education high school level syllabus/curriculum" (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2006).

subjects at all grade levels contain at least a handful of messages about the type of citizen students should aspire to become. However, the Myanmar language textbooks stand out, as they contain considerably more civic education content than other primary school textbooks. The contents of the Myanmar readers largely consist of simple phrases, poems and stories for students to use to practice reading, spelling and pronunciation. Unlike the textbooks for other subjects, such as math or geography, the text in the Myanmar readers is not constrained to one particular academic subject area. While the text covers multiple topics, much of the content of the Myanmar readers conveys civics. In addition, they are the only textbooks that contain a statement in their preface explicitly declaring that they are intended to be used for civic education, in addition to teaching the academic subject at hand, Burmese language literacy.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, an analysis of the Myanmar readers is essential to gain an understanding of civic education policy in contemporary Burma.

A second reason I chose to analyze the Myanmar readers is that they are among the most widely read books in all of Burma. Therefore much of Burma's population has been exposed to the array of civics messages they contain. Not only are they used in all government primary schools, they are widely regarded as the standard text to help anyone to learn to read Burmese language. Therefore, they are used in all monastic schools, most private schools as well as by many non-formal literacy programs aiming to teach adolescents and adults to read and write Burmese. Furthermore, I found that when people from Burma discussed their childhood schooling experiences with me, they would often start reciting poems and sayings from the Myanmar readers unprompted, in the middle of our conversation. They seemed to remember the Myanmar readers particularly vividly, as I never heard someone recite passages from any other textbook. Many seemed simultaneously proud and amused that they could still recite these passages by heart. It was clear that these particular textbooks had played a central role in

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<sup>16</sup> While other textbooks contain moral messages, this is not explicitly acknowledged in the teachers' preface. For example, history textbooks currently used in government schools emphasize values such as unity and patriotism as well as bravery and self-sacrifice (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 1998; Metro, 2011). English textbooks include Aesop's fables and other moral passages that advocate 'being disciplined,' 'fulfilling one's responsibilities' and avoiding immoral temptations such as laziness and greed (Government of the Union of Myanmar 2009d).

their primary schooling and in their childhood.

### Textbook Translations

Before analyzing the five primary school Myanmar readers, I worked with an experienced Burmese-English translator to translate each textbook into English. We worked side-by-side so that we could engage in regular discussions about the meaning of each passage. Throughout this process we encountered words and phrases that could be translated into English in multiple ways. We discussed each case and decided together on the most accurate translation. We made every effort to ensure every translated phrase accurately reflected the meaning and tone of the original Burmese version. In cases where a Burmese phrase had multiple meanings that we were unable to replicate in a single English phrase, we included a footnote that described the multiple meanings, gave alternate translations and/or added further explanation for that section of text. In cases where the original textbook had typos, we have reproduced those typos in the translated version and marked these with footnotes. Some words in the original Burmese version of the textbook were written in English. We marked these words with footnotes in the English translation.

Occasionally, for purposes of clarity, we added words into the English version that were not present in the original Burmese. In these cases, we put the word in square brackets. Most often, the words we added were the subject of sentences. In Burmese language, the subject of the sentence is often understood and not explicitly stated. As this is not common in English, we made the subject of the sentence explicit to facilitate English-language readers' understanding of the text.

In a few select cases we left elements of Burmese script in the English translation of the textbook. We did this only when there was a standalone Burmese character that could not be translated or sounded out. For example, the Burmese symbol (၀) named အောက်မြစ်, pronounced 'out-gah-myint,' is used at the end of a word or syllable to indicate that the syllable should be pronounced with a short, creaky tone. When written in isolation, there is no way to pronounce it or translate it. Therefore, we included this Burmese character in the English

version of the textbook along with a footnote explaining its meaning. Like an explanation point (!) in the English language, the symbol influences the way a word or sentence is pronounced; there is no way to sound out this symbol when it is written in isolation.

As we proceeded through the translation process, I constructed an English version of each textbook using Microsoft Word. To ensure that the English version would look as similar as possible to the original Burmese version, I imitated all aspects of the original formatting, including text size and spacing as well as placement of illustrations. So, for example, in cases where text is bolded in the original, it has been bolded in the English translation. This was important as the formatting also helps set the tone that shapes the readers' understanding of the text's meaning. In addition, I've followed, as closely as possible, the translation and formatting procedures described above for each excerpt from the Myanmar readers included in this dissertation.

### *Ethnographic interviews*

To capture how teachers operationalize and remake civic education policy as they implement it in their own classrooms, I conducted semi-structured, ethnographic interviews with 20 participants, including 15 former teachers and 5 former students from Burma. While most of the interviews were conducted one-on-one, I conducted one focus group interview with a group of former teachers from Burma. All interviews were conducted in Thailand in 2008.

Out of a total of 20 interviewees, 10 were men, 10 were women, and they ranged from eighteen years old to their late sixties. Fourteen interviewees were Burman, the majority ethnicity in Burma; one interviewee was half Karen and half Burman, while the remaining five interviewees were from the following ethnic minority groups: Karen (2), Muslim (2), and Shan (1). All interviewees were high school graduates. In addition to their high school diploma, ten interviewees had also earned university degrees in Burma, one of which was earned through distance education. All the interviewees were Buddhist except four, two of whom self-identified as Muslim and two who self-identified as Christian.

As my study focuses on civic education in government primary schools, most of the individuals I



sought to interview had extensive experience teaching and/or studying in this setting. All the former students I interviewed attended government schools throughout their primary, secondary, and, where applicable, tertiary education. All of the teachers I interviewed taught at the primary level for at least a portion of their career. Eight of the 15 teachers interviewed taught middle school and/or high school after demonstrating several years of successful classroom teaching at the primary level. Twelve of the teachers interviewed taught in government schools, while 3 taught in other settings. Of the three non-government schoolteachers, one taught in a private school run by a Christian organization, another at a private tutoring school, while the third was a monk who offered free, informal classes to community members of all ages at his monastery. Three of the government schoolteachers also spent several years engaged primarily in private tutoring during times when a government school teaching position was not available. Analyzing interview data from teachers who had experience outside of government schools alongside those from government schoolteachers enriched my findings by providing a source of contrast that yielded additional insights about the civic education that goes on in Burma's government primary schools.

Of the available teachers willing to be interviewed, I chose to interview those who had spent the most number of years teaching in Burma and who had stopped teaching in Burma most recently. Teachers interviewed for this study had an average of 12.5 years experience teaching in Burma and had stopped teaching in Burma an average of 3 years prior to their interviews with me. Similarly, I chose to interview former students who had attended school in Burma most recently. The former students interviewed for this study had attended school in Burma, on average, 4 years prior to their interviews with me.



The map above illustrates the approximate location of where the former teachers taught and where the former students studied. Five of the teachers interviewed taught in two locations. These moves are indicated on the map using arrows. While I aimed to interview people from many different areas of Burma, when possible, I also sought to interview at least two people from a given region. Out of the 20 interviewees, 18 of them taught and/or studied in the same

area as at least one other interviewee. This facilitated the triangulation of data, as I had access to multiple people's perceptions of how civic education was implemented in schools in a given area. While they studied and/or taught in many different parts of the country, the majority of interviewees had experience in Burma's southern and eastern regions. The table below summarizes the areas of Burma where interviewees taught or studied. For a complete list of interviewees and their basic information see the table in Appendix 1.

<b>Area of Burma</b>	<b># of interviewees who taught and/or studied there<sup>17</sup></b>
Yangon Division	10
Mon State	4
Kayin State	3
Shan State	2
Tanintharyi Division	2
Bago Division	2
Kachin State	1
Kayah State	1
Ayeyawaddy Division	1

While I chose interviewees based on the characteristics detailed above, due to the relatively small number of interviewees available, this was largely a convenience sample and therefore it is not a representative sample of teachers or students in Burma. While the roughly two-thirds to one third split between the majority and minority ethnic groups in this sample approximates the proportions present in Burma's population as a whole, the range of ethnic groups represented is only a fraction of those living in Burma. While the gender split is reflective of Burma's actual population, their educational qualifications are higher than average. All of the teachers interviewed for this study had graduated high school and 47% had earned a university degree. According to recent estimates, 97.7% of primary school teachers in Burma hold a high school diploma and 27.7% hold a university degree (UNESCO, 2011, p. 27). Similarly, 3 out of the 5 former students interviewed had graduated from university, while this qualification is much less common among Burma's population as a whole. The most recent data put the

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<sup>17</sup> The numbers in this table add up to 25 instead of 20 since five of the 20 teachers interviewed taught in two locations.

national secondary school completion rate at 47% (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012a) and the proportion of university graduates in Burma at 10% (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012b).

In terms of the nature and degree of interviewees' involvement in Burma's political affairs, the vast majority of interviewees were typical of Burma's overall population. They had not been actively involved in politics while living in Burma. They had not participated in pro-democracy protests nor did they have any affiliation with groups seeking an end to military rule. In fact, when these topics came up, most interviewees explained that they had never considered becoming politically active in Burma. Due to the danger of retribution from the government, they felt the risks were far too high.

However, while living in Burma, 2 interviewees had been affiliated with pro-democracy groups or other individuals seeking to end military rule in Burma. While living inside the country, these two interviewees engaged in political activities that openly opposed the Burmese government and they served prison terms as a result.<sup>18</sup> Two other interviewees, who themselves had remained politically disengaged, had a close family member who had openly opposed the Burmese government. As noted in chapter one, openly opposing the government is exceedingly rare for people in Burma due to the authoritarian political environment and the government's strong disapproval of citizens' becoming politically engaged in ways that are not pre-scripted by the government itself. Therefore, the proportion of interviewees who had engaged in such activities, or who had a close connection to those who did, is far higher than in Burma's general population. This difference likely stems from the fact that I conducted the interviews in Thailand, where many people from Burma have sought refuge from Burmese government persecution after engaging in politically contentious activities.

However, while having a sample of interviewees that are skewed towards more anti-government political activity may lead one to assume that this would result in less compliance with government civic education policy, that did not turn out to be the case. As will be elaborated on in the findings chapters of this dissertation, there was a strong overall pattern of

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<sup>18</sup> The activities that prompted their arrest were not directly linked to their teaching.

compliance with government civic education policy amongst all interviewees.

Lastly, since all research participants had experience living both inside and outside of Burma, it is highly likely that they had been exposed a wider array of views about the Burmese government than their counterparts in Burma who have never left the country. Critiques of the Burmese government and its policies are shared much more freely in communities of Burmese living in Thailand and elsewhere outside Burma's borders than they are within the country. As a result, the reflections participants expressed in interviews about their experiences in Burmese primary schools are likely a combination of thoughts and assessments they had during and soon after the experience itself, as well as additional reflections they've had on those experiences since living in Thailand.

### **Interviewing and Interview Transcription Procedures**

For the protection of all research participants, I took a number of steps to ensure I conducted this study according to the highest ethical standards. Prior to each interview I informed every participant, verbally and in writing, about the purpose of my study and what he or she could expect being a research participant. I explained how I would keep their participation and responses anonymous and emphasized that they could decline to answer any question and that they were free to end the interview at any time. I provided them with my contact information and encouraged them to contact me any time if they had a concern about my research project or their participation in it. In addition, throughout my research notes, interview transcripts and write up I used pseudonyms for all research participants. In each case, pseudonyms are reflective of the participant's gender and ethnic background. For instance, when choosing a pseudonym for a female interviewee from the Karen ethnic group, I chose a name that is commonly used by Karen women.

During the interviews, I sought to create an environment where research participants felt as comfortable and safe as possible sharing their experiences and opinions. I positioned myself as a learner, making it clear to interviewees that I value their knowledge greatly and respect their opinions. In this way, I attempted to equalize power relations to the extent possible. To put

them further at ease, all research participants were given the option to be interviewed in either Burmese or English. Seven people chose to be interviewed in English, while the remaining 13 people chose to be interviewed in Burmese. I conducted all of the interviews, but in cases where the interviewee opted to be interviewed in Burmese language, I was assisted by a Burmese-English translator to ensure the research participants and I could understand each other thoroughly.

All interviews were carried out in a semi-structured fashion using an interview protocol I developed ahead of time, according to Carspecken's (1996) guidelines. The protocol contained 4 broad lead-off questions designed to encourage participants to discuss a range of issues related to their own background and their experiences in Burmese government schools—both in general and in relation to civic education in particular. I came to the interviews with relatively few questions because I sought to conduct the interviews primarily by responding dynamically to what interviewees said. For instance, I often asked participants to elaborate on certain experiences they mentioned in passing. In other cases, when participants made generalized statements about topics such as 'good teaching,' I asked them if they could provide concrete examples from their own lives. As they described their classroom experiences in detail, they revealed a great deal about their values and backgrounded beliefs associated with schooling, citizenship and civic education. Asking follow-up questions directly related to the experience they recounted encouraged participants to explore these values and backgrounded beliefs to an even greater extent.

When I did ask questions from my prepared interview protocol, I made sure each lead-off question was general enough that interviewees had a wide variety of experiences and subtopics they could choose to discuss. This enabled me to avoid leading the interviews in a specific direction and allowed me to act as a facilitator, encouraging interviewees to share their experiences and opinions in their own words. Lead-off questions I used frequently include the following:

Lead-off Question #1: Tell me about yourself.

Lead –off Question #2: What was it like to be a teacher/student<sup>19</sup> in Burma?  
Lead –off Question #3: What is a typical day like at school? Describe it in as much detail as you can.  
Lead –off Question #4: Did you teach/learn anything about Burma at school? Yes?  
Describe the experience teaching/learning about Burma that you remember best.

While the broad nature of these interview questions was very beneficial in eliciting rich and detailed interview data, they occasionally led to some ambiguity in participants' responses. Since 8 of the 15 teachers interviewed taught at the primary level in addition to the middle school and/or high school level, some of the teachers' comments may have been in reference to teaching experiences they had with older students. Similarly, all the former students interviewed for this study attended government schools in Burma from the primary level through, at least, high school. Therefore, some of their comments may have referenced experiences they had in post-primary school grades. However, in most cases, the context of participants' comments and their responses to my follow up questions made it clear what level of schooling they were referring to. As this dissertation study is focused on civic education policy at the primary level, I have concentrated my analysis on the portions of these interviews that pertain to participants' experiences in primary schools. In addition, unless otherwise noted, the interview excerpts I include in this dissertation pertain to participants' primary level schooling.

I used several validity techniques recommended by Carspecken (1996) to ensure the veracity and reliability of information I gathered during interviews. For one, when possible, I sought to conduct multiple interviews with research participants. While I was able to interview most participants just once, I had the opportunity to interview three participants multiple times. Each initial interview was approximately 2 hours long. Follow-up interviews were approximately 1 hour long. Multiple interviews enabled us to discuss their experiences and views in much greater detail. In addition, I checked for consistency within and between interviews and approached participants when certain statements seemed contradictory so we could ensure we had understood each other fully.

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<sup>19</sup> I alternated between these terms depending of whether the interviewee was a former teacher or former student from Burma.

My use of non-leading interview questions was another validity technique, since this style of interviewing put the participants in greater control of the topics covered in the interview, giving them considerably more freedom to bring up issues and describe experiences that they viewed as particularly important. This was one way I tried to minimize the impact of my own understanding of civic education on the data I collected. I asked relatively general interview questions about schooling in Burma, so that civic education policies and practices that emerged as prominent in the interview data were less likely to have been those I chose to focus on. Instead, they were more likely to be those that Burmese teachers and students identified as having a central role in Burmese government schools.

In addition, I asked colleagues to act as ‘peer debriefers.’ In this role they read through interview transcripts and we discussed instances where the translator or I were leading the interview in a particular direction more than at other times. I used these discussions to enhance the context notes I included in the primary record, which I took into account during the data analysis process.

I also made use of ‘member checks’ to help ensure the validity of interview data. Member checks consist of checking in with research participants in the later stages of data collection as well as during data analysis stages about the conclusions the researcher is drawing. At the conclusion of several interviews I verbally summarized the key points participants had made about schooling in Burma and encouraged them to confirm, adjust or add to my comments to ensure I had understood them accurately. During follow-up interviews with participants I had met with several times, I described some broad patterns I was seeing across comments made by multiple interviewees and invited them to critique and comment on these preliminary findings. In some cases, these member checks prompted insightful discussions that greatly enhanced my understanding of the interview data and what it revealed about civic education in Burma.

I drew on the work of Spradley (1979) to guide me as to how to conduct ethnographic interviews. The interviews were ethnographic in the sense that they enabled the participants and I to explore the culture of schooling in Burma from the perspective of the interviewees,



using their own terms and descriptions. These interviews were not question and answer periods where the interviewee and I went back and forth, switching topics abruptly and in a disjointed manner. The interviewees were given the time and space to depict their lives and schooling experiences in great detail, thus the interviews had a fluid, narrative quality to them. As a result they were rich in details that allowed me to reconstruct cultural meanings.

After conducting interviews, I fully transcribed them from the recordings I made during the interview itself. As I wrote up the transcriptions, I paid great attention to detail, transcribing all comments and sounds made by everyone involved in the interview. I worked alongside a Burmese-English translator while transcribing interviews in which both English and Burmese were used so that, together, we could transcribe the full interview into English. In each interview transcript I also made note of the speakers' tone, noticeable background noises, pauses and other silences, specifying their length. In addition, I referred to notes I made at the time of the interview about gestures and expressions participants made and I included these in the transcription. These details helped me construct the context in which participants made their comments, which helped ensure the validity of the interview data.

### **Key informants**

During the data collection and analysis process, 4 of the 20 research participants emerged as 'key informants.' These interviewees were particularly insightful about the teaching of civics in Burmese government schools. They spent a great deal of time with me discussing civics-related textbook content and they went into considerable detail describing how they and their colleagues implemented civic messages in their own classrooms. I had the opportunity to interview most of these key informants multiple times. Therefore many of the examples I use to illustrate my key findings are drawn from their experiences in Burma's government schools.

Below is a short description of each key informant that outlines basic aspects of their personal background and teaching career. The information included in these descriptions is based on what the interviewee chose to emphasize about herself during my first interview with her. The alpha-numeric code following the pseudonym for each key informant refers to his or her

position on the map of interviewee locations in the 'ethnographic interviews' section above.

*'Tharamu Lily Paw'* [T1] is a half-Burman, half-Karen woman in her late 20s who taught at 3 government schools over a period of 5 years in rural Karen State. She felt teaching was her calling, so much so that she pursued this career despite her parents' objections. She approached teaching with passion and drive, often going great lengths to advocate for her students' education. On some occasions she helped community members harvest their crops to lessen their need for their children's labor on the farm. She hoped this would result in families sending their children to school more regularly. Tharamu Lily Paw was recognized as a well-qualified teacher from the very start of her career. She had a university degree in addition to her primary teacher certification, while many of her teacher colleagues had not graduated high school. Her first year on the job there was a shortage of middle school teachers. Recognized as one of the most well-trained primary teachers, she was asked to fill one of the vacant posts. While she enjoyed teaching middle school, she expressed even greater happiness about being assigned to the primary level the following year, as it was a level for which she had been formally trained. She said with pride, "in the second year, I became a real primary assistant teacher." She had arrived in Thailand just prior to her interview with me to pursue a job teaching primary students at a Burmese migrant school. In Burma, she had been repeatedly assigned to rural schools and she wanted to teach in a more urbanized area.

*'Sayama Mar Lar'* [T2] is a veteran teacher in her late 50s from Yangon Division with nearly three decades of teaching experience in Burmese government schools. She and her siblings were raised in a rural area outside Yangon by two Burman, Buddhist parents, one of which was a teacher. After completing high school and the government's primary teacher training program, she was assigned to various rural primary schools over the course of 8 years. After earning a middle school teaching qualification through distance education, she was promoted and assigned to a middle school in her hometown. While she loved teaching, she was very devoted to her parents. She turned down a promotion to teach high school because it would've taken her too far away from her aging mother. She never married and lived with her parents until they passed away. Due primarily to economic difficulties, she came to Thailand to teach

the children of Burmese migrant workers, as the salary was higher.

*'Tharamu Say Say'* [T4] is a veteran teacher with 23 years teaching experience in Burmese government schools in eastern Burma. She is a Karen woman in her 50s who follows the Christian religion. Tharamu Say Say is a jovial woman who described many of her experiences teaching in Burma through a comedic lens. For instance, she good-naturedly joked that after allowing her teachers' pension to build up for three years, when she finally went to collect it there was only enough to buy a cup of tea on the way home. She spent the first portion of her career teaching students from the Kayan ethnic minority at a government primary school in a small village in Karenni State. After obtaining a middle school teaching certificate, she taught middle school in an urban area of Karenni State and then later, an urban area of Bago Division, where she had lived during childhood. She taught middle school in Bago Division for over a decade before retiring from teaching. Several years after retirement, Tharamu Say Say came to Thailand to find work and replenish her retirement savings. She looked for work in Burmese migrant schools in Thailand instead of returning to Burmese government schools because of the higher salaries in Thailand.

*'Sayama Nanda Aye'* [T6] is a female teacher of Burman ethnicity in her early 30s. She was born and raised in Ayeyawaddy Division in Burma's southern delta region. Right after graduating high school and earning her primary teacher training certificate, she was offered an opportunity to teach in an urban area, but she declined, choosing to teach in a high-needs area because she wanted to help those most in need. She spent one year teaching in a very small primary school in a rural area of Ayeyawaddy Division. In addition to teaching some primary students, she also taught some middle school students who were unable to travel to the nearest middle school, which was a considerable distance away. She was then transferred to a 'model' government school in a larger village in Ayeyawaddy Division. In this model school Sayama Nanda Aye taught both primary and middle school students for 4 years. She came to Thailand looking for teaching work that paid a higher salary than what she was receiving as a government schoolteacher, so she would be better able to support her family.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

I began my data analysis with the translation and transcription of the interviews I conducted, along with the translation of the set of primary school Myanmar readers, using the procedures described above. Once these initial stages of data analysis were complete, I analyzed both the Myanmar readers and the interview data using reconstructive analysis as outlined by Carspecken (1996). This form of analysis is 'reconstructive' in the sense that it is a process in which the researcher puts into words, cultural norms and meanings that had previously been tacit and of which participants may not have been consciously aware. Through this analysis, the researcher 'reconstructs' participants' implicit understandings about the world and about how they see themselves within that world. Preliminary reconstructive analysis consists of alternating back and forth between low inference, emic coding, initial meaning reconstruction and horizon analysis. I will briefly describe each of these three processes in turn.

Coding is essentially a process of labeling sections of text in a way that corresponds to its content in order to find patterns in the data. The coding process I used is emic in that the codes I used emerged from that data itself. They were not chosen by me ahead of time based on what I anticipated finding in the data, nor were they based on my own understanding of civic education or its meaning as portrayed in the scholarly literature. They are low inference, meaning that they reflect the content of the data very closely, and they do not incorporate much abstracted interpretation on the part of the researcher. Examples of emic, low inference codes I used at this stage of analysis include the following code and associated sub-codes.

Ways to show respect to others

'Gadaw'<sup>20</sup> (perform a respectful bow)

Stand up straight with arms crossed over chest

Bend at waist when passing in front of someone

Gift-giving

Carrying someone's bags

These codes emerged as prominent throughout both the Myanmar readers and the interview

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<sup>20</sup> 'Gadaw' (ဂဏ္ဍဝါ) is a Pali word, commonly used in Burmese language to refer to a bowing procedure that a person performs as a sign of profound respect. It involves sitting on one's knees, raising both hands towards one's face, as if in prayer, then touching one's forehead to the ground. This is done three times in succession, with one's eyes closed or cast downwards.

data. For instance, I marked sections of the textbooks with the 'gadaw' code when the text or illustrations depicted youth preforming this respectful bow towards a teacher, parent or other elder. Similarly, I marked sections of the interview transcripts with this code when interviewees described students engaging in this practice. Mentions of gadawing in the textbooks and in interviews were usually accompanied by comments that implicitly or explicitly indicated that the purpose of the bow was to show respect. I identified commonalities and differences between the codes that emerged and used these to group codes into preliminary categories based on similarities in meaning. For instance, all of the codes listed above were similar in that they were all ways people used to show respect to others. I then used these categories to code additional interviews. Throughout this process I examined the fit and refined the category criteria as needed.

During and after this preliminary coding process, I engaged in initial meaning reconstruction as I read through the text of interview transcripts and the Myanmar readers, noting the array of possible meanings for different passages and lines of text. This primarily involved noting patterns of meanings that were repeated across multiple data sources as well as noting some meanings that stood out as rare or unusual. I then chose sections of text to analyze at a much more detailed level using a technique Carspecken (1996) refers to as 'meaning field analysis' (p. 95-96). Constructing a meaning field involves mapping out an array of meanings that the speaker or writer was likely attempting to communicate with a certain comment. Meaning fields can contain both implicit and explicit meanings the speaker could've intended. Interpreting participants' possible meanings is an intersubjective process in that I engaged in position-taking, imagining myself in the role of the speaker and other participants in the interaction, where applicable. This is a hermeneutic process in which I deduced participants' possible meanings based on the context in which the statement or interaction occurred. To do this, I took into account not only the participants' word choice, but also their tone, facial expressions, and gestures as well as other non-verbal cues.

For example, the following is a meaning field analysis I carried out for a comment Tharamu Lily Paw made during an interview I conducted with her. At this point in the interview Tharamu Lily

Paw was describing how she had initially accepted government policies unquestioningly as good and followed them faithfully. However, after working as a government schoolteacher for a number of years, she had come to view the government's policies with a more critical eye. Below I have included an excerpt from the interview to provide some context for her comment, "I was telling a joke," which is the focus of this meaning field.

T: Tharamu Lily Paw begins speaking using a serious, but calm and matter-of-fact tone of voice<sup>21</sup> *I feel that before my ideas were not good, but when I became a civil servant I look at their [the government's] guidelines and I follow their guidelines. While following those guidelines, I have faced a lot of difficulties but they don't allow me to report those difficulties. Later on I started to know why they would not allow us to report those difficulties. My ideas got better after working under them.* Tharamu Lily Paw stops speaking abruptly and pauses for a few seconds. She looks down at the table with a thoughtful look on her face. Then, Tharamu Lily Paw Looks up from the table, smiles uncomfortably at me, chuckling. She begins speaking again using a hesitant tone of voice. *I was telling a joke.* Laughs.

**[Meaning field: What I just said isn't entirely true AND/OR I didn't come to view the government's policies in a more critical light AND/OR I came to view the government's policies in a more critical light, but I don't believe it was my experience working under government policies that caused that change AND/OR Please disregard what I just said AND/OR I shouldn't have said what I just said AND/OR I want to take back what I just said]**

Tharamu Lily's abrupt stop after making a comment that cast the Burmese government in a negative light and her significant change in tone, from matter-of-fact to hesitant and uncomfortable, suggested that she made the comment 'I was telling a joke' to not only convey that her previous comments weren't entirely true, but that she felt bad about having made them. Although she claimed her comments were meant as a joke, her serious tone and demeanor prior to pausing, suggest that it was not a joke in the sense that she was intending to make me laugh. Stating that her comments were a joke seemed to be a way of admitting that she had just said something that was untrue and/or a way of asking me to disregard her

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<sup>21</sup> All text italicized in interview excerpts are the exact words of the speaker. Non-italicized text within interview excerpts consist of my own comments about the speaker, including a description of their tone, gestures or other aspects of their demeanor.

previous comments.

As I got to know each research participant better and became more familiar with their cultural and personal norms, I was able to pinpoint, with greater accuracy, participants' most likely meanings from the array of possible meanings in the meaning field. Constructing meaning fields was key to my analysis, as it heightened my awareness of the many tacit meanings expressed by participants. Doing this also made it possible for me to share my interpretation of participants' possible meanings with peer debriefers and, in some cases, with the participants themselves to ensure that I had understood them correctly. In addition, I used these meaning fields to engage in pragmatic horizon analysis, the next stage of my data analysis process.

Pragmatic horizon analysis is a method of performing meaning reconstruction with even greater precision. This method of analysis is based on the phenomenological idea that just as our ability to make sense of an object is facilitated by seeing it against a 'horizon' of other forms such as the ground or the sky, the same is true with concepts at a purely mental level. Our ability to make sense of an idea is made possible because we perceive it against a 'horizon' of explicit and tacit understandings about the world. Therefore, every meaningful act a person carries out implies a horizon of his or her own understandings about the world. This method of analysis involves reconstructing the horizon of meanings participants are drawing from when they act and convey meanings to others. These horizons are comprised of various layers of meaning, ranging from highly foregrounded to highly backgrounded. Foregrounded meanings include those participants are actively trying to communicate to others. Thus, for a given act, the contents of the meaning field will also appear in the foreground of the pragmatic horizon analysis. At the backgrounded end of the horizon analysis are assumptions participants have about the world that they are less explicitly aware of.

Drawing from Habermas' (1984, 1987) theory of communicative action, Carspecken (1996) posits that within these assumptions are validity claims that fall into three ontological categories—objective, subjective and normative-evaluative. Objective claims are those that can be backed up with evidence that can be observed by multiple people. They are "associated with assertions about the world: about what is, about what took place, and about what sorts of

events regularly preceded other sorts of events” (Carspecken, 1996, p. 84). In contrast, subjective claims refer to one’s feelings, motivations and desires, which cannot be directly perceived by anyone other than the person experiencing them. Lastly, normative-evaluative claims express a person’s values about what is good and bad, right and wrong. In addition to containing validity claims in all three of these categories, within the horizon of all meaningful acts the actor communicates an ‘identity claim,’ which is a message about the type of person they are. To illustrate, I’ve included the validity horizon I created for the interaction I had with Tharamu Lily Paw in the interview excerpt above. You’ll note that I categorize validity and identity claims according to where they fall on the foreground to background continuum and I label each validity claim according to its ontological category. I’ve also included Lily Paw’s comments here again for easy reference.

T: Tharamu Lily Paw begins speaking using a serious, but calm and matter-of-fact tone of voice *I feel that before my ideas were not good, but when I became a civil servant I look at their [the government’s] guidelines and I follow their guidelines. While following those guidelines, I have faced a lot of difficulties but they don’t allow me to report those difficulties. Later on I started to know why they would not allow us to report those difficulties. My ideas got better after working under them.* Tharamu Lily Paw stops speaking abruptly and pauses for a few seconds. She looks down at the table with a thoughtful look on her face. Then, Tharamu Lily Paw Looks up from the table, smiles uncomfortably at me, chuckling. She begins speaking again using a hesitant tone of voice. *I was telling a joke.* Laughs.

#### More Foregrounded

What I said, wasn’t entirely true (Objective)

I do not view the government’s policies critically (subjective)

OR—I came to view the government’s policies in a more critical light, but I don’t believe it was my experience working under government policies that caused that change (Subjective)

#### Less Foregrounded

I want to take back what I just said (subjective)

I shouldn’t have said what I just said (Normative-evaluative)

#### Mid-Range

Identity claim: I am an honest person

If you tell someone something that’s not true, you should let that person know.



(Normative-evaluative)

#### Less Backgrounded

OR—What I said is true (objective), but falsely claiming this was a joke will help protect me from government retribution (objective)

(Just possible) Identity claim: I am the kind of person who protects herself from danger

(Just possible) Identity claim: I'm not the kind of person who risks her own safety by making critical statements about the Burmese government

(Just possible) I feel afraid because I said something critical of the government.

(Subjective)

(Just possible) It is bad/dangerous to be critical about the government. (Normative-evaluative)

#### More Backgrounded

It's not okay to lie, but it's okay to make jokes. (Normative-evaluative)

Certain things are okay to say and others that are not okay to say (Normative-evaluative)

(Just possible) Identity claim: I am the kind of person that puts my personal safety above honesty

(Just possible) When a person critiques the government, they will be punished (objective)

(Just possible) If one claims one's critique was a joke, they will be safer from government retribution (objective)

(Just possible) My negative comments about the government made me feel nervous and unsafe, so I claimed my statement is a joke to feel safer (subjective)

(Just possible) It's not okay to be critical of the government, but it's okay to make jokes (Normative-evaluative)

Reconstructing participants' pragmatic horizons enabled me to gain deeper insight into how individuals made sense of their world and, in particular, how they conceptualized issues related to citizenship, civic education and schooling in general. For instance, in the case of Tharamu Lily Paw's comment above, we learn that she doesn't see critiquing the government and openly expressing her negative opinions as activities she should be engaging in. In fact, her comments suggest that she may fear the government would see her comments as an act of disloyal citizenship and punish her as a result. Seeing patterns of similar worldviews across multiple participants, as I did with Tharamu Lily Paw's sentiment above, gave me further insight into Burmese culture and the culture of Burma's government schools.

#### Validity Checks

As I did during the data collection stages of this study, I used a number of techniques suggested by Carspecken (1996) to ensure the validity of my data analysis. Colleagues familiar with critical qualitative data analysis procedures acted as peer debriefers. They examined my coding, meaning fields and pragmatic horizon analyses to explore whether there were additional interpretations of meanings or validity claims that should be taken into account. In cases where a peer debriefer and I initially disagreed, we discussed our interpretation at length until we reached an agreement, noting down multiple valid interpretations as needed.

I also made use of 'member checks,' in which I checked in with research participants in the later stages of data collection as well as during data analysis stages about my initial findings. I engaged in member checks at the conclusion of interviews and during follow-up interviews. I encouraged participants to confirm, adjust or add to my preliminary findings.

In addition, I engaged in negative case analysis, which consisted of actively looking for evidence in my data that seemed contradictory or seemed to disprove my findings at each stage of my data analysis process. In cases where data didn't fit with other, more dominant patterns, I examined my analysis to uncover reasons for the discrepancy. Negative case analysis deepened my understanding of my data and, in some cases, led me to refine or revise my findings in important ways.

Triangulation of data was another key technique I used to enhance the validity of my data analysis. I triangulated findings from multiple interviewees, both former students and teachers, many of whom spent time in government schools in the same area of Burma. In addition, I triangulated findings from interviews with other data sources, including the Myanmar readers and other government-produced education policy documents.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter explored the methodology that guided this study, the specific methods I employed to collect and analyze data, as well as the techniques I used to ensure the validity of my findings. I chose to use ethnographic methods to explore civic education policy in Burmese government schools, as they enabled me to uncover and understand cultural norms and

meaning-making in a highly contextualized way. This was particularly important given that I take a socio-cultural approach to policy, conceptualizing policy as an ongoing process that both shapes and is shaped by the culture and social norms of the policy actors. These ethnographic methods enabled me to analyze how Burmese educators shape and remake civic education policy as they put it into practice over time. Collecting and analyzing an array of data sources, including ethnographic interviews, textbooks and other government policy documents, using critical qualitative methodology, I was able to reconstruct what civic education means in the context of Burmese government schools and how teachers implement it in that setting.

## Chapter 3 Textbooks as policy: Civic education policy in the Myanmar readers

When striving to understand the civic messages students are exposed to in Burmese primary schools, examining the content of textbooks is an important place to start. This is true for two key reasons. For one, civic messages are woven throughout the textbooks that students interact with every day. There is no textbook wholly dedicated to civics currently used in Burmese schools (UNESCO, 2011, p. 12). However, textbooks primarily designed to teach academic subjects such as Burmese language, social studies and English all contain civic education content in explicit and/or implicit forms. Students have very frequent exposure to these civic messages, as they use their textbooks constantly within the formal school setting as well as in their homes, engaging in individual study, completing homework tasks and taking part in study groups with their peers and/or their tutors.

Secondly, textbooks serve as primary school teachers' chief source of civic education policy from the Burmese government. While the government has outlined some civic education policy in official written documents such as policy booklets or letters sent to schools, most teachers have had little to no exposure to these formal policy pronouncements. Instead, government-produced textbooks are the only written documents teachers consistently receive from the Ministry of Education. Furthermore, even for the few educators who have gained access to other forms of official written policy, they provide very little detail about how educators should pursue the civic education goals they lay out. In contrast, the textbooks' civic education content provides a roadmap for teachers to follow, guiding them in how to shape their students into the 'ideal' citizens the government wishes them to become.

As the Myanmar readers contain the most explicit civic education content of all the primary school textbooks, this chapter focuses on uncovering the Burmese government's civic education policies embedded in this particular set of textbooks. This chapter presents a content analysis of all five primary-level Myanmar readers, in which I identify their most prominent civic themes: (1) respect elders, (2) fulfill your duties and (3) live and act in unity. This chapter also

notes the three ways these themes are most frequently conveyed in the text—in mottos, specific practices and stories—as well as the pedagogical practices the textbooks encourage educators to employ when teaching civic messages to students. This chapter concludes that the civic education messages embedded in the Myanmar readers are largely moral in nature and emphasize the importance of obedience and conformity.

#### *Explicit & implicit curriculum policy in the Myanmar readers*

Curriculum policy is embedded throughout the textbooks in both explicit and implicit forms. Policy is *explicit* when it has been reified in the form of bulleted rules, written directives, or ‘dos and don’ts’ that educators are expected to follow when designing and implementing schooling. The formatting is similar to that found in documents that are more traditionally thought of as official written policy. The Myanmar reader for each primary grade level contains explicit curriculum policy in a 2 to 3-page preface. This section is written primarily for teachers and contains the learning objectives for the year-long course as well as pedagogical directives. For instance, the second grade Myanmar reader advises teachers to “teach children through using activities” (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009d). The preface of each Myanmar reader also includes a very detailed breakdown of how many class sessions should be dedicated to teaching each page of the textbook, as can be seen below in figure and table 3.1 (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c, p. ii). Explicit curriculum policies, such as these, clearly and directly instruct teachers to convey certain information and to convey it in a particular way.

၈၈ သုတေသနပြုဖွဲ့စည်းထားသော သင်ရိုးချုပ်ဆိုချက်များကို မူရင်းအတိုင်း ဖော်ပြထားပါသည်။

စဉ်	သင်ရိုးအမည်	သင်ရိုး	လေ့ကျင့်ရိုး	စုစုပေါင်း
၁	ဗျည်းအက္ခရာ၊ ဗျည်းအက္ခရာများနှင့် သဘာဝကျရာများ ဗျည်းအက္ခရာများ	၈	၉	၁၇
၂	ဗျည်းအက္ခရာများရေးသားခြင်း	၁၅	၃၀	၄၅
၃	ဗျည်းအက္ခရာများရေးသားခြင်း လေ့ကျင့်ရိုး	၃	၆	၉
၄	ကဗျာများ (တစ်ပုဒ်လျှင်)	၁	၁	
	၁၈ ပုဒ်	( ၂ ခု x ၁၈ )		၃၆
၅	မင်္ဂလာကဗျာများ (တစ်ပုဒ်လျှင်)	၃	၃	
	၂ ပုဒ်	( ၆ ခု x ၂ )		၁၂
၆	နိုင်ငံတော်သီချင်း	၂	၃	၅
၇	သင်္ဂြိုဟ်များ (တစ်ခုလျှင်)	၃	၃	
	၁၄ ခု	( ၆ ခု x ၁၄ )		၈၄
၈	ဇာတ်ကဗျာ (တစ်ခုလျှင်)	၄	၄	
	၁၄ ခု	( ၈ ခု x ၁၄ )		၁၁၂
၉	ဆောင်ပုဒ်များ (၄) ခု	၆	၄	၁၀
စုစုပေါင်းသင်ရိုး လေ့ကျင့်ရိုး				၃၃၀
တတ်မြောက်မှုစစ်ဆေးရိုး				၆၆
စာရင်းစုံ (၃၆) ပတ်ပတ်တွက်သင်ရိုးအချိုး				၃၉၆

(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c, p. ii)

Figure 3.1 Excerpt from Myanmar reader detailing number of class sessions per lesson

8. Tentative timetable for kindergarten Myanmar subject is provided as an example.

No.	Lesson topic	Teaching time	Practicing time	Total
1	Consonant poem, consonants and vowels, names of consonants	8	9	17
2	How to write consonants	15	30	45
3	Practicing writing and reading consonants	3	6	9
4	Poems (each poem)	1	1	
	18 poems	(2 x 18)		36
5	Mingala Poems (each poem)	3	3	
	2 poems	(6 x 2)		12
6	National anthem	2	3	5
7	Lessons (each lesson)	3	3	
	14 lessons	(6 x 14)		84
8	Readings (each reading)	4	4	
	14 readings	8 x 14		112
9	4 proverbs	6	4	10
Total teaching and practicing time				330
Learning assessment				66
Teaching time for one year (36 weeks)				396

(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c, p. ii)

**English translation of table 3.1**

In contrast, implicit curriculum policy is not stated in the form of directives and has not been reified into succinct, written ‘dos and don’ts.’ Instead, the reader infers implicit policies from the content and layout of the textbooks. Because implicit curriculum policy is not explicitly labeled as policy and is not presented in a form that most people expect to find policy, it often goes unnoticed by the reader. However, whether or not the reader is aware of it, exposure to these implicit policies over time helps shape aspects of the reader’s worldview, including their views on what qualifies as ‘appropriate’ curriculum content and pedagogy.

For example, the exercises, discussion questions and other interactive features in textbooks communicate implicit pedagogical policy, providing teachers with cues about how and to what extent students should actively engage with the information being taught. Where these interactive elements are placed in the textbook relays implicit policies to teachers regarding formative and summative assessment. Furthermore, the information and skills these exercises ask students to draw on suggests what textbook content teachers should consider most important. The way content is divided and categorized as well as the form in which it is presented, be it through stories, vocabulary word lists, tables or illustrations, gives suggestions to teachers about how it should be conveyed to students. These are just a few of many possible examples. Everything about a textbook, from its content to its layout, gives implicit cues to the reader about how it should be used for learning and teaching. It is these cues that I refer to as implicit curriculum policy.

Textbooks’ implicit curriculum policy is one form of what scholars refer to as the ‘hidden curriculum’ of schooling. This is the concept that all aspects of schooling contribute to the socialization of society—from school timetables, to the physical layout of the classroom, to classroom management practices, to textbooks and beyond. Each component of schooling helps shape individuals’ worldview and instills in them certain norms, values and beliefs. It teaches society to see the world in a certain way, even when we are not aware of it, hence the name ‘hidden curriculum.’ This term was originally coined by Jackson (1968) who primarily

focused on the hidden curriculum communicated through school rules and discipline procedures. Subsequently, many other scholars have explored how a hidden curriculum is conveyed through other aspects of schooling such as student evaluation procedures (Anyon, 1980), pedagogical practices (hooks, 1989, 1994), social relationships in the school setting (Giroux & Purpel, 1983) and textbooks (Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991).

While all textbooks contain explicit and implicit curriculum policy, educators will not necessarily interpret the policy the way the textbook developers intended, and not all teachers will interpret the policy in the same way. This is a key aspect of Sutton & Levinson's (2001) 'policy as practice' framework and has also been widely recognized by other scholars, including Cohen and Ball (1990), who refer to textbooks as "rubbery agents of policy" for this reason. However, even if teachers actively resist the policy by intentionally not implementing it, the policy itself likely played a role in conditioning that person's views and actions.

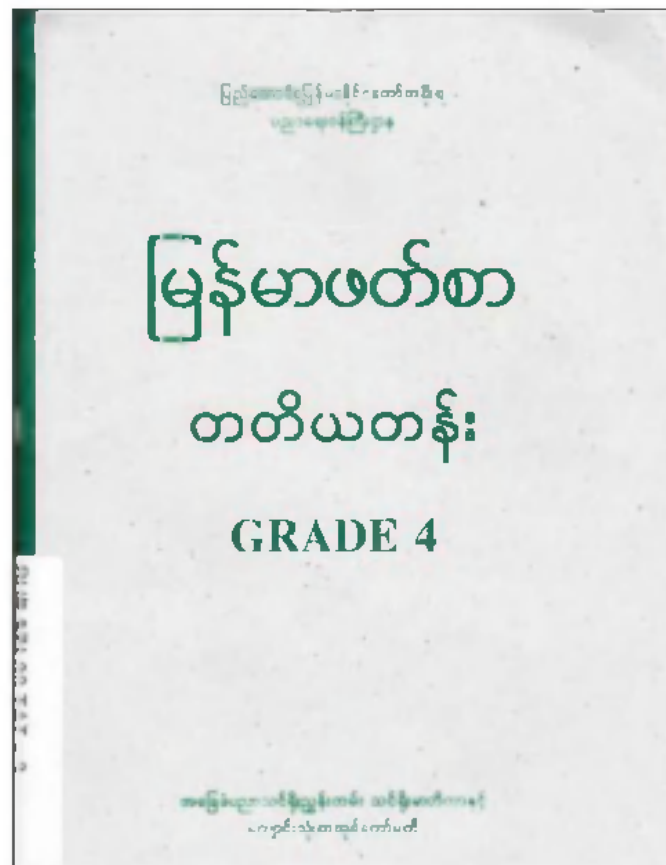
#### *Authorized vs. Unauthorized Policy*

The curriculum policy contained in textbooks can be either authorized or unauthorized. As noted in chapter one, policy is authorized when it originates from an official, recognized policy-making authority, while policy is unauthorized when it originates from an individual or group that has not been officially tasked with setting policy (Sutton & Levinson, 2001, p. 2). For instance, textbooks' curriculum policy would be unauthorized if a textbook was being used in class that hadn't been approved by the Ministry of Education or other official policy-making body.

All the implicit and explicit policy contained in the Myanmar readers is authorized since the government is directly involved in all aspects of textbook production. The textbooks are written, revised and approved by the Basic Education Curriculum, Content and School Textbook Committee, which is a part of the Ministry of Education (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2004). In addition, the Myanmar readers are required to pass government censor boards within the Ministry of Information's Press Scrutiny and Registration Division to gain permission to be printed (Cheesman, 2002). Textbooks are printed at publishing houses run by the Printing and Publishing Enterprise, which is a part of the Ministry of Information (New Light of Myanmar,



2008]. The government maintains a uniform green and white color scheme and the cover design for all textbooks (figure 3.2).



(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009e)

**Figure 3.2 Front cover of a Myanmar reader**

#### *Textbooks as curriculum policy in Burma*

The extent to which curriculum policy embedded in textbooks influences actual classroom practice depends on a number of contextual factors. In Burma, textbooks are a particularly prominent source of curriculum policy for two key reasons: (1) the highly prescriptive policy environment, and (2) the inaccessibility of other sources of education policy for most teachers.

#### Highly prescriptive policy environment

A. Porter et al. (1988) found that in highly prescriptive policy environments, where courses and topics within those courses were mandated, teachers closely followed the textbooks' order and content when teaching their students. This was not the case in environments where less

prescriptive policies were in place. The policy environment in Burma is even more rigid than the policy context examined by A. Porter et al. (1988). The Burmese government mandates that all textbooks used in all public schools be those explicitly approved by the government for this purpose. It is illegal for the government textbooks to be substituted or supplemented by any other book or written educational materials.<sup>22</sup>

Like many Asian countries, schooling in Burma is very textbook-centric. Burmese teachers regularly make comments implying that teaching is impossible without the textbook.<sup>23</sup> This is exemplified by Sayama Nanda Aye's comment: "Because of those things [lack of textbooks and other supplies], there are difficulties to teach. In teaching, if there's no book, how will you teach?"

Moreover, teachers interviewed for this study reported adhering very strictly to the curriculum policy the textbooks lay out.<sup>24</sup> They stated that they teach all the content in the textbooks, in the prescribed order. While they did not know of any document explicitly mandating this, they considered abiding by this unwritten policy to be a requirement of their job. In fact, for most teachers, teaching information not in the textbook, skipping textbook sections or teaching the information in an alternative order did not occur to them as an option. Whenever I asked them about these practices they responded with surprise. Many explained that they had not considered doing these things. For example, Tharamu Say Say, a government schoolteacher from Karen State in eastern Burma, responded to my query in the following way.

**Brooke:** And when you were teaching with the [text]book did you ever get to a part that you didn't want to teach, so you didn't teach that lesson?

**Tharamu Say Say:** I'm sorry, that what?

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<sup>22</sup> Private schools have more flexibility with the texts they use. While it is legal for them to use non-government textbooks, their students are required to pass government examinations, which are heavily based on the content in the government textbooks. If the students do not pass these examinations, they are unable to receive an official government certificate indicating that they completed basic education. This certificate is required to obtain many jobs in Burma as well as to continue on to university education.

<sup>23</sup> 6 participants expressed this.

<sup>24</sup> 10 participants expressed this.

**Brooke:** That's okay. When you're teaching—maybe Monday you teach this one, maybe Tuesday you teach this one then maybe Wednesday you get to this one and you don't like that one, or, I don't know, you're too busy. Do you skip it?  
**Tharamu Say Say:** [insistent tone] No. No. We don't skip. We teach all. Teach every lesson, yes.

In addition, teachers consider teaching the textbook, exactly as it was intended to be taught, to be in the best interest of their students, academically.<sup>25</sup> For example, Tharamu Lily Paw, a government primary school teacher from Karen State, explained her views on this issue.

"If there are 12 chapters in the textbook and only 7 chapters are related to each other, the other 4 has nothing to do with the 7 chapters. I still teach them because I think even though it may not be helpful for this class, it may be helpful in the next level, or in other classes. I don't want them to have that gap."

Teachers also stated that they rarely, if ever, taught students content that was not in the textbooks for fear of punishment from the authorities.<sup>26</sup> This is made clear in the following exchange I had with two government primary school teachers from southern Burma.

**Brooke:** [in Burmese, via a translator] What did you teach your students about their country?

**Sayama Thida:** [in Burmese] ...We only taught what they issued [in the textbook].

**Sayama Nanda Aye:** [in Burmese] We only taught what they issued. We cannot talk about anything more than what is said in the book... If these [other] things are mentioned in the lecture, we will be accused of talking about something that is not related to the lecture.

**Sayama Thida:** [in Burmese] Talking about things that are not related to the lecture, we will be fired.

**Sayama Nanda Aye:** [in Burmese] We will be fired.

**Sayama Thida:** [in Burmese] And we will be put into jail."

#### Lack of written policy outside of textbooks

The availability of curriculum policy documents outside of the textbooks is a second contextual factor that likely affects how closely teachers follow the curriculum policy embedded in textbooks. When little to no other curriculum policy is made available to educators, teachers likely rely more heavily on the content and layout of textbooks for cues indicating how best to teach the information it contains. In the interaction below, Sayama Sandar Win, a government

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<sup>25</sup> 7 participants expressed this.

<sup>26</sup> 8 participants expressed this.

schoolteacher from Mon State in Eastern Burma, suggests that she relies primarily on textbooks as her main source of civic education policy.

**Brooke:** [English into Burmese, via translator] What does the government tell you about teaching morals to students? Do they give you any advice or is there any policy?

[RN:<sup>27</sup> short pause, Sayama's expression seems thoughtful, if slightly puzzled]

**Sayama Sandar Win:** [in Burmese] At school, at the beginning of the year, the education office gives us the textbook.

**Translator:** [in English] It [the textbook] is like a policy.

Sayama Sandar Win goes on to state that textbooks are the primary written documents that she consistently receives from the Ministry of Education, and thus they are her main source of official written policy on a wide range of issues related to schooling. Several other teachers interviewed for this study made very similar comments.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, many teachers named the Myanmar readers as their primary source of information about the government's civic education policies.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> RN, meaning 'researcher's note' is a notation I used when inserting additional information into interview transcripts that could not be communicated through the speakers' words alone. This includes information such as pauses in speech, changes in the speakers' tone of voice, changes in the speakers' expression, laughter or gestures the speaker made.

<sup>28</sup> 5 participants expressed this.

<sup>29</sup> 5 participants expressed this.



(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c, p. 1)

**Figure 3.3 The first page of academic content in the kindergarten Myanmar reader**

While some other sources of authorized education policy exist, they are inaccessible to the vast majority of Burma's teachers. The Ministry of Education, which is the primary government entity responsible for establishing formal education policy, disseminates information about its policies by producing formal, written education policy documents in various forms, including textbooks, informational booklets, letters to school principals, and announcements in government-run newspapers. However, while teachers and school principals occasionally learn about education policies through these means, textbooks are their most common source of information about education policy. This is because the primary written documents that schools regularly receive from the Ministry of Education are the government-produced textbooks.<sup>36</sup> Other education policy documents only appear at schools sporadically, if ever. Therefore, it is

<sup>36</sup> 5 participants expressed this.

likely that the implicit education policies in the textbooks play a much larger role than they otherwise would.

### Overview of Myanmar readers' content

Before detailing the civic education content of the Myanmar readers, it is useful to provide a brief overview of the content and structure of these textbooks. Each reader contains a preface for teachers and table of contents followed by the academic content.

The kindergarten and first grade Myanmar readers are very similar. They consist largely of a series of 2-page lessons. Each lesson focuses on how to read and write one letter of the Burmese alphabet or a short combination of letters. The first page of each lesson includes vocabulary words that use the new letter(s). Some vocabulary words are accompanied by an illustration. For example, lesson 1 in the kindergarten Myanmar reader introduces the letter – ဘ/–, which makes the sound 'ah' (figure 3.4). The vocabulary words that contain this letter include ဆရာမ, pronounced 'say-yah-mah,' meaning teacher, စပါး pronounced 's'bah' meaning rice grains and ဝါး, pronounced 'wah,' meaning bamboo (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c, p. 18).

On the second page of each 2-page lesson, there are four short poems that make frequent use of the new letters the lesson is introducing. Each poem is accompanied by an illustration. For example, the first poem in lesson 1 of the kindergarten reader is included below. It is accompanied by an illustration of children playing in the moonlight. This poem and drawing can be seen on the top right of figure 3.4.

ညအခါ	Night time
လ သာ သာ။	Moon is shining.
က စား မလား	Let's play?
နား မလား။	Let's rest? <sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Many of the passages from the Myanmar readers, including this one, are written in the form of a poem and do not follow all the grammatical rules that are required when writing prose. Every effort has

(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c, p. 19)



(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c, p. 18-19)

**Figure 3.4 Lesson 1 from the kindergarten Myanmar reader**

In addition to these 2-page lessons practicing new letters, the kindergarten and first grade Myanmar readers also contain poems, informational passages and stories that are not associated with learning one particular letter. Instead, they are designed to be memorized and recited by students, indicated by their common heading, 'for recitation.' They pertain to a variety of topics including civics, good health practices as well as plants and animals. The kindergarten reader has 27 pages dedicated to this type of content, which is interspersed between the 2-page lessons oriented towards learning particular letters (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c). The first half of the first grade Myanmar reader consists entirely of the 2-page lessons on letters, while the entirety of the second half of the reader, a total of 32

been made for the English translation to accurately reflect the meaning, tone and rhythm of the original Burmese version.

pages, consists of passages for recitation (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a). Both the kindergarten and first grade Myanmar readers end with the national anthem on the last page (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 69; 2009c, p. 64).

The Myanmar readers for grades 2 to 5 consist entirely of poems, informational passages and stories pertaining to the same types of topics as those in the first two Myanmar readers. They do not contain any lessons on particular letters, as all letters were covered in the kindergarten and first grade readers. Another difference is that very few of the passages in the second to fifth grade readers are labeled 'for recitation,' presumably because students at these grade levels are expected to have the skills to read these passages. In addition, these poems, passages and stories increase considerably in length at each successively higher grade level. There are also changes in the formatting and design of the Myanmar readers for each grade. The density of words on each page increases with the grade level, while the frequency of illustrations decreases. The use of color in illustrations also decreases as the grade level goes up. While Myanmar readers for kindergarten through second grade contain only color illustrations, the Myanmar readers for third and fourth grade contain only black and white illustrations (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2009e).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> However, while it is relatively rare, there are some editions of even the kindergarten and first grade Myanmar readers that are printed wholly in black and white.





{Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009e, p. 16}

**Figure 3.5 Story entitled 'Ascetic's example of tamar leaves' from grade 3 Myanmar reader**

### Historical longevity of content

The Myanmar readers have been used to teach people in Burma to read and write in Burmese language since at least the 1950s, and much about these textbooks has remained consistent since then. While the exact text used in the 1950s readers is different from that used in contemporary readers, the types of content—poems, stories and vocabulary words—remain constant, as do the civic themes. Even the title of the Myanmar readers is the same {Government of Burma, 1959; Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c}.

The text of the Myanmar readers was gradually rewritten over the course of the 1970s and 1980s. Between the 1980s and the early 2000s, the content of the Myanmar readers remained almost identical. Then, after the Ministry of Education announced curriculum reforms as part of the government's *30-year Long Term Education Plan*, there was a reduction in the number of lessons in newly published Myanmar readers. At each grade level, the Myanmar readers

published for the 2010-2011 academic year have about half the number of pages as those published in the mid-1990s. During this time, no new text was added (Government of Myanmar, 1996; Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c). Government policy documents indicate that upon the advice of UNICEF and UNESCO, the Ministry of Education made these changes to reduce the amount of memorizing that students are responsible for and to give teachers more time to help students understand these lessons at a deeper level than pure memorization allows. Government policy documents state that choices regarding which lessons to cut from the textbooks were made with the goal of avoiding redundancy. “[B]ecause some of the content in the stories and poetry are very similar, they should be removed. For example, the poem 'Northern Burma Weddings' should be shortened” (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2006, p. 26).

### **Civic education policy in the Myanmar readers**

While the Myanmar readers are primarily intended to teach students how to read and write in Burmese, more than a quarter of the text in the Myanmar readers advocates civic concepts. This civic content is woven into nearly all components of the textbooks, from the vocabulary word lists to the poetry recitation sections and throughout the textbooks’ many stories designed for reading practice. It is rare to find more than two consecutive pages in any Myanmar Reader that do not advocate any civic values. The teachers’ preface in each reader, from kindergarten to grade 4, explicitly refers to civic education policy. For instance, the teachers’ preface of the kindergarten Myanmar reader states that there are sections within the book that are designed to foster civic knowledge and values such as ‘patriotism’ (နိုင်ငံချစ်စိတ်) and ‘environmental appreciation’ (သဘာဝကို မြတ်နိုးလိုစိတ်) (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c, p. i). Similarly, the teachers’ preface of the first grade Myanmar reader contains the following text stating that the book’s contents “promote good behavior, good habits and morals, [and] valuing the culture.”

ဤသူငယ်တန်း မြန်မာဖတ်စာအုပ်တွင် အကြောင်းအရာအများအနေဖြင့် ရိုးရာယဉ်ကျေးမှု၊  
နိုင်ငံချစ်စိတ်၊ လူမှုရေး၊ စိုက်ပျိုးရေး၊ သဘာဝကို မြတ်နိုးလိုစိတ်၊ ကျန်းမာရေးဆိုင်ရာ  
အကြောင်းအရာများ ပါဝင်ပါသည်။ (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. iii).

These few short phrases are the only explicit policy concerning civic education that is readily available to teachers. Since it is sweepingly broad and provides educators with very little direction regarding how to implement civic education, the teachers seek guidance on these matters from the implicit civic education policies embedded in the academic content in the main body of the textbooks.

### Civics and morality intertwined in the Myanmar readers

As we proceed through this chapter, exploring the form and content of civic education policy in the Myanmar readers, it will become clear that morality plays a role in nearly every passage that conveys civic values and concepts in the textbooks. In some cases, morality is foregrounded, while in other cases it is more backgrounded. However, it is almost never entirely absent from a textbook passage advocating good citizenship.

Burma is not alone in making moral education a prominent component of civic education. As discussed in chapter 1, while the content of civic education curricula differs the world over, moral education is one of the most common components to appear in formal civic education curricula across the globe. In particular, a number of Asian nations, including Singapore and China, have embraced civic education curricula with strong moral education elements (Han, 2009, p. 117; Vickers, 2009, p. 67).

Moral education is “concerned with character and molding a student into becoming a good person” (Chi-Hou, 2004, p. 561). Civic education concerns preparing and shaping students into good citizens. Civic education and moral education are a common pairing since the qualities that make one a ‘good’ person overlap to a large extent with the qualities that make one a ‘good’ citizen. While they are not always synonymous, they are highly interrelated. The moral values one holds and adheres to throughout one’s life plays a large role in determining what type of citizen s/he will be. Furthermore, in order to interact with others in one’s community in a civil way, it is important to adhere to certain moral values considered fundamental within one’s culture and society. Lacking such moral values could inhibit one’s ability to participate in civic life, while possessing them could facilitate such participation.

While they are highly interrelated, some distinctions have been made in the academic literature that enable us to differentiate between being a ‘good person’ and being a ‘good citizen.’ Being a good person is often thought to mean that one lives by a particular set of ‘good’ morals and that this has facilitated the development of one’s personal character. To be considered a ‘good citizen,’ a person, many scholars posit that one must embody good morals as well as act in ways that benefit one’s community and/or their country. As Sherrod et al. (2002) posit, “a key aspect of citizenship includes the ability to move beyond one’s individual self-interest and to be committed to the well-being of some larger group of which one is a member” (p. 265). Since one’s individual morality doesn’t always have a direct benefit to one’s community or nation, possessing good morals doesn’t guarantee a person is a good citizen. One would be considered a ‘good’ citizen once one put those morals into practice in a way that benefited people outside one’s intimate family setting. Thus, having ‘good’ morals is necessary, but not sufficient for ‘good citizenship’ (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006).

The Myanmar readers urge students to become both ‘good’ citizens and ‘good’ people in a highly intertwined way. The importance of morality and benefiting one’s community and country are emphasized side-by-side in the textbooks. Consider the following civic passage from the first grade Myanmar reader that promotes the importance of honesty and good habits, which are primarily moral in nature, alongside the civic practice of sacrificing for the benefit of others.

ရိုးသား၍ ပညာထူးချွန်သူ။	A person honest and gifted in education.
အကျင့်ကောင်းမွန်သူ။	A person with good habits.
အများအကျိုးငှာ	A person who sacrifices for the benefit of many.
ကိုယ်ကျိုးစွန့်သူ။	A person who fulfills [their] responsibilities.
တာဝန်ကျေပွန်သူ။	Those people should be praised.
ထိုသူတို့ကို ချီးမွမ်းရမည်။	

(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 13, my emphasis)

In another example, this one from the second grade Myanmar reader, the primarily moral concepts of being disciplined and well behaved are interwoven with how this ultimately

benefits one's school and community. The passage concludes by stressing that it has described 'the duty of a good citizen.'

We also respect school property. We don't make marks on our writing tables in the classroom. In the classroom, the blackboard, map and drinking water pot are in place. We don't make school walls dirty. We don't make school fences break. School property should also be respected as our own property. We should also respect public property at the cinema, train station, hospital. Respecting public property is the duty of a good citizen. (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009d, p. 21)

Thus, throughout the Myanmar readers, moral education and civic education are intertwined and I therefore consider all passages that pertain to morality or other forms of civic education to be a component of the textbooks' civic education policy. At various points throughout the remainder of this chapter, I will make note of the extent to which the civic themes in the textbooks incorporate issues of morality.

### **The Forms of Civic Content in the Myanmar readers**

The Myanmar readers' civic content comes in many forms, including metaphors, proverbs, poems, and fables. All of this civic content, in its various configurations, can be loosely grouped into 3 broad categories: 1) packaged mottos 2) specific practices and 3) stories. I will describe and illustrate each of these categories in turn using examples that convey one of the most prominent civic themes in the Myanmar readers, the importance of respecting elders. I have chosen to illustrate these categories using this particular civic theme because it provides numerous examples within each of the three forms of civic content.

#### *Packaged mottos*

Packaged mottos consist of broad, overarching concepts that have been boiled down into succinct proverbs, metaphors or short sayings. They are 'packaged' in the sense that the wording used to express these concepts is often catchy and memorable since it either rhymes, is set to a distinct rhythm or is designed to be sung with a certain tune. Many of these packaged mottos have become well-known in Burma and are used regularly in everyday conversations as well as in the media. Because these overarching concepts have been condensed into such few

words, which often use metaphor and/or poetic language, their meaning is not usually clear when they are encountered for the first time.



(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009d, p. 54)

**Figure 3.6 Illustration of an elder sitting in a squatting position, head between his knees**

Packaged mottos are primarily found in three locations within the Myanmar readers. They are occasionally placed at the end of fables or other stories to sum up the civic lesson the story was intended to demonstrate. Mottos can also be found interspersed throughout the short poems on the second page of each 'lesson' dedicated to teaching a specific letter. Lastly, mottos can be found in Mangala Sutta excerpts, a portion of Theravada Buddhist scripture that is included in the Myanmar readers. Examples of civic mottos that express the importance of respecting elders can be found within all three of types of content within the Myanmar readers.

'Learn from people who have three heads' is a civic motto stated in a story in the second grade Myanmar reader entitled 'Open a shop in the backyard.' This is one of the rare cases in which the textbook provides some explanation about the meaning of the motto. At the conclusion of the story an elder briefly explains the meaning of this motto to a younger man.

“ခေါင်းသုံးလုံးရှိသူတို့မှာ သင်ယူပါဆိုသည်မှာ အသက်အရွယ်ကြီးသူတို့မှာ သင်ယူပါဟု ဆိုလိုသည်။ သို့မှသာ ဗဟုသုတ အသိပညာ တိုးပွားမည်။”

“I learn from the person who has three heads means learn from old people. That way, knowledge and skill will increase” (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009d, p. 54).

The reason why the term ‘person with three heads’ is used to refer to older people is not explicitly stated, but it is suggested by the accompanying illustration (figure 3.6). In Burma people often squat, with their feet flat on the ground and their knees up by their chest. When older people squat in this way, their knees often come up close to their head. In this position, their head is between their knees.<sup>33</sup> So, from far away, the old person appears as if they have three heads. In contrast, when younger people sit in a squatting position, they do not generally rest their head between their knees (figure 3.7).



(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009d, p. 50)

**Figure 3.7 Image depicting a young woman in a squatting position**

The importance of the motto ‘learn from people who have three heads’ is further emphasized in the reading comprehension questions following the story. One fill-in-the-blank question reads the following.

ခေါင်းသုံးလုံးရှိသူတို့မှာ သင်ယူပါဆိုသည်မှာ \_\_\_\_\_ ဟု ဆိုလိုသည်။

<sup>33</sup> This may be because they are very thin and/or because their back is slouched in this position.

Learn from the person who has three heads means \_\_\_\_\_ (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009d, p. 55).

This line is phrased exactly the same way as it is in the story, suggesting that students are expected to complete the line so it matches the text above verbatim.

Mottos can also be found in the Mangala Sutta excerpts in the Kindergarten Myanmar reader. Often referred to by Burmese teachers as the '38 mingala,' 'the Mangala Sutta'<sup>34</sup> is a portion of Theravada Buddhist scripture, well-known in Burma and Thailand. It is the second sutta, or discourse, delivered by the Buddha after he achieved enlightenment. In the Mangala Sutta, the Buddha lists the 38 most important principles that, if followed, will enable a person to gain spiritual merit and live a life of happiness (Silanandabhivamsa (Rector - Sayadaw U), 2000). The first six of these principles have been included in the kindergarten Myanmar reader, in the form of mottos. The first three are contained in a poem entitled Mangala Poem 1, while Mangala Poem 2 contains a second grouping of three mottos.

One of these mottos advocates the civic value of respecting elders and falls into the category of 'packaged mottos' because it is a well-known and often-repeated saying in Burma.

သုံးပါးရတနာ မိဘများနဲ့ ဆရာသမားကို ပူဇော်လေ။

'Three gems, parents and teachers, should be worshiped' (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c, p. 55).

It is set to a distinct rhythm and when read aloud, it is chanted to a specific tune. Although the English translation of this motto, provided above, appears relatively self-explanatory, it cannot be easily understood as it is written in the Myanmar reader, since its meaning is obscured by the language register in which it is written.

Originally penned in Pali, an ancient language many Buddhist texts are written in, the Mangala Sutta excerpts in the kindergarten Myanmar reader have been translated into Burmese. However, the Burmese translation uses advanced vocabulary of a literary register and still includes some Pali terms, which are difficult for primary school students to understand. In fact,

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<sup>34</sup> The Mangala Sutta can be found in the Khuddaka Nikaya, which is the fifth component of the Sutta Pitaka.



it is difficult for readers to understand, no matter their age. During interviews I conducted with Burmese teachers, teachers fluently sung the mangala sutta excerpts by heart, but many of them could not explain what the verses meant. Moreover, while the Burmese-English translators present at these interviews had little trouble translating anything else, translating the mangala sutta excerpts was particularly challenging for them.

Lastly, packaged civic mottos can also be found in the short poems designed to help students practice reading words with certain letters. For example, lesson 15 in the first grade Myanmar reader, which introduces the punctuation mark – <sup>c</sup>, indicating a glottal stop, contains the following civic motto. “Let’s consider [teachers] as one of the 5 gems” (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 33). The full text of the poem is the following.

ဆရာမေတ္တာ စေတနာ။	Teachers’ meeita [and] saydahnah. <sup>35</sup>
တာဝန်ဝတ္တရား မပျက်ပါ။	Not neglecting responsibility.
တတ်သိလိမ္မာ တပည့်တို့။	Knowledgeable and well-behaved pupils.
ဒနန္တိုဇ္ဈိတ နှစ်ပါး။	Let’s consider [teachers] as one of the 5 gems.
(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 33)	

The illustration accompanying this poem shows a male teacher at the front of his classroom, lecturing to a room full of students, sitting respectfully at their desks, arranged in neat rows. The meaning of the ‘5 gems’ is not explained in the textbook, but it refers to the five most respected entities in Burmese Buddhist culture: parents, teachers, the Buddha, the dharma and the sangha.<sup>36</sup>

### *Specific practices*

I refer to the second form of civic content in the Myanmar readers as ‘specific practices.’ These are specific acts that students should either do or avoid doing in order to be a ‘good person’ and ‘good citizen.’ Unlike the packaged mottos, the meaning of specific practices is largely self-explanatory, even on one’s first encounter with them. They are written in everyday language

<sup>35</sup> These are Pali terms, roughly meaning ‘goodwill.’

<sup>36</sup> In this case, ‘dharma’ refers to the collection of Buddhist scripture, while ‘sangha’ refers to the worldwide community of Buddhist monks.

and do not make use of symbolism or metaphor. Another reason this type of civic content is easier to understand is that it is much more specific than mottos. Instead of referencing a vague, overarching concept, they list very specific 'do's and don'ts.' In fact, in many cases, these specific practices can be read as instructions for implementing the overarching mottos contained elsewhere in the Myanmar readers. For instance, while the mottos listed above advise youth to respect elders, many questions are left unanswered such as, how should one show respect to these people? In what contexts should respect be shown? The specific practices in the textbooks begin to answer these questions. They give more detailed information about the specific actions one should do to put this motto into practice in daily life.



(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c, p. 27)

**Figure 3.8** An illustration accompanying the informational passage entitled 'Be Polite'

Specific practices can be found in four types of content within the Myanmar readers, in informational passages, in poems, in stories as well as in excerpts from the *Singlovada Sutta*, a portion of Theravada Buddhist scripture. For example, there is an informational passage in the second grade Myanmar reader entitled 'Be polite' that lists specific practices youth should do to respect elders and authority figures. This passage is accompanied by an illustration of a young boy bowing down in front of an elder and receiving an item from the elder with two hands, as the text advises youth to do (figure 3.8).

ယဉ်ကျေးသော ကလေးသူငယ်များကို ဆရာမိဘတို့က ချစ်ခင်ကြသည်။ ---  
 မိဘဆရာသမားတို့ရှေ့တွင် ကိုယ်ကိုညွှတ်ကိုင်း၍ သွားရသည်။ လူကြီးမိဘဆရာသမားတို့ကို  
 ပစ္စည်းပေးလျှင် အနားသို့ကပ်၍ လက်နှစ်ဖက်ဖြင့် ရိုရိုသေသေ ပေးရသည်။ ထမင်းစား သည့်အခါ  
 ကြီးသူအဖို့ ဦးချပြီးမှ ငယ်သူက စားရသည်။ ---လူကြီးမိဘဆရာသမားတို့နှင့် စကားပြောသောအခါ  
 ခင်ဗျား၊ ကျွန်တော်၊ ရှင်၊ ကျွန်မ စသည်ဖြင့် ပြောဆိုရသည်။ လူကြီးမိဘဆရာသမားတို့က  
 မိမိအားခေါ်သောအခါ ဟင်ဟု မထူးရ။ ရှင်၊ ခင်ဗျာ[sic] ဟု ထူးမှ ယဉ်ကျေးသည်။  
 လူကြီးမိဘဆရာသမားတို့က မေးမြန်းသောအခါ အင်း၊ အင်းဟု မဖြေရ၊ ဟုတ်ကဲ့ဖြေမှ  
 ယဉ်ကျေးသည်။

“Teachers [and] parents love polite children... Bend down when passing in front of elders, parents and teachers. Things should be held in two hands and handed to the elders, parents and teachers respectfully. Food should be offered to the elder first when eating... ‘Kamya,’ ‘juh-naw,’ ‘shin,’ ‘jam-ma’<sup>37</sup> should be used when talking to the elders, parents and teachers. ‘Yeah’ should not be your answer when elders, parents and teachers call. Answering with ‘shin’ or ‘kamya,’ is considered polite. ‘Yeah, yeah’, should not be an answer to a question posed by elders, parents [or] teachers. Answering ‘yes’ is considered polite” (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009d, p. 27).

In the second grade Myanmar reader there is a poem entitled ‘Ask Permission,’ that contains specific civic practices related to respecting elders.

မိဦးဖဦး၊ ဆရာဦးကို	Before father, before mother, before teacher
ခူး၍အလျင်၊ မစားနှင့်။	don’t take and eat.
မိဘဆရာ၊ ထားသည့်ဟာကို	Parents and teacher, things they have put down,
မျက်နှာကွယ်လျှင်၊ မယူငင်နှင့်။	behind them, should not be taken.
လိုချင်သောအား၊ စားချင်ငြားက	Want to have, want to eat,
ဝပ်သွားခယ၊ တောင်းပါကြ။	politely go and ask for permission”

(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009d, p. 29)

Above the poem there is an illustration of a man giving a young boy a book (figure 3.9), which the youth presumably wanted and asked permission to take. The boy is receiving the book with

<sup>37</sup> Two of these terms, ‘juh-naw’ and ‘jam-ma,’ are used in Burmese language to politely refer to oneself as the subject of a sentence. ‘Kamya’ and ‘shin’ are polite terms that can be added to the end of a sentence to emphasize one’s respect for the person one is speaking to. ‘Kamya’ and ‘shin’ can also be used as a more polite way of responding ‘yes’ when one’s name is called. Men use ‘Kamya’, while women use ‘shin’.

two hands, as the previous 'Be Polite' passage instructs youth to do. In addition, he is bending slightly at the waist, which is another way of showing respect to elders.



(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c, p. 29)

**Figure 3.9 Illustration accompanying a textbook passage entitled 'Ask for permission'**

The *Singalovada Sutta* excerpts included in the Myanmar readers also contain specific civic practices. Like the *Mangala Sutta*, the *Singalovada Sutta* is a Theravada Buddhist text that has been translated from Pali to Burmese and included in the textbooks in the form of poems.<sup>38</sup> Often referred to as "the Code of Discipline for Laymen," the *Singalovada Sutta* is a discourse given by the Buddha to a young man named Singala, advising him about how to act politely (Guide to the Tipitaka: introduction to the Buddhist Cannon, 1993). In the *Singalovada Sutta*, the Buddha states that everyone has duties to fulfill in regards to certain people in their lives, and to fulfill these duties is equivalent to showing those individuals respect. Therefore, many of the *Singalovada Sutta* excerpts in the textbooks describe, in specific terms, the duties one should fulfill towards one's elders.<sup>39</sup> For example, the kindergarten Myanmar reader contains one

<sup>38</sup> The original *Singalovada Sutta* is included in the portion of Buddhist scripture called the *Pathika Vagga* Pali, which is the third component of the *Suttanta Pitaka*.

<sup>39</sup> The *Singalovada Sutta* contains lists of duties with the following titles: 'Friends' duties', 'Parents' duties', 'Son & daughters' duties', 'Teachers' duties', 'Pupils' duties', 'Husbands' duties', 'Wives' duties', 'Leaders' duties', 'Employees' duties', 'Laymen's duties' towards *Sameras* and *Bhikkhus'* duties towards disciples' (Saw Yee Ma, 2011, p. 3). However, only lists of duties highly relevant to students during their young life are included in the Myanmar readers.

stanza from the Singalovada Sutta that lists the duties pupils must fulfill towards their teachers in order to show them respect.

တပည့်ဝတ်	Pupils' Duty
ညီညာထကြွ၊ ဆုံးမ နာယူ	Stand in unison, listen [and] take in the preaching
လာမှုကြိုဆီး၊ ထံနီးလုပ်ကျွေး	When come greet [and] serve
သင်တွေ့ အံ့ ရွတ်၊ တပည့်ဝတ်	Learn think read recite pupils' duty
မချွတ် ငါး ခုသာ။	These 5 things cannot be neglected.

(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c, p. 67)

This text is accompanied by an illustration showing a collage of scenes depicting students faithfully and good-naturedly performing each of the duties described in the text (figure 3.10). The top of the illustration shows students standing in unison, listening to their teacher's preaching. Just below that, two students with bowed heads are depicted listening and taking in their teacher's preaching. It also shows a student 'serving' his teacher by carrying his bag, likely just after greeting him as he arrived at school. On the bottom left side of the page, two male students are 'serving' their teacher in another way. One is massaging the teacher's leg while the other fans him. At the bottom of the collage is a male student reciting a text, while a teacher looks at the text to ensure the student is reciting it accurately. Therefore, it is clear that both the images and text of this lesson contain specific practices that provide students with a detailed list of actions they can take to show their teachers respect.



{Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c, p. 67}

**Figure 3.10 Illustration accompanying ‘Pupils’ Duty’ poem in kindergarten Myanmar reader**

### *Stories*

Lastly, civic content in the Myanmar readers also comes in the form of stories. These stories depict human or animal characters in situations where they make choices that are either in line with the civic messages contained elsewhere in the Myanmar readers or which violate those messages. Then, the stories end with a positive or negative consequence for one or more of the characters depending on whether the character abided by ‘good’ civic values or not. In most of the stories at least one of the characters makes the ‘correct’ choice. Thus, these stories provide students with examples of how to implement the overarching mottoes and the specific practices in their daily lives.

Several of the stories in the Myanmar readers come from a Buddhist text called the Jataka, a collection of 547 stories that the Buddha told about situations that occurred during his previous

lives.<sup>40</sup> Each Jataka tale illustrates one or more civic theme. Like the excerpts from the other Buddhist texts discussed above, the Jataka stories were originally written in Pali, but have been translated into Burmese for the Myanmar readers. The Jataka tales were first introduced into the Myanmar readers during British colonial rule (Okell, 1967). While there are no Jataka tales in the kindergarten Myanmar reader, there is one at the first grade level. The Myanmar readers for second, third and fourth grade, contain 1, 1 and 3 Jataka tales respectively (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009b, 2009d, 2009e). Several other civic stories are Aesop's fables. They can be found in the first and second grade Myanmar readers and include 'The Ant and the Grasshopper,' and 'The Turtle and the Hare' (figure 3.11).



(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009d, p. 3)

**Figure 3.11 Textbook page containing the story 'The Turtle and the Hare'**

Almost all stories in the Myanmar readers implicitly or explicitly advocate the importance of respecting elders. Even when the main focus of the story is on a different civic concept, in most cases the stories have at least one character who treats an elder with respect. 'Open a Shop in

<sup>40</sup> The Buddha gained the unusual ability to remember his past lives after he attained enlightenment. Therefore, he could tell stories of specific instances in which he lived according to good civic principles, while others did not, either as a result of their own choices, or because of their circumstances.



the Backyard’ and ‘Tha-din jut Light Festival’ are two stories in which the importance of respecting elders is the most prominent civic message. These stories are neither Jataka Tales nor Aesop’s fables, but they have a similar narrative structure. They show that if one respects elders, one will eventually benefit and, if one fails to respect elders, one will suffer.

‘Open a Shop in the Backyard,’ can be found in the second grade Myanmar reader and was mentioned in the section above describing mottos because it ends with the motto, ‘learn from people who have three heads.’ This is the story of a son whose father gave him words of advice in the form of mottos just before he passed away. The boy attempted to follow this advice literally, but he did not become successful in life, because the advice was meant to be followed symbolically. For example, instead of looking for a person to learn from who actually has three heads, the son should have learned from his elders. Finally, after many years, the son encountered an old man who helped him understand his father’s advice. “Then, the older son became wealthy because he understood the meaning of those words and followed what the old man said” (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009d, p. 55).



(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009e, p. 19-20)

**Figure 3.12 Illustration of 3 children gadawing elders during ‘Tha-din-jut Light Festival’**

The second story that explicitly advocates respecting elders is entitled ‘Tha-din-jut Light Festival’ and can be found in the third grade Myanmar reader. The story is written as if by a student describing how he or she celebrated Tha-din-jut festival. This is an annual celebration, rooted in Theravada Buddhist tradition, where younger people ‘gadaw’ their elders as a show



of respect. The illustration that accompanies this story shows three students gadawing their elders (figure 3.12). Below is an excerpt from the story.

ကျွန်တော်တို့ကျောင်းတွင် သီတင်းကျွတ် ကျောင်းမပိတ်ခင် တစ်ရက်က ဆရာကန်တော့ပွဲ ကျင်းပပါသည်။ ကျောင်းအုပ်ဆရာကြီးအမှူး ပြုသည့် ဆရာ၊ ဆရာမများကို ကျွန်တော်တို့ ကျောင်းသူ ကျောင်းသား အားလုံးက ရိုသေလေးစားစွာ ကန်တော့ကြပါသည်။ ကန်တော့နေစဉ်ပင် ဆရာများ၏ ဂုဏ်ကျေးဇူးကို ပိုမိုသဘောပေါက် လေးစားမိလာပါသည်။ ကျောင်းအုပ်ဆရာကြီးက ဆုံးမစကားပြော၍ တပည့်များကို ကျန်းမာပါစေ၊ အောင်မြင်ကြပါစေဟု ဆုပေးသောအခါ ကျွန်တော်တို့သည် ပေးသည့်ဆုနှင့်ပြည့်ပါစေဟု အလွန်ဝမ်းသာစွာ ပြန်လည်ဆုတောင်းကြပါသည်။ ညချမ်းတွင် ကျွန်တော်တို့သည် ဘိုးဘွားများနှင့် လူကြီးမိဘများအား လှည့်လည်ကန်တော့ကြပါသည်။ ဘိုးဘွားများက ဝမ်းသာအားရ ဆုပေးကြပါသည်။ ရေလိုအေးကြပါစေ၊ ပန်းလိုမွှေးကြပါစေ၊ လိုရာဆန္ဒ တစ်လုံးတစ်ဝ ပြည့်စုံကြပါစေဟု ဆုပေးပါသည်။ လူကြီးမိဘများအား ရိုသေလေးစားခြင်းသည် မြန်မာယဉ်ကျေးမှုပင်ဖြစ်သည်ဟူ၍လည်း ဆုံးမကြပါသည်။ ကျွန်တော်တို့အား မုန့်ပဲသရေစာများကိုလည်း ကျွေးလိုက်ကြပါသည်။

“At our school we gadaw our teacher the day before the school closes for tha-din jut holiday. All the students gadaw the headmaster and all the teachers politely and respectfully. When gadawing teachers we understand more about our gratitude toward our teachers. When the headmaster preaches and wishes his students good health and success, we happily said, may your wishes be fulfilled... In the evening we go around and gadaw grandparents and elders. Grandparents gave wishes to us happily. May you be cool as water, may you be as fragrant as flowers, may all your wishes be fulfilled. These kinds of wishes were given. They also preach that respecting elders is Myanmar culture. They also gave us snacks and sweets” (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009e, p. 19-20).

Stories such as these contextualize the civic mottos and specific practices for the students and show the positive and negative consequences associated with choosing to follow or not follow them. They show students examples of how civic concepts should be implemented in their own lives and how this will benefit them.

### **Most Prominent Civic Themes in the Myanmar readers**

There are scores of civic messages that appear repeatedly in the Myanmar readers, many of which overlap and reinforce each other. When examining how frequently these civic messages are found and how the textbook content links them to each other, a number of overarching civic themes emerge. The following three are the most prominent:

- (1) Respect elders
- (2) Fulfill duties
- (3) Live & act in unity

These themes were identified as most prominent based on a number of factors. Of all the civic themes in the textbooks, these three appeared the greatest number of times. In addition, all three themes can be found, both backgrounded and foregrounded, in images and text throughout each of the primary level Myanmar readers. These themes are also included in all three forms of civic content: mottos, specific practices and stories. Each theme is prominently foregrounded in at least one motto, specific practices vignette and story within the set of primary school Myanmar readers. Furthermore, these three themes were supported and reinforced by the greatest number of related civic messages. Lastly, there were no civic messages that contradicted these three most prominent civic themes. Below, each civic theme will be described, with evidence of its presence within all three forms of civic content in the Myanmar readers.

#### *Overarching civic theme 1: Respect elders*

The importance of respecting elders is the most prominent civic theme running through the Myanmar Readers. This theme is either explicitly mentioned or strongly implied 96 times over 62 different lessons. It is present in 16 lessons in the kindergarten Myanmar reader and 9 lessons in the first grade reader. In the second through fourth grade Myanmar readers it is present in 11, 12 and 14 lessons, respectively. In addition, each reader contains at least two lessons, which are focused entirely on advocating the importance of respecting elders.

#### Conveyed through mottos, specific practices and stories

The 'respect elders' theme can be found in each of the Myanmar readers in the form of mottos, specific practices and stories. This is demonstrated by the many examples presented in the

previous section describing the three forms of civic content. When using these three forms of civic content to explicitly advocate this theme, the wording used in the Myanmar readers varies from lesson to lesson. The textbooks occasionally use the phrase ‘respect elders.’ For example, in a Jataka tale titled ‘Thu Wun Na Tha-ma,’ a mother uses this phrase when describing the most admirable qualities of her son.

ငါ့သား သုဝဏ္ဏသာမသည် တရားကိုကျင့်၏။ မှန်သောစကားကို ဆို၏။ မိဘကိုလည်း လုပ်ကျွေး၏။  
သက်ကြီးကိုလည်း ရိုသေ၏။ ငါသည် ငါ့သားကို အသက်ထက် ချစ်မြတ်နိုး၏။

“My son, Thu Wun Na Tha-ma, is a fair person. Practices fair habits. Tells the truth. Takes care of parents. Respects elders. I love and cherish my son more than my life” (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009b, p. 59).

However, in most passages that contain this theme, the text advocates that specific categories of elders be respected, most of which feature prominently in the lives of students. Teachers and parents are the two categories of elders featured most often. The kindergarten Myanmar reader provides typical examples.

ဆရာမ ရိုသေကြ

“Female teacher, respect [her]” (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c, p. 2).

ဖေဖေစကား သားလေးစား။

“Father’s words, Son’s respect” (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c, p. 29).

While they are mentioned less frequently, grandparents, aunts, uncles, community leaders, military generals and civilian government officials are also featured in the textbooks. Without exception, every instance where these elders appear in the textbooks, the images and text suggest that they should be respected.

Elders are usually referred to by their relationship to the children depicted in the textbook. This is evident in the examples above where the elders are referred to as ‘teacher’ and ‘father.’ Occasionally, elders in stories are given fictional names. This is the case for the title character in the story “Grandpa Pyo’s House.” The name, ပျို, pronounce ‘Pyo’, is a common name in Burma and ‘Grandpa Pyo’ is the typical way a Burman child would refer to their grandfather or to other elders of a similar age. This name does not refer to a particular figure in Burmese history.

However, there are a few rare instances where the Myanmar readers refer to a specific, well-known elder. Two well-known elders from Buddhist scripture appear in several Jataka tales contained in the textbooks. They include the king of the mythic Baya Kingdom and the Buddha himself, in his past lives, before he gained enlightenment and became the Buddha. Non-religious figures from Burmese history that the textbooks refer to by name include U Pho Sein, Sein Baedar and General Aung San. The first two figures, an actor and a musician respectively, are mentioned only once in the set of primary level Myanmar readers. They are noted for their high skill and unique contributions to their respective fields of Burmese traditional art (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009b, p. 14; 2009d, p. 42-43; 2009e, p. 7).

In contrast, General Aung San is mentioned repeatedly. There are four lessons in the set of primary Myanmar readers that feature General Aung San. Three of those lessons are focused entirely on his admirable morals and civic achievements, for which he should be respected. These lessons are entitled 'General Aung San,' 'Aung San the Brave' and 'General Aung San's Song,' and they can be found in the third and fourth grade Myanmar readers (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009b, p. 35; 2009e, p. 18, 40). General Aung San is the most well known military general who helped Burma gain independence from colonialism. Political rivals assassinated him in 1947, just six months before this goal was achieved. Since then, the Burmese government has considered him a national hero, repeatedly referring to him as the 'father of Burma's independence' and the 'father of the armed forces' (Chao-Tzang Yawngnwe, 1995, p. 179; Silverstein, 1993, p. 1). He became a more controversial figure long after his death, once his daughter, Aung San Suu Kyi, began actively opposing the Burmese government in 1988. However, General Aung San is still widely revered by the people of Burma. Furthermore, the Burmese military and government officials continue to refer to him with great respect. Martyrs' day, a national holiday established to commemorate General Aung San's life and death, continues to be celebrated today by the government and the Burmese people.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> A full discussion of General Aung San and his role in Burma's political landscape is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, interested readers may consult J. Silverstein's 1993 work *The Political Legacy of Aung San*.

### Feeling respect and acting out respect

The textbook passages that advocate this civic theme refer to respecting elders in two ways. Some refer to respecting elders in terms of feeling profound admiration for them, often to the point of encouraging students to model their own actions after the actions of elders. In these cases, ‘respect’ is a feeling or emotion one should feel towards elders. For instance, in the story entitled ‘General Aung San’ from the fourth grade Myanmar reader, a school headmaster encourages students to feel a deep respect for General Aung San by describing his admirable qualities and accomplishments. The headmaster concludes by urging his students to emulate General Aung San.

ဗိုလ်ချုပ်အောင်ဆန်း သတ္တိရှိသလို၊ အရည်အချင်းရှိသလို၊ ဖြောင့်မတ်သလို၊  
အကျင့်စာရိတ္တကောင်းသလို တပည့်တို့လဲဖြစ်အောင် ကြိုးစားရမယ်။ တိုင်းပြည်အတွက်  
လွတ်လပ်ရေးရအောင် အသက်နဲ့လဲပြီး ဆောင်ရွက်ပေးသွားတဲ့ ဗိုလ်ချုပ်အောင်ဆန်းရဲ့ ကျေးဇူးကို  
ပြန်ဆပ်ချင်ယင် သူ့လို အကျင့်ကောင်းပြီး အရည်အချင်းရှိအောင် ကြိုးစားကြရမယ်ဟု ဆရာကြီးက  
ဩဝါဒမိန့်ခွန်းတွင် ထည့်သွင်း ပြောကြားသွားလေသည်။

“All my pupils, you have to study hard to be brave, to have the ability to be honest, to have good habits, like General Aung San. If you want to return the favor of General Aung San who sacrificed his life for the independence of the country, you have to have good habits like him and you have to study hard to have good abilities like him,” the headmaster included that in his speech (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009b, p. 36).

Other textbook passages refer to respecting elders as a series of actions one should take to publically display their respect. These actions include gadawing elders, bending at the waist when passing in front of them, as well as tending to their needs by carrying their bags and offering them water and food. Respecting elders also encompasses the act of listening to them attentively and following their instructions and advice when it is given. For example, in the story ‘Martyred Leaders,’ which is about a monkey who is the leader of a community of monkeys, the followers of the ‘monkey king’ show him respect through their actions. “All the monkeys gadawed the monkey king respectfully and walked slowly to the other side of the river.”<sup>42</sup> They also showed their respect by following his commands. “Every time when the mango flowers

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<sup>42</sup> Original Burmese text: arsmufwdk@onf arsmufrif;tm; &dkaopGmuefawmhl wpfzufurf;odk@jznf;nif;pGm ul;=u.?

bloom, the monkey king told all the monkeys to destroy all the flowers on that branch.”<sup>48</sup> The monkeys obeyed the king faithfully (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009b, p. 40-41).

### Consistency of the theme

In all cases, the figures who the textbook presents as deserving of respect are older than the students learning about them through the Myanmar readers. So, they are literally the students' 'elders' in terms of age. Similarly, when the textbooks depict characters of different ages interacting with each other, the younger character always feels and/or acts out their respect to the elder character. While the elder character is not rude to the younger character, the textbooks do not depict the elder character as feeling or acting out their respect to the younger character.



(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009b, p. 10)

**Figure 3.13 Image of a young prince meeting a wise old man, from the story 'Saydahnah.'**

This is even the case in the story entitled 'Saydahannah,' (සෙය්දာနာ) where a crown prince encounters an old man in the forest. The old man is polite to the young prince and offers him fruit, but he does not perform any grand acts of respect such as gadawing. Instead, the crown

<sup>43</sup> Original Burmese text: ဝ&ufyGifhcsdefa&mufwkdif; xdktudkif;wGifyGifhaom tyGifhwkd@udk  
arsmufrif;u arsmufwdk@tm; zsufqD;ap.?

prince, who is greatly impressed by the old man's admirable morals, expresses his respect in words and actions.

‘ယနေ့မှစ၍ ကျွန်ုပ်သည် ဖို့တစ်ဖို့တည်းကို မကြည့်တော့ပါ။ ကျွန်ုပ်နှင့်တကွ နောင်လာနောက်သားတို့ အကျိုးရှိမည့် အလုပ်မျိုးကိုသာ လုပ်ပါတော့မည်။ အဘိုးအား ပူဇော်ပါရစေ။’ ထိုသို့ဆို၍ အိမ်ရှေ့မင်းသားသည် ပတ္တမြားလက်စွပ်ကို ချွတ်၍ ပေးပြီးလျှင် စီးတော်မြင်းကို နှင်၍ ရွှင်လန်းစွာ ထွက်သွားလေ၏။

‘From today on, I will not only look after myself. I will do things that will benefit me and also generations to come. Let [me] make a devotional offering, Grandfather’...After saying that, the crown prince took off the ruby ring, gave it to the old man, got on his horse and rode away happily (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009b, p. 10).

The respect the young prince feels and displays in this story is particularly notable because he is a crown prince, which indicates a much higher social status than the old man. Despite this, the theme of the younger character showing respect to the older character is maintained.



(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009b, p. 60).

**Figure 3.14 Image of a young man, hit by an arrow, from the story ‘Thu Wun Na Tha-Ma.’**

There is only one story in the entire set of Myanmar readers that, at first glance, appears to violate this pattern. In the Jataka tale titled ‘Thu Wun Na Tha-Ma,’ the King of the Baya Kingdom both feels and demonstrates his respect for a boy who is much younger and of much lower social status than himself. The king was hunting and accidentally shot a young boy named Thu Wun Na Tha-Ma with his bow and arrow. During the king's brief interaction with the boy

before he died, the king learned that the boy had lived in accordance with the civic theme ‘respect elders.’ For one, the young boy showed respect to the king by speaking and acting politely towards him, despite the fact that the king had shot him. The king also learned that the boy had demonstrated his deep respect for his two blind parents every day of his life by dutifully taking care of their daily needs. The young boy also gadawed in the direction of his parents’ home after he had been shot. He was using the last precious moments of his life to pay respect to his mother and father. After Thu Wun Na Tha-Ma died, his parents and grandparents prayed for him and praised him for living according to all admirable values, including respecting elders. Because the boy had respected elders throughout his lifetime and because his elders were praying on his behalf, he was brought back to life. The king then gadawed the boy and said the following.

အချင်း သုဝဏ္ဏသာမ အပြစ်မရှိသော သင့်အား ငါပြစ်မှားမိ၏။ ငါသည် သင့်ကို ကိုးကွယ်ရာဟူ၍  
ဆည်းကပ်ပါ၏

My friend Thu Wun Na Tha-Ma, I offended a person who does not have any misdeeds. I shall worship you” (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009b, p. 60).

A surface-level reading of this story makes it appear as if it doesn’t conform to the general pattern in the textbook, where elders receive immense respect from youth rather than convey it to them. However, a closer examination reveals that this story could be interpreted as conforming to this theme. Although it is not explicitly stated in the story itself, this is a Jataka tale and, according to Buddhist scripture, Thu Wun Na Tha-ma is Buddha in one of his past lives before he achieved enlightenment. So, even though the boy’s current physical form is younger than that of the king, the boy’s soul has likely lived through a greater number of rebirths than the king’s soul, making Thu Wun Na Tha-ma older than the king from a Buddhist perspective.

The respect elders theme is also strikingly evident in another aspect of this story. It was primarily the fact that Thu Wun Na Tha-ma had respected elders consistently throughout his life that he was able to be brought back from the dead. This is the only story in the textbooks where a character achieves such a feat. Thus, this story reinforces the theme of respecting elders found throughout the Myanmar readers.



### The role of morality within this civic theme

Morality makes up a prominent component of this civic theme. The textbooks portray respecting elders as essential to being both a good person and a good citizen. According to the textbooks, embodying this virtue will help one cultivate one's own good character and accrue positive spiritual merit, which according to Buddhist beliefs, will result in favorable conditions in a person's future lives. The following excerpt from the story 'Water Festival' in the second grade Myanmar reader illustrates this.

ရတနာသုံးပါး၊ ဆရာသမား၊ ဘိုးဘွားမိဘစသော ရှိသေထိုက်သူတို့ကို ကန်တော့ကြသည်။  
သက်ကြီးရွယ်အိုများကို ခေါင်းလျှော်ပေးခြင်း၊ ရေချိုးပေးခြင်းဖြင့် ကုသိုလ်ကောင်းမှုပြုကြသည်။

People to be respected such as the three gems, teachers, grandparents and parents are gadawed. Good merit is also obtained through washing [their] hair and showering the old (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009d, p. 33).

However, also included in this theme is the idea that the benefits from cultivating one's character in this way accrue not only to the individual, but also to the community. For youth, respecting elders is a key part of fulfilling what is considered to be their 'proper' role in the community. By respecting elders such as teachers, soldiers and government officials, as youth are portrayed doing throughout the textbook, they are able to interact with these members of Burmese society in a harmonious way. These elders expect to be respected, and by fulfilling those expectations youth are praised and welcomed in communal contexts because they are considered 'good,' well-behaved community members. In this way, respecting elders is essential for participating in civic life. For example, in the story 'Tha-din-jut Light Festival' in the third grade Myanmar reader, students are shown paying deep respect to their teachers and community elders and, in return, the elders are pleased with the youths' presence at the festival.

In the evening we go around and gadaw grandparents and elders.  
Grandparents give wishes to us happily... They also preach that respecting elders is Myanmar culture. They also give us snacks and sweets" (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009e, p. 19-20).<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> The complete text of the 'Tha-din-jut Light Festival' story can be found earlier in this chapter, on page 116.

The elders not only praise the youth for their demonstration of respect, but also offer them food, which enables them to participate even more fully in the civic life of the festival.

Furthermore, some textbook passages suggest that when people respect elders, this benefits the entire nation. For example, the third grade Myanmar reader describes how villagers respectfully follow instructions issued by the Agriculture Ministry, which is implicitly understood to be headed by elder government officials. This results in national benefits, including increased rice production and increased ‘national income’ (နိုင်ငံတော်၏ ဝင်ငွေများ) (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009e, p. 11). In this way, the moral and the civic are highly intertwined and overlapping, as the textbooks portray the value of respecting elders as good citizenship on a personal, community and national level.

#### *Overarching civic theme 2: Fulfill duties*

The second overarching civic theme that runs through all of the Myanmar readers is the importance of fulfilling one’s duties. This theme is centered on the idea that throughout one’s life, there are certain duties that one is expected to fulfill in relation to one’s family, school, community and nation. The textbooks lay out, in detail, what these duties are and how to fulfill them. The importance of fulfilling one’s duties is either explicitly mentioned or strongly implied 43 times in 40 different lessons. This theme is present in 7 lessons in the kindergarten reader and 10 lessons in the first grade reader. In the second through fourth grade readers it is present in 10, 3 and 10 lessons, respectively. In addition, each primary school Myanmar reader contains at least one lesson that is focused entirely on advocating the importance of fulfilling one’s duties. This theme is prominent in each of the Myanmar readers in mottos, specific practices and in stories.

#### Conveyed through mottos, specific practices and stories

##### **Mottos**

Some textbook passages express the importance of fulfilling duties in the form of a motto. As is the case with most mottos, these are short, catchy sayings that often rhyme with lines of text that precede or follow it. For example, a motto emphasizing this theme is included as the fourth

line of a short poem in lesson 6 in the first grade Myanmar reader. While the rhyme is not reflected in the English translation of the text here, in the original Burmese version, this motto rhymes with the second line of the poem, as they both end in the sound နှစ် pronounced 'non.'

မိုးသား၍ ပညာထူးချွန်သူ။	A person honest and gifted in education.
အကုန်ကောင်းမှုန်သူ။	A person with good habits.
အပျားအကျိုးစွာ	A person who sacrifices
ကိုယ်ကျိုးစွန့်သူ။	for the benefit of many.
တာဝန်ကျေပန်သူ။	A person who fulfills [their] responsibilities.
ထိုသူတို့ကို ချီးမွမ်းရမည်။	Those people should be praised.

(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 13, my emphasis)



(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 13)

**Figure 3.15** Illustration of a student awarded a prize, accompanying the poem above.

The accompanying illustration (figure 3.15) depicts a male student who fulfills his responsibilities. The drawing shows a boy standing either on a stage or at the front of a classroom. The triangular symbol of the Ministry of Education can be seen on the wall behind him. He is wearing a school uniform and a sash while holding a cup-shaped trophy. The text suggests that he was awarded the trophy as a result of performing well at school and having good values, one of which is fulfilling his responsibilities. In this way he has contributed to the communal life of the school by modeling the ideal behavior and values of a 'good' person and a 'good' student, in preparation for becoming, in the future, a 'good' citizen.

The mottoes themselves do not refer to a specific set of duties that should be performed. Instead, they refer purely to the idea that regardless of what one's duties and responsibilities are, it is essential that one fulfill them. However, in some cases, other text that surrounds the mottoes as well as accompanying illustrations suggest a particular set of duties that the mottoes likely referring to. For instance, a short poem in lesson 10 of the first grade Myanmar reader ends with the motto, 'don't neglect responsibilities.' While the motto refers to responsibilities in general, the meaning of the sentences that precede it imply that the responsibilities the poem's last line is referring to are those one should carry out for the benefit of the country.

ပြည်တွင်းဖြစ်ကို အထောက်အပံ့	Support products produced in the country
ချစ်ချစ်ခင်ခင် နေကြပါ။	Love and care for each other
အပြစ်တွေလုပ် ပြုပြင်ပါ။	If laws are broken, improve them
စနစ်တကျ သိပါလေ။	Be systematic
ကလန် မလစ်တင်ပါလေနှင့်။	Don't neglect responsibilities

(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2008a, p. 29, my emphasis.)



(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2008a)

Figure 3.16 Illustration of a woman and a young girl dressed in traditional Burman clothing

The accompanying illustration (figure 3.16) also suggests that the responsibilities the mottoes referring to are those one is expected to fulfill for the country. The drawing depicts a young girl in traditional Burman clothing standing across from a woman in front of a shop selling items that have been domestically produced. The implications are that this will fix the domestic economy

and benefit the nation as a whole. As the poem instructs, the woman in the illustration, along with her daughter, are fulfilling their duty of “support[ing] products produced in the country” (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 23).

### Specific practices

Of the three forms of civic content in the Myanmar readers, the theme of fulfilling one’s duties is most commonly found in the form of specific practices. The lessons in the textbooks, which contain specific practices connected with this theme, provide students with detailed information about how to fulfill one’s duties and responsibilities. They lay out a detailed catalogue of the duties people are expected to perform in relation to one’s family members, teachers, community members and their nation.

Many of these lessons are made up entirely of excerpts from the Singalovada Sutta. As stated previously in this chapter, the Singalovada Sutta is a portion of Theravada Buddhist text in which the Buddha describes various sets of duties a person is expected to fulfill towards different people in their lives (*Guide to the Tipitaka: Introduction to the Buddhist Cannon*, 1993). Lessons comprised of direct Singalovada Sutta translations can be identified by their title and form. They contain the word ‘duties’ in the lesson title and they are written as a one-stanza poem.

One example of a lesson comprised entirely of Singlovada Sutta excerpts is in the first grade Myanmar reader. The heading at the top of the page is ‘For Recitation’ (ရွတ်ဆိုရန်), indicating that the lesson is designed to be memorized and read aloud by students. There are two poems on the page. The first is titled ‘Sons’ and Daughters’ Duty’ (သား သမီး ဝတ်), while the second one is titled ‘Pupils’ Duty’ (တပည့် ဝတ်). These two Singlovada Sutta excerpts are accompanied by a collage of illustrations that depict children carrying out the duties listed in the poems (figure 3.17). The first poem lists the duties students are expected to carry out for their parents.

ကျွေးမွေးမပျက်၊ ဆောင်ရွက်စီမံ  
မွေခံထိုက်စေ၊ လှူမျှဝေ၍  
စောင့်လေမျိုးနွယ်၊ ဝတ်ငါးသွယ်

Not disregarding serving [food], make  
arrangements  
Accept inheritance, donate and share the merit

ကျင့်ဖွယ် သားတို့တာ။

Guard the family,  
Five duties to be practiced by a son.<sup>45</sup>

(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 46)

The illustrations surrounding this poem show sons and a daughter faithfully and happily carrying out the duties listed in the poem. At the top, center of the page a son and daughter are shown serving food to an older female figure sitting at a table. The children are placing food on the table, as they bow slightly at the waist, as a mark of respect to the figure who is likely their grandmother. At the top right, an older man is passing what looks to be a bag of coins to a boy who is respectfully reaching for it with two hands. This is likely intended to depict the duty of 'accepting inheritance.' Below that, at the center right of the page is a boy who is participating in a Buddhist ceremony. In front of him is fruit that he has donated to monks. He is shown pouring water from a glass into a bowl. This is an act one does during certain Buddhist ceremonies to indicate that one is sharing the good merit from one's donation with all other living beings. The water represents the flow of good merit from oneself to others.

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<sup>45</sup> While the literal meaning of the poem's last line states that these are the duties of a 'son,' this term is likely being used to refer to children in general. This would correspond to the title of the poem 'Son's and Daughter's Duty.'



(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 46)

**Figure 3.17 Illustrations surrounding 'Sons' and Daughters' Duty' and 'Pupils' Duty' poems**

On the bottom half of the page, the second poem describes the duties students are expected to fulfill for their teachers. This poem appears twice in the set of Myanmar readers, once at the kindergarten level and once at the first grade level. This poem was described earlier in this chapter, as it not only emphasizes the importance of meeting one's duties, it is also an example of a specific practices vignette demonstrating the theme of respecting elders.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>46</sup> For the full text and description of this poem, see page 113 of this chapter.



There are also numerous lessons that do not contain Singlovada Sutta excerpts, but which do contain specific practices that give students information about how to fulfill their duties. They are very similar to the Singlovada Sutta in terms of the duties they advocate, but they differ in their wording and format. For example, a lesson titled ‘Daily Duty,’ found in the kindergarten Myanmar reader, uses key phrases and images to guide students through the duties they are expected to fulfill during a typical day. The key phrases are the following.

get up early	brush teeth	return from school	help parents
wash face	make bed	play	bathe
eat meal	rinse mouth	eat dinner	study
change clothes	go to school	brush teeth	get in bed

(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c, p. 11-12).

The accompanying illustrations depict a young boy fulfilling each of these duties diligently and in the specified order (figure 3.18).



(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c, p. 11-12)

**Figure 3.3.18 Lesson in the kindergarten Myanmar reader entitled ‘Daily Duty’**



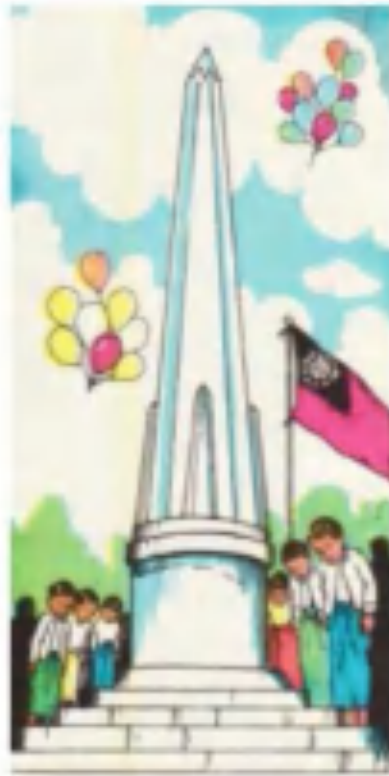
## Stories

Several stories in the Myanmar readers advocate the civic theme of fulfilling one's duties. These stories describe the circumstances in which one should fulfill one's duties in a much fuller context than the mottos and specific practices that emphasize this theme. Often these stories end by stressing the positive benefits that have come about as a result of people fulfilling their duties.

The story 'Independence Day' in the second grade Myanmar reader provides a clear example of these qualities. The story describes how, during British colonial rule, the people of Burma fulfilled their duty to the nation by struggling to regain independence, starting from when the British took over. Under the leadership of General Aung San, "Myanmar nationalities... participated in battles for independence."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Original Burmese text: jrefrmwkdif;&if;om;rsm;onf vGwfyfa&;wkdufyGJrsm;wGif yg0ifcJh=uonf?



(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009d, p. 42).

**Figure 3.19** Illustration accompanying the story 'Independence Day' in the second grade Myanmar reader

As a result, those individuals, as well as the country as a whole, benefited. "Myanmar gained independence on January 4th, 1948."<sup>48</sup> The story then describes how celebrations are held in commemoration of the people's efforts. The story concludes by reinforcing the importance of fulfilling one's duties. "It is the duty of all the ethnic nationalities to solidify Myanmar's independence."<sup>49</sup> This theme is further emphasized in the exercise section of this lesson, where students are asked to fill in the blank in the following sentence.

မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ၏ လွတ်လပ်ရေး \_\_\_\_\_ ရက်မှာ ကိုင်းရင်းသားအားလုံးကို၍ တာဝန်ရှိကြရသည်။

"It is the duty of all ethnic nationalities to \_\_\_\_\_ independence." (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009d, p. 42-43).

<sup>48</sup> The exact Burmese phrase used is: ၁၉၄၈ ခုနှစ် ဇန်နဝါရီလ ၄ ရက်နေ့တွင် မြန်မာနိုင်ငံတော်သည် လွတ်လပ်ရေးကို ရရှိခဲ့သည်။

<sup>49</sup> The exact Burmese phrase used is: မြန်မာနိုင်ငံတော်သည် လွတ်လပ်ရေးကို ရရှိခဲ့သည်။ မြန်မာနိုင်ငံတော်သည် လွတ်လပ်ရေးကို ရရှိခဲ့သည်။ မြန်မာနိုင်ငံတော်သည် လွတ်လပ်ရေးကို ရရှိခဲ့သည်။

The intent is for the students to make this sentence match the concluding sentence of the story. Therefore the expected answer is ‘solidify’ (တည်တံ့ခိုင်မြဲ).

The illustration accompanying this story (figure 3.19) shows a crowd of men standing, with their heads bowed reverently, around a large, obelisk-style independence monument. The national flag is flying above their heads and there are two bunches of balloons floating up into the sky, one on either side of the monument. This represents a commemoration ceremony in which today’s Burmese citizens pay respect to those in the past who fulfilled their duty of “solidify[ing] Myanmar independence” (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009d, p. 42-43).

#### The role of morality within this civic theme

As with the first civic theme discussed in this chapter, the textbooks’ portrayal of ‘fulfilling one’s duties’ integrates morality within the civic nature of this theme. Fulfilling one’s duties is shown as essential to being both a ‘good’ person and a ‘good’ citizen. The textbooks refer to adhering to this theme in multiple settings, both intimate and public—within the family, school, community and national contexts. In many cases, the text and images imply that the benefits that result from fulfilling one’s duties accrue to people on a personal and familial level. It enables youth to develop ‘good’ personal character. For instance, the poems ‘Son and Daughter’s Duty’ and ‘Daily Duty’ refer to responsibilities youth are expected to fulfill in the domestic environment, in order to become a ‘good,’ responsible person. The same textbook sections suggest that one’s parents benefit, as they are relieved of certain domestic tasks that they would otherwise be responsible for (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 46; 2009c, p. 11-12).

However, the textbooks also show that, ultimately, citizens who fulfill their duties provide great benefit to their wider community as well. For instance, there are a number of passages that refer to fulfilling duties in the context of the school. These include the ‘Pupils’ Duty’ poem described earlier in this chapter. Also, the second grade reader contains a poem that details the duties teachers should fulfill in relation to their students.

### ဆရာ့ဝတ်

အတတ်လည်းသင်၊ ပဲ့ပြင်ဆုံးမ  
သိပ္ပံမချန်၊ ဘေးရန်ဆီးကာ  
သင့်ရာအပ်ပို့၊ ဆရာတို့  
ကျင့်ဖို့ ဝတ်ငါးဖြာ။

### Teachers' Duty

Teach skills, guide [and] preach<sup>50</sup>  
[Give] knowledge without omissions, prevent all danger  
Send [students] to where appropriate, teachers  
Five duties to practice

(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009d, p. 37).

By completing these duties, the teachers are providing great benefit to both their students and the nation as a whole. By equipping students with knowledge and skills and 'guiding' them towards adopting good civic and moral values, youth are better able to serve their community and country. The third line of the poem that mentions sending students 'to where appropriate,' is instructing teachers to advise students to follow certain academic and/or career paths. In these ways, the teachers benefit the nation by helping shape the future workforce.

In addition, there are several passages about duties students have to the school itself. In these cases, the school as a whole benefits from individuals fulfilling their duties. For instance, a story entitled 'School Garden' in the fourth grade reader includes the following line.

ဤသို့ ပြုလုပ်ရသည်ကို ကျွန်တော်တို့အားလုံး ပျော်ရွှင်ဝမ်းမြောက်ကြပါသည်။ ဤဥယျာဉ်လေး ပိုမိုစိမ်းလန်းစိုပြည်အောင်၊ ပိုမိုလှပတင့်တယ်အောင် ဆောင်ရွက်ရမည့်တာဝန်မှာ လက်ရှိကျောင်းသူ ကျောင်းသားများဖြစ်ကြသော ကျွန်တော်တို့ တာဝန်သာ ဖြစ်သည်။

"We are all very happy to do this. It is the duty of the current students to make our garden more vibrantly green and more pleasantly beautiful" (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009b, p. 6).

This concept is then reinforced in the exercise section of the lesson, where students are asked a question requiring that they repeat this idea.

ကျောင်းဥယျာဉ်ကို ထိန်းသိမ်းရန် မည်သူတို့၌ တာဝန်ရှိသနည်း။

Whose duty is it to maintain the school garden? (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009b, p. 7)

<sup>50</sup> In Burmese language, the terms 'guide' and 'preach' are understood to mean the act of conveying civic and moral concepts to others and urging them to act in accordance with these concepts. The meaning of these terms will be described at length later in this chapter.

Duties one should fulfill within other community settings are emphasized through numerous stories and poems. For instance, a poem in the first grade reader describes how the community works together, fulfilling their duties, resulting in the reduction of the mosquito population.

ရွာထဲကရေအိုင်။	A pond in the village.
သည် [sic] ဒိုင်က ခြင်လာသည်။	Mosquitoes came from the pond.
ခြင်နိုင်ဆေး ဖျန်းပါ။	Spray enough of the mosquito repellent.
လူတိုင်းမှာ တာဝန်ရှိသည်။	Everyone has their duty.
(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 7)	

Moreover, the textbooks refer to fulfilling duties in a national context. In these cases, it is the nation as a whole that benefits from people fulfilling their duties. One example of this is the story ‘Independence Day,’ from the second grade reader, described earlier in this chapter. In this story the people of Burma are described as struggling to restore and maintain the country’s independence, as it “is the duty of all the ethnic nationalities” (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009d, p. 42-43). In addition, there are many other examples of textbook excerpts that emphasize the national benefits of individuals fulfilling their duties. One such example is the following short poem from the first grade Myanmar reader.

လွတ်လပ်ရေးကို ထိန်းသိမ်းပါ။	Preserve independence.
ညီညွတ်ရေးကို ကြိုးပမ်းပါ။	Try to be united.
ရွတ်ရွတ်ခွံ့ခွံ့ ဆောင်ရွက်ပါ။	Do this dedicatedly.
တာဝန် မချွတ်ယွင်းပါစေနှင့်။	Don’t neglect the responsibility.
ပြည်သူ့ကျင့်ဝတ်ကို	Venerate people’s ethics.
အထွတ်အမြတ်ထားပါ။	
(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 27).	

### Fulfilling duties systematically

All the textbook passages that refer to the importance of fulfilling one’s duties express, implicitly or explicitly, that these duties should be carried out ‘systematically.’ In other words, they should be performed in an organized, disciplined way. In some cases, the text communicates this by explicitly urging students to be ‘systematic’ when carrying out their duties. For instance, in lesson 10 in the first grade reader, the line “Be systematic” (စနစ်တကျ

ရှိပါစေ) immediately precedes the line “Don’t neglect responsibilities” (တာဝန် မလစ်ဟင်းပါစေနှင့်) (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 23). Similarly, when recounting how students fulfilled their responsibilities in relation to their school garden, the textbook states the following.

ထို့နောက် ယူလာသော အပင်ပေါက်လေးများနှင့် မျိုးစေ့များကို စနစ်တကျ စိုက်ပျိုးကြသည်။

“Then plants and seeds were planted in a row *systematically*” (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009b, p. 4-5, my emphasis).

In other cases, the importance of organization and discipline is implied when duties are described as being carried out ‘in unison’ with others. If duties are carried out in the same way, at the same time, there is a certain amount of discipline needed to maintain that synchronization. In the poem ‘Pupils’ Duty,’ students “stand in unison” (ညီညာထကြွ) (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c, p. 67). Another poem entitled ‘Mingalaba’ describes students’ duties to their teacher, stating that students “greet [the teacher] in unison” (ညီညီညာညာ နှုတ်ဆက်ကြ။) (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c, p. 13).

Also, the layout of the lesson ‘Daily Duty’ implicitly communicates the disciplined nature in which duties should be performed (figure 3.18). The use of a series of boxes with thick black borders arranged very close together in straight rows and columns, gives off a striking sense of regimentation and discipline. Each box contains an illustration of just one singular duty, with a short phrase describing the duty just below it. The illustrations themselves are very sparse, providing an intense focus on the duty itself by leaving out any components that are not essential to communicating what duty the boy is engaged in. For example, in the box illustrating the duty ‘make [your] bed,’ we can see the boy folding up his bed. However, nothing else is visible. The background is merely a shaded purple color. Not even the walls of an empty room are shown. Furthermore, the boxes of duties are arranged chronologically, showing the order in which these duties should be performed from early morning to night. This chronological arrangement, with almost no space left between the boxes, strongly implies that in one’s daily life, fulfilling one’s duties should be prioritized over other tasks, and completing these duties

likely leaves very little time for other activities. Even ‘play’ is scheduled, in its own box, after helping parents and before bathing (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c, p. 11-12).

#### Consistency of the theme

The textbooks present the theme ‘fulfill responsibilities’ in a very consistent way. Throughout the entirety of the Myanmar readers, the theme of fulfilling one’s duties is never contradicted or undercut in any way. In fact, a number of other civic themes reinforce the idea that one should fulfill one’s duties. For instance, this is the case with the theme of respecting elders, discussed at length earlier in this chapter. One of the most prominent ways the textbooks advocate youth show their respect to elders is through fulfilling their duties in relation to them. Therefore, when the textbooks urge students to respect elders, the reader is often reminded of the importance of fulfilling one’s duties.

#### *Overarching civic theme 3: Live and act in unity*

The third of the three key overarching civic themes emphasized throughout the primary level Myanmar readers is the importance of living and acting in unity. This civic theme is centered on the idea that the nation is comprised of different groups who have come together to live and act in unity for the benefit of the country as a whole. The textbooks depict unity as fundamental to the peace, stability and development of the country. Without it, the country cannot move forward.

The importance of living and acting in unity is either explicitly mentioned or strongly implied 24 times across 17 different lessons. This theme is prominent in each of the primary school Myanmar readers in mottos, specific practices and in stories. It is present in 3 lessons in the Kindergarten reader, and 7 lessons in the first grade reader. In the second through fourth grade reader it is present in 2, 4 and 1 lessons, respectively. In addition, the Myanmar readers for kindergarten through grade three have at least one lesson that is focused primarily on advocating the importance of living in unity.

#### Mottos

One of the most well known mottos in Burma that expresses this unity theme can be found in the first grade Myanmar reader.

ကိုင်းကျွန်းမှီ၊ ကျွန်းကိုင်းမှီ။

Plants rely on islands, islands rely on plants.

(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 13)

This motto stresses the importance of acting in unity with others in order to achieve success. By doing this, one can rely on the particular strengths of others and allow others to rely on one's own unique strengths. This is symbolically represented by the plants in the metaphor above, which can only survive if they can continue drawing nutrients from the island's soil. Similarly, the island can only survive if the plants continue to stabilize its banks with their roots, preventing the small island from being washed away by the water flowing against its shores. In this way, the plants and the island are united. They rely on one another to successfully thrive.

#### Specific practices

Numerous passages in each of the Myanmar readers contain specific practices that provide details about what living and acting in unity means in different contexts. What are the different groups that need to unite? In what circumstances is this important? These specific practices also provide details about how and why one should go about acting in unity with others. For example, the following text from Burma's national anthem, which is included in the kindergarten and first grade Myanmar readers, contains specific practices that emphasize the importance of acting in unity with others when the country as a whole is being threatened. The specific practices, in this case, also describe what united actions should be taken to ward off the threat to the country.

Let the inheritance of the union be sustained  
Dedicatedly, let's preserve [it]...  
For the union, life will be given  
To protect [it].  
This is our country, this is our land, the land that we own.  
Our country, our land, for its benefit  
We, in unity  
Let's carry the load  
Our duty  
Precious land  
(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 69).





{Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c, p. 68}

**Figure 3.20 Illustration accompanying the national anthem, kindergarten Myanmar reader**

These lines stress the importance of national unity and explicitly state that it benefits the country. The united actions the people must take, according to these lyrics, include fighting alongside others to protect the country and giving one's life for the country, if necessary.

The accompanying illustrations provide additional detail regarding what groups need to unite. While the national anthem serves as the text for the final lesson in both the kindergarten and first grade Myanmar readers, they are accompanied by different illustrations. However, while the illustrations are different, they are remarkably similar in how they depict unity. In each case, the illustration shows a diverse group of people standing together, smiling and laughing near a recognizable national symbol. In the kindergarten Myanmar reader, the illustration shows a group of people from diverse occupations standing under the national flag (figure 3.20).<sup>51</sup> In the first grade Reader, there is a group of people from diverse ethnicities all working together to hold up a map of the country (figure 3.21).<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> The occupations of most of the people in this group can be identified by the uniform they are wearing. The genders and occupations of the group members are the following: (From left to right) a male farmer, a male of unknown occupation, a female red cross volunteer, a female schoolteacher, a male doctor, a female nurse, a male soldier, a male police officer, a male of unknown occupation.

<sup>52</sup> The ethnicities of people in this group can be identified by the traditional clothing they are wearing, which is particular to their ethnic group. The genders and ethnicity of the group members are the



(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 69)

**Figure 3.21** Illustration accompanying the national anthem, first grade Myanmar reader

### Stories

The unity theme is also present in multiple stories in the Myanmar readers. It is the main theme of the Jataka Tale entitled 'Wise Owl,' found in the fourth grade Myanmar reader. The story tells of a monkey and an elephant who couldn't agree on which one of them had more useful skills. They took their dispute to a wise owl who asked them to pick fruit from a tree standing on the opposite side of a nearby stream. To successfully complete this task the elephant and the monkey had to act in unity. The elephant had to help the monkey cross the stream and the monkey had to climb to the top of the tree to get the fruit. So, the unique skills that each animal possessed were essential to achieving success. The story concludes with words of wisdom from the owl.

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following: (From the top right, going clockwise) a Shan man, a Karenni woman, a Mon woman, a Karen woman, a Burmese man, a Rakhine woman, a Chin woman, a Kachin woman.

သတ္တဝါတိုင်း၌ ကိုယ်ပိုင်အရည်အချင်း တစ်ခုစီရှိကြသည်။ သတ္တဝါတို့၏ အရည် အချင်းများသည် လူ၊ နေရာနှင့်လူ အသုံးကျသည့်ရည်းဖြစ်သည်။ ကစီပီး၌မရှိသော အရည်အချင်းကို ခိုသူက ဖြည့်စွက် ကျူကျူညီလိုက်လျှင် အရာခပ်သိမ်း ပြီးမြောက် အောင်မြင်နိုင်သည်ကို အသင်တို့လက်တွေ့ သိမြင်ခံစား ခဲ့ကြပြီ မဟုတ်ပါလော့။ အငြင်းပွားနေမည့်အစား ညီညွတ်စွာ ပူးပေါင်းဆောင်ရွက် လျှင် အရာရာကို စွန့်စွမ်းဆောင်အောင်မြင်နိုင်မည် မဟုတ်ပါလော့ဟု ဆိုဆုံးမလေသတည်း။

“Every animal has their own ability. The abilities of all the animals are useful in different places. You have learned that anything can be done if a person who lacks a certain ability is helped by a person who has that ability. Instead of arguing with each other, working together in unity will bring success in everything,” he preached (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009b, p. 32).



(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009b, p. 32)

**Figure 3.22 Textbook illustration accompanying the story entitled ‘Wise Owl’**

#### The role of morality within this civic theme

While elements of morality are present in this civic theme, the moral elements are more backgrounded than they are in the themes ‘respect elders’ and ‘fulfill your duties.’ There is very little explicit mention of how adhering to this theme helps individuals develop good character

or become ‘good’ people, while the text places great emphasis on how adhering to this theme benefits the community and nation.

However, on an implicit level, the textbooks do convey that ‘good’ people are those that live and act in unity with others. People who act in this way do so because they hold moral values such as honor, self-sacrifice and putting the needs of others before their own. Evidence of the moral aspects of this civic theme can be found in the poem entitled ‘Than Kyet’ in the third grade Myanmar reader.

လုပ်အားပေးဖို့ထွက်လို့လာ၊ ညီညီညာညာ လာကြလာကြ။  
တစ်ယောက်တစ်လက် ဝိုင်းလို့ကူ၊ လုပ်သားပြည်သူ ကောင်းဖို့ ကောင်းဖို့။  
ရပ်ရွာအကျိုးသယ်ပိုးတာ၊ ဝါဖိုးသာယာ ကျန်းမာဖို့ပဲ။  
လက်တွေ့ဖွံ့ဖြိုး မမေ့ပါ၊ စုကာပေါင်းကာ လုပ်ကြကိုင်ကြ။  
တံတားခင်းပါ၊ လမ်းပြင်ပါ၊ အလုပ်ဆိုတာ ဂုဏ်ရှိတာပဲ။  
----- ကျောင်းသူကျောင်းသားနိုးကြားပါ၊ တို့ပြည်မြန်မာ ရှေ့သို့- ရှေ့သို့။

Coming out to volunteer, in unison, come, come; Helping, everyone gives a hand for workers [and] people, for good, for good; Carry out for the benefit of the village, for development and good health; Not forgetting to realize the development, together do it, carry it out; Build a bridge, repair the road, work is an honorable thing; Plow the soil with a chopping hoe, decorate the land by growing and planting... All students be attentive, our country Myanmar, forward, forward (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009e, p. 36).

This passage explicitly states how living and acting in unity benefits the nation. The text asserts that volunteering one’s time and labor promotes the development of the village and moves the country ‘forward’ (ရှေ့သို့). However, the text also stresses the moral aspect of acting in unity, calling it ‘honorable’ (ဂုဏ်ရှိတာပဲ). In this way, this poem strongly implies that good people are those who volunteer their labor and that everyone does this. The poem suggests that if one does not volunteer their labor, then they are impeding their country’s progress and development. They are selfishly thinking of themselves first, without considering the good of the nation.

In contrast, many other passages in the Myanmar readers refer to unity yielding a number of different local community and national benefits, while leaving out any explicit mention of

morals or values. For instance, the story entitled ‘Bagan’ in the third grade Myanmar reader emphasizes that the nation benefited when all the ethnic groups worked together in unity to construct Burma’s ancient capital.

ပုဂံခေတ်မြန်မာနိုင်ငံတော်ကို ထိုခေတ်မြန်မာတိုင်းရင်းသားတို့က စည်းလုံးညီညွတ်စွာ  
စုပေါင်းတည်ထောင်ခဲ့သည်။

“Myanmar Kingdom, during the Bagan Era was built by Myanmar nationalities together in unity.”<sup>53</sup>

The united way in which Bagan was built, with all ethnic groups participating, is also emphasized in the exercise section of this lesson, where students are asked to answer the question,

ပုဂံကို မည်သည့်တိုင်းရင်းသားများ တည်ထောင်ခဲ့ပါသနည်း။

“Which nationalities built Bagan?” (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009e, p. 33-35)

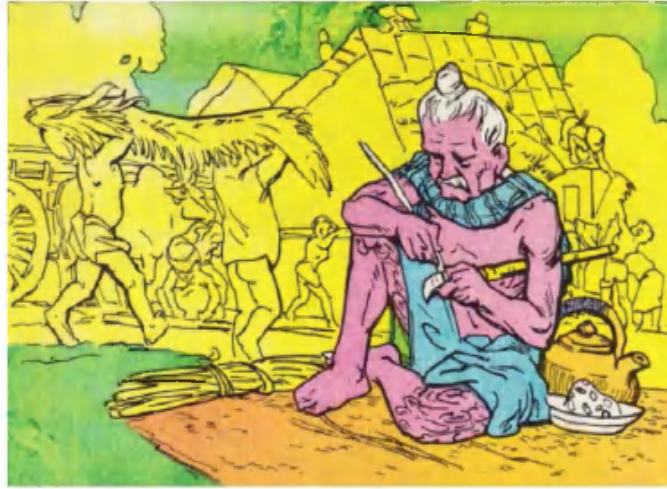
Other textbook passages emphasize how communities benefit from people living and working in unity. For instance, a story in the first grade Myanmar reader entitled ‘Grandpa’s Pyo’s House’ tells of people of various ages and from different families working together to fix the home of an elderly community member.

ဘကြီးဖို့တို့အိမ် ပျက်စီးနေပါသည်။ ရွာသားများက ဝိုင်းဝန်းပြင်ဆင်ပေးကြသည်။ ရွာသားအချို့က သစ်ဝါးများကို ခုတ်ပေးကြသည်။ အချို့က သစ်ဝါးများကို လှည်းဖြင့်သယ်ပေးကြပါသည်။ အသက်ရှစ်ဆယ်ကျော် ဖိုးလေးထွန်းကပင် သက်ငယ်မိုးရန် နီးဖြာပေးသည်။ ကျွန်တော်တို့ကလေးများက သက်ငယ်ပျစ်များကို သယ်ယူပေးပါသည်။ ဘကြီးဖို့၏ဇနီး အဖွားငြိမ်းက ကောက်ညှင်းပေါင်းကျွေးပါသည်။ ကျွန်တော်တို့ အလွန်ပျော်ကြပါသည်။

Grandpa Pyo’s<sup>54</sup> house is broken. Villagers are fixing it together. Some villagers are cutting wood and bamboo. Some are transporting wood and bamboo with a cart. Eighty years old, Grandpa Pyo also helps making bamboo string for attaching thatch. We children are also helping by carrying thatch. Grandpa Pyo’s wife, Grandma Nyine steams sticky rice. We are very happy (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 47).

<sup>53</sup> This statement is unlikely to be historically accurate. While there were people from multiple ethnicities involved in constructing Bagan, it is improbable that people from all of Burma’s ethnic groups were involved.

<sup>54</sup> The title ‘grandpa,’ is used here as a way of showing respect to him and acknowledging that he is older than most of the other community members. It is not used to indicate that the people helping him are members of his extended family.



(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 47)

**Figure 3.23 Textbook illustration accompanying the story 'Grandpa Pyo's House'**

In this story, unity doesn't only benefit Grandpa Pyo and his wife. It also benefits the 'happy' community members, since the passage implies that if they have a future need they will not face it alone. Like Grandpa Pyo, they will receive assistance from the other community members in fulfilling their needs. Thus, with this form of communal safety net, the community as a whole is better off than it would be in the absence of this unity.



(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 13)

**Figure 3.24 Image of two men attempting to push a bullock cart out of the mud**

### Acting in unity vs. living in unity

Most of the textbook passages that fall under this theme show groups *acting* in unity, by which I mean they are all engaged in tasks for the purpose of protecting or developing their community and/or the country. In some cases people are shown engaging together in the exact same task to reach a common goal. For example, the first grade Myanmar reader contains a poem and accompanying illustration that depicts two men working in unity to dislodge a bullock cart that is stuck in the mud (figure 3.24).

လှည်းဘီးနွဲ့ထဲ ကျုံ့နေသည်။	Bullock cart wheel is stuck in the mud.
ကူ၍ တွန်းပေးကြပါ။	Help and push.
လေးလွန်း၍ မတွန်းနိုင်ဘူးလား။	Can't be pushed because it's too heavy?
ပြိုင်တူတွန်းလျှင် ရွေ့နိုင်ပါသည်။	It can be moved when [we] push at the same time.

(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 13)

In other cases the textbook shows people fulfilling different aspects of a larger task, also for a common goal that benefits the community or country. This is demonstrated in the example above where a diverse group of people are communally building Grandpa Pyo's house. Everyone engaged in this common task has a different role. Some people are responsible for cutting wood, while others transport it. Grandpa Pyo himself makes string to attach the pieces of thatch to his roof while his wife cooks sticky rice to keep the group well fed (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 47).

In other passages diverse groups are not shown engaging in communal tasks. Instead, they are simply shown *living* in unity, by which I mean they are depicted existing in close proximity to one another in peace and harmony. This is exemplified by the lesson in the first grade Myanmar reader entitled 'Our Country's Family.' Beneath the lesson's title is a 2-page illustration showing eight male-female couples in the traditional dress of various ethnic groups. They are smiling and standing around a map of Burma. Arrows emanate from different locations on the map and point toward each couple, indicating the region of the country they originate from. Near each couple, the name of their ethnic group is listed. These ethnic group names are the only text in this lesson aside from the title of the lesson itself (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 44).





(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 44)

**Figure 3.25 'Our Country's Family,' a lesson from the first grade Myanmar reader**

#### Acting in unity ensures success

A prominent sub-theme that can be found within the passages that advocate living and acting in unity is that acting in unity ensures success. In each case, the link between acting in unity and success is stated as unequivocal fact. This is exemplified by a lesson in the kindergarten Myanmar reader entitled 'Unity Motto.' The motto itself is the only text on the page. It reads "Unity, success spreads, Happily celebrate, our success celebration" (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c, p. 27). The full page illustration that accompanies this text shows a multiethnic group of people waving small Burmese flags (figure 3.26).<sup>55</sup> They are on a hill in front of a monument commemorating Burma's independence.

<sup>55</sup> The gender and ethnic groups represented in this illustration are the following: (front row, left to right) Kayah woman, Karen woman, Burman man, Rakhine woman; (second row, left to right) Naga Man, Shan man, Mon woman; (back row, left to right) Kachin woman, Kayan woman.





(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c, p. 27)

**Figure 3.26 'Unity Motto,' a lesson in the kindergarten Myanmar reader**

Each time the connection between unity and success is mentioned in the text, implicit or explicit messages are provided which explain the rationale for this linkage. Overall, the passages suggest that by working together, people within the group support each other in various ways, which facilitates the process of achieving the goal at hand. In some cases, this support comes in the form of having more people available to complete the task. For example, a poem and accompanying illustration in the first grade Myanmar reader communicates this idea.

အမိမြန်မာနိုင်ငံတော်၊  
တိုင်းရင်းသားများ  
စုဝင်းနေထိုင်ကြ၏။  
အချင်းချင်း ကူညီရိုင်းဝင်းကြသည်။  
ဝိုင်းဝန်းတင်းဆောင် ကြတိုင်းကောင်း

[In] Mother Myanmar,  
Ethnic nationalities are living together.  
[They] help [and] support each other.  
Working together [makes] every idea  
successful.

(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 7)

The illustration that accompanies this poem provides further detail regarding what “helping [and] supporting each other” entails. In the picture, four people from different ethnic groups are walking through a field together, each carrying items in a basket (figure 3.27).<sup>56</sup> These people are all engaged in the same task—transporting materials from one place to another. This image suggests that by having multiple people on the task together, they are more likely to complete it successfully than if one person was trying to complete it alone, since if any one person struggles with their share of the load, it could be split up and carried by the other group members.



(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 7)

**Figure 3.27** Image from the first grade Myanmar reader showing four women from different ethnic groups carrying food or other materials through a field.

A similar message is communicated in the story “Ben, Chin Man and Three Sons,” found in the first grade Myanmar reader. In the story, a father gives a bundle of firewood to his three sons and asks them to break it in half. Each son tries and fails. The old man then splits the bundle and carries one piece of firewood to each son, which they break with ease. The story continues with the father advising his sons about the importance of unity in the form of a proverb:

<sup>56</sup>The ethnicities are genders of the people in this illustration are Jaffre (right), Karen woman, a Shan man, a Karen woman, and a Kayah woman.

အဘိုးအိုက “ချစ်သားတို့။ ထင်းစည်းကို အစည်းလိုက်ချိုးသော် မကျိုးနိုင်၊ တစ်ချောင်းစီချိုးသော် ကျိုးနိုင်၏။ ထို့ကြောင့် ချစ်သားတို့သည် ထင်းစည်းကဲ့သို့ စည်းစည်းလုံးလုံး နေကြပါ” ဟု ဆိုအဘိုးအိုက “ချစ်သားတို့။ ထင်းစည်းကို အစည်းလိုက်ချိုးသော် မကျိုးနိုင်၊ တစ်ချောင်းစီချိုးသော် ကျိုးနိုင်၏။ ထို့ကြောင့် ချစ်သားတို့သည် ထင်းစည်းကဲ့သို့ စည်းစည်းလုံးလုံး နေကြပါ” ဟု ဆိုမလေသည်။ သားတို့က “ကောင်းပါပြီဖခင်” ဟု ပြောကြလေသတည်း။  
 Th... an  
 be broken. Therefore, lovely sons, live in unity like a bundle of firewood.” The sons said  
 “Yes father” (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 55).

In this story, simply having greater numbers in a group makes it more likely that the group will be successful. Each piece of firewood in the bundle is doing the same thing. One piece of wood is not depicted as having different abilities than any other piece. They are made stronger simply by banding together. This message is further emphasized in the exercise section of this lesson, which asks student to make a sentence using the word ‘unity.’ (စည်းစည်းလုံးလုံး) Then students are asked to answer the following questions.

- (က) သားတို့သည် ထင်းစည်းများကို ချိုးနိုင်ပါသလား။  
 a. Were sons able to break a bundle of firewood?
  - (ခ) သားတို့သည် ထင်းချောင်းများကို ချိုးနိုင်ပါသလား။  
 b. Were sons able to break a piece of firewood?
  - (ဂ) ဖခင်က သားသုံးယောက်ကို မည်ကဲ့သို့ နေကြရန် ဆုံးမသနည်း။  
 c. How did the father preach to three sons how to live?
- (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 56)

Other textbook passages contain a different reason why working in unity results in success. They suggest that working in unity brings about success because people in the group have different strengths. Thus, when working towards a specific goal, tasks can be divided up between group members according to their particular skills, making them more likely to successfully reach their objective. For instance, this idea is embedded in the poem that ends with the unity motto, “plants rely on islands, islands rely on plants” from the first grade reader discussed earlier in this chapter. The full text of the poem is the following.

ခွန်အားကြီးသော လယ်သမားများ။	Strong farmers.
စုပေါင်းထွန်ကြမည်။	Plowing together.
နည်းလမ်းကောင်းများ ညွှန်ပြထားသည်။	Guided by good methods.
သီးနှံဖွံ့ဖြိုးမည်။	Crops will develop.

ကိုင်းကျွန်းမှ ကျွန်းကိုင်းရှိ။

Plants rely on islands, islands rely on plants.

(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 13)

While it is not explicitly stated, the government is understood to be guiding the farmers with 'good methods.' Thus, this poem stresses the importance of farmers acting in unity with the government to achieve success. By doing this, they can rely on each other's particular strengths, making the task easier.

Similarly, the Jataka Tale in the fourth grade Myanmar reader entitled 'Wise Owl', discussed earlier, demonstrates the same reasoning for why unity results in success. Had the monkey or the elephant tried to obtain the fruit from the tree separately, they both would have failed. It was only when they united the elephant's ability to forge the stream and the monkey's ability to climb the tree that the fruit could be picked (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009b, p. 30-32).

#### Textbooks' selective portrayal of diversity

The different groups the textbooks portray as coming together in unity include people of different ethnicities and from different regions of the country, as well as people of different ages, genders and occupations. In addition, civilians are shown working together with the military and with government ministries and departments.



(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 5)

**Figure 3.28 Image of individuals from different ethnic groups marching in unity**

#### Different ethnicities act in unity

Many textbook passages feature different ethnic groups living and acting in unity. Not only is this evident in the lesson 'Our Country's Family,' shown above (figure 3.25), but there are seven other lessons which depict people from different ethnic groups acting in unity. In fact, every time different ethnicities are mentioned in the text or shown in an illustration, they are either living or acting in unity. For example, the first grade Myanmar reader includes an illustration of a group of people from various ethnicities marching together in unison (figure 3.28).<sup>57</sup> A Burman man is walking at the very front of the group, waving a small national flag. Behind the group, banners can be seen in shadow, presumably being held up by other group members who are obscured by those standing at the front. It appears as if this group may be marching in unison to celebrate a national holiday. This illustration is accompanied by the following text:

ပြည်ထောင်စုသား

Union member

ညီနောင်များတို့

Brothers

ကောင်းစားစေကြောင်း

For the [public] good

<sup>57</sup> The gender and ethnicity of each figure are the following (from left to right): Burman man (holding flag), Shan or Pa-O man, 2 Shan women, an Akha or Lisu woman.

အားဖြည့်လောင်း၍  
စုပေါင်းညီညွတ်ကြိုးပမ်းပါ။

Strength and labor, fill and pour  
Together try in unity

(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 5)

Similarly, the story entitled ‘Independence Day’ in the second grade Myanmar reader states that the country obtained independence from British colonial rule thanks to all of Burma’s ethnic groups acting in unity, albeit under the guidance of the Burman general, Aung San.

အာဇာနည် ဗိုလ်ချုပ်အောင်ဆန်း၏ ခေါင်းဆောင်မှု၊ တိုင်းရင်းသားလူမျိုးပေါင်းစုံတို့၏ စည်းလုံးညီညွတ်မှုဖြင့် ၁၉၄၈ ခုနှစ်၊ ဇန်နဝါရီလ ၄ ရက်နေ့တွင် မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ လွတ်လပ်ရေး ရရှိခဲ့၏။ စည်းလုံးညီညွတ်မှုဖြင့် ၁၉၄၈ ခုနှစ်၊ ဇန်နဝါရီလ ၄ ရက်နေ့တွင် မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ လွတ်လပ်ရေး ရရှိခဲ့၏။

“With the leadership of martyr General Aung San [and] unity among all ethnic nationalities, Myanmar got independence on January 4th, 1948.”

This point is further emphasized in the exercise section of this lesson, in which the students are asked to fill in the following blanks with the words ‘ethnic groups’ (တိုင်းရင်းသားလူမျိုးများ) and ‘solidify’ (တည်တံ့ခိုင်မြဲစေရန်), respectively.

(ခ) လွတ်လပ်ရေးတိုက်ပွဲများတွင် \_\_\_\_\_ အားလုံး ပါဝင်ကြိုးပမ်းခဲ့၏။

b. All \_\_\_\_\_ participated in battles for independence.

(ဂ) မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ၏ လွတ်လပ်ရေး \_\_\_\_\_ ရန်မှာ တိုင်းရင်းသားအားလုံးတို့၏ တာဝန်ဖြစ်သည်။

c. It is the duty of all ethnic nationalities to \_\_\_\_\_ independence.”

(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009d, p. 43)

#### People from different regions act in unity

Other textbook passages mention how people from different regions of the country have acted in unity for the country’s benefit. A story titled ‘National Day’ from the third grade Myanmar reader stresses how people from urban and rural areas as well as from all ethnic groups protested in unity to help drive the British out of Burma during colonial times.

၁၉၂၀ ပြည့်နှစ်တွင် အင်္ဂလိပ်အစိုးရက ရန်ကုန်တက္ကသိုလ်ကို ဖွင့်လှစ်ရန် စီစဉ်သည်။ တက္ကသိုလ်ဥပဒေကိုလည်း ပြဌာန်းသည်။ ဤဥပဒေ အရ တက္ကသိုလ်ပညာသင်လိုသူတိုင်း သင်ကြားခွင့် မရနိုင်သဖြင့် မြန်မာတမျိုးသားလုံးက မကျေနပ်ကြချေ။ ထို့ကြောင့် တက္ကသိုလ် ကျောင်းသားများက ဦးဆောင်၍ သပိတ်မှောက်ခဲ့ကြသည်။ ရန်ကုန်တက္ကသိုလ်ကျောင်းသားများသပိတ်သည် အနယ်နယ်အရပ်ရပ်သို့ ပျံ့နှံ့သွားပြီး နယ်ကျောင်းများကလည်း သပိတ်မှောက်ကြပါသည်။ အမျိုးသားကောလိပ်နှင့် အမျိုးသားကျောင်းများကို တည်ထောင်ကြပါသည်။ ထိုကျောင်းများကြောင့်

အမျိုးသားစိတ်ဓာတ်များလည်း ပိုမိုနိုးကြားဖွံ့ဖြိုးလာပါသည်။ အမျိုးသားစာပေလေ့ လာမှုလည်း ပွင့်လန်းလာပါသည်။ ထိုအချိန်မှစ၍ မြန်မာအမျိုးသားတို့သည် အင်္ဂလိပ်အစိုးရကို ဆန့်ကျင်ဆန္ဒပြပွဲများ အဆက်မပြတ် ဆင်နွှဲကာ လွတ်လပ်ရေးကို တောင်းဆိုခဲ့ကြပါသည်။ ထို့ကြောင့် လွတ်လပ်ရေးအစ အမျိုးသားနေ့ဟု ဟူ၍ ဆိုကြပါသည်။

In 1920...the University Law was issued [by the British]. All Myanmar nationalities were dissatisfied because according to that law, not just anyone who wanted to get a university education could get one. Therefore, university students led a protest. The protest of the Yangon University students spread to other places, and schools in rural areas also started to protest... Since then, Myanmar nationalities constantly protested against the English government and demanded independence. Therefore, the beginning of independence is called National Day (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009e, p. 1-2).

#### People of different occupations act in unity

The Myanmar readers also repeatedly depict people from diverse occupations coming together to complete tasks for the benefit of the community and nation. This is evident in the illustration accompanying the national anthem in the kindergarten Myanmar reader included at the head of this section (figure 3.20). The illustration shows a group of smiling people standing under the national flag, each dressed in the uniform of a different occupation. The group includes a doctor, a nurse, a farmer, a red cross volunteer, a teacher, a male doctor, a soldier, and a police officer (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 69). When this illustration is viewed in concert with the accompanying text, which explicitly emphasizes unity, it suggests that each of these individuals contribute toward the collective task of bettering the country by carrying out their respective jobs.

Throughout the Myanmar readers there are ten lessons that feature people from various occupations working to enable the community and country as a whole to develop and thrive. Six of those lessons focus on just one occupation and describe how all the people who do that type of work help the community and/or nation develop. The remaining four lessons, including the example above, show people of different occupations side by side, all working for the betterment of the community and/or nation. Among them is a lesson entitled 'Our Flag' in the second grade Myanmar reader. As the text explains the meaning of the symbols in the flag, it simultaneously highlights the idea that farmers and workers

(အလုပ်သမား)<sup>58</sup> contribute to the common task of driving national development by doing their respective jobs.

စပါးနို့သည် တောင်သူလယ်သမားများအတွက် အမှတ်အသားဖြစ်ပါသည်။ စက်သွားသည် အလုပ်သမားများအတွက် အမှတ်အသားဖြစ်ပါ သည်။ တောင်သူလယ်သမားနှင့် အလုပ်သမားသည် နိုင်ငံတော်တည်ဆောက်ရေး၏ အခြေခံလူတန်းစားများ ဖြစ်ပါသည်။

“The paddy plant is the symbol for farmers. The gear is a symbol for workers. Farmers and workers are the foundational class of people building our country” (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009d, p. 1).

A two-page lesson in the first grade Myanmar reader, entitled ‘Our Duty,’ stresses the same idea, but with a broader spread of occupations. The lesson illustrates people working in twelve different occupations (figure 3.29). Next to each illustration are two lines of text that include the name of the person and their occupation, followed by a few words explicitly or implicitly stating how they help the community or the country. The text accompanying the illustration of the farmer provides an explicit example. “Expert farmer U Tha Aung Grows paddy and benefits the country.” In another illustration, a man in a field is using a hoe to make a stream for water drainage, while a group of three men work behind him. Next to this image is the following text. “U Tha Nu is leading [others] to work for the good of the village” (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 49).

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<sup>58</sup> This term likely refers to factory workers and workers in other types of industrialized manufacturing plants.





(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 49–50)

**Figure 3.29 ‘Our Duty,’ a lesson from the first grade Myanmar reader**

The text accompanying the illustration of a factory worker provides an example of how community and/or national benefit is implied, instead of explicitly stated. “Ko Poe Maung, a worker, tries to increase production.” Similarly, next to the illustration of the doctor the text states, “U Sein Ba, a doctor, expert in patient treatment.” While it is not explicitly stated, the last phrase describing these occupations refers to an aspect of their work that is oriented towards the benefit of the community or nation. By increasing production the worker is promoting economic growth. By treating patients with his expert skills, the doctor is nurturing the good health of the community. Thus, this section suggests that each person, in his or her own occupation, is working towards the common goal of bettering the nation.

The last section of text in this lesson connects this message to the lives of students, informing them about their role in bettering the nation.

Students, our companions  
When growing up

Value education  
Fulfill our own responsibility  
(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 50).

This passage explicitly advises students to fulfill their responsibility by focusing on their education while they are growing up. This text implicitly suggests that while they are young and in school, it is not the appropriate time for them to contribute towards the development of the community through an occupation. Instead, students should consider studying to be their current duty. Fulfilling this duty will enable them to work in unity with others when they are older, pushing the nation forward by working in their future occupation.

#### People of different ages act in unity

Several textbook passages that center on unity feature people of different age groups working together toward a common civic goal. One example is the 'Our Duty' lesson from the first grade Myanmar reader described above. It makes reference to how adults in various occupations help the community and nation thrive. Then it also extends this theme to youth, explaining that the most helpful task they can do for the community and country, at this early stage of their lives, is to study (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 49-50).

Similarly, the story in the first grade Myanmar reader entitled 'Grandpa's Pyo's House' features people of all ages assisting in the common task of fixing a home. The children and the oldest people perform the less physically taxing aspects of the job, such as carrying the light-weight thatch pieces and making string. Meanwhile, the middle-aged adults in the story complete the more physically demanding tasks such as climbing on to the roof to attach thatch and cutting wood. The story emphasizes the ages of the people participating, referring to the title character of this story as 'eighty-year old Grandpa Pyo' and having the narrator of the story refer to himself as a child (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 47).

#### Both genders act in unity

The Myanmar readers depict people of different genders acting in unity for the benefit of the country. For instance, in the illustrations showing different ethnic groups, there are always men and women represented in these happy, harmonious groups. Similarly, women and men are

shown engaged in common tasks benefiting the country. For example, in *Lesson 5* of the kindergarten Myanmar reader, a male soldier is shown helping a civilian woman lift a basket full of rocks and earth onto her head, so she can carry it away (figure 3.30). It appears as if they are both contributing their labor to an infrastructure project.



(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c, p. 97)

**Figure 3.30 Illustration of a male soldier and civilian woman, kindergarten Myanmar reader**

However, while the textbooks portray people of different genders working and acting in unity for the greater good, men and women have distinctly different tasks within this process. Men are usually shown doing tasks that require physical strength, while women are usually shown engaging in tasks similar to those they would carry out in a domestic setting, such as cooking or cleaning, but on a larger scale and benefiting a larger number of people. This is evident in the story 'Grandpa's Pyn's House' discussed above. Adult men are cutting wood and bamboo and attaching them to frame of the house, while the young boy narrating the story tells us that he carried the thatch. The only woman mentioned in the story is Grandpa Pyn's wife, who contributed to this communal task by cooking sticky rice to share with the whole group. In cases where women are shown carrying out tasks that require physical strength, they are usually depicted as needing help from a male to complete the task, as in the illustration of the female civilian and the male soldier above.

### Civilians & the military/government act in unity

Civilians are also shown acting in unity with the government. This is the case in the illustration from the kindergarten Myanmar reader above (figure 3.30) in which the male soldier and female civilian are working together to complete what appears to be an infrastructure construction project. In the background of the image, additional civilians can be seen working on the same project.

There are five additional references within the text of the Myanmar readers where the government and civilians are depicted working together for the betterment of the country. Like the textbooks' depictions of different genders and occupations working together, the government and the country's civilian population are depicted as having distinctly different sets of skills which can greatly benefit the country if these two groups work together in unity. In each case, the government is depicted as a purveyor of valuable information that civilians rely on, enabling them to be successful in the tasks they are carrying out. Civilians are depicted as providing the labor necessary to actually carry out tasks that benefit the nation on a large scale. Thus the government and the civilians are shown as reliant upon each other.

For instance, the second grade Myanmar reader includes a passage describing how farmers defeat insects that threaten to destroy their crops. In this text the government is positioned as the source of expert knowledge, allowing farmers to achieve this goal. The farmers implement this knowledge as directed by the government, thus ensuring that they are able to grow sufficient food for the community and nation. The great importance of this task and the sense of unity between the government and civilians are emphasized by the battle metaphors used in this passage. The government provides the information needed to 'defeat' (နိုင်နင်း) the insects, described as 'enemies' (ရန်သူ).

ပိုးဖျက်လျှင် စပါးပင်တို့ ညှိုးနွမ်း၏။ အသီးအနှံအထွက်လျော့၏။ စပါးဖျက်ပိုးများသည်  
လယ်သမားကြီးတို့၏ ရန်သူဖြစ်သည်။ ပိုးမကျစေ ရန် စပါးပင်များကို အမြဲစောင့်ကြည့်ရသည်။  
စပါးပိုးကျလာလျှင် စုပေါင်းနိုင်နှင့်ရသည်။ ---- ထိုစပါးဖျက်ပိုးများကို နိုင်နင်းရန် စိုက်ပျိုးရေးဌာနက  
နည်းပေးသည်။ ရွာသူရွာသားများကလည်း လိုက်နာဆောင်ရွက်ကြပါသည်။

When the insects destroy, paddy plants languish. Crop yield decreases. Paddy-destroying insects are the enemies of the farmers. In order not to have insects falling,

paddy plants are always being watched. When insects fall, they should be defeated together... The Agriculture Ministry gives methods to defeat those paddy destroying insects. Villagers also follow the guidelines (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009d, p. 22-23).

The idea that the government is a source of expert knowledge is further emphasized in the exercise section of the same lesson, where one of the questions asks,

စပါးဖျက်ပိုးများကို နှိမ်နင်းရန် မည်သည့်ဌာနက နည်းပေးသနည်း။

“Which ministry has the methods to defeat paddy destroying insects?” (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009d, p. 23)

In another passage, in the third grade Myanmar reader, civilians and the government are shown working in unity in very similar roles—government as purveyor of information and civilians as an implementation force. The national benefit resulting from carrying out this task in unity is described in concrete, measureable terms of an increase in rice production and national income.

စပါးအထွက်တိုးစေမည့် နည်းလမ်းများကို လယ်သမားများအား စိုက်ပျိုးရေးဌာနက နည်းပေးလမ်းညွှန်ထားပါသည်။ ပျိုးထောင်ရာတွင် အထွက်ကောင်းသည့် စပါးမျိုးသန့်ကိုသာ အသုံးပြုရပါမည်။ ရက်ပေါင်း ၂၅ ရက်မှ ရက်ပေါင်း ၃၀ ရက် အတွင်း ပျိုးနုတ်၍ ကောက်စိုက် ရပါမည်။ လယ်ကို ညက်ညက်ထွန်၍ ကောက်ပင်ကို စိပ်စိပ်စိုက်ရပါမည်။

In order to increase production, guidelines issued by the Ministry of Agriculture were followed. Due to the increased production of rice, national income has increased. The Ministry of Agriculture gave rice production increasing techniques to the farmers. In order to maximize production, when planting the seeds, the best seeds are used. Within 25 to 30 days, little plants are pulled out and replanted. The farm has to be well plowed and the plants have to be planted close together. Chemical fertilizer and natural fertilizer are used proportionally (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009e, p. 11).

#### Linguistic and religious diversity absent from textbooks

While the textbooks show a diversity of people from across the country engaged in communal tasks, certain aspects of Burma’s diversity are conspicuous in their absence from the textbooks. While the people of Burma speak over 100 different languages, no linguistic diversity is represented in any of the Myanmar readers. All people depicted in the textbooks speak fluent Burmese. This is not altogether surprising given that this is a textbook designed to teach Burmese language. It was likely deemed important that all figures in the textbook model correct Burmese language skills. However, there are no images or text suggesting that anyone

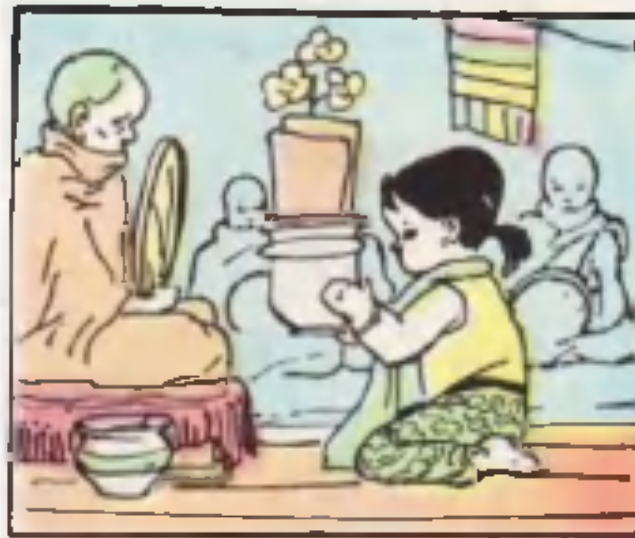
speaks any other language in addition to Burmese, despite the fact that Burmese is a second language for much of Burma's population. For many of Burma's youth, their first time being immersed in a Burmese language environment is when they enroll in government primary school.

Furthermore, the Burmese language is celebrated in the Myanmar readers and, in some cases, explicitly described as the language of all people in Burma. For instance, a poem in the kindergarten Myanmar reader implies that Burmese is the language of all of Burma's citizens by emphasizing that Myanmar literature belongs to all people of Burma. The poem is accompanied by an image of a young Burman boy, wearing a traditional Burman jacket over his school uniform. He is depicted as if he is in mid-sentence, giving an enthusiastic speech, which is presented in the form of a poem.

မြန်မာပြည်သည် ငါတို့ပြည်၊	Myanmar country is our country,
မြန်မာစာသည် ငါတို့စာ၊	Myanmar literature is our literature,
မြန်မာပြည် ကြီးပွားစေရမည်။	Myanmar country will develop.
ငါတို့ ကြိုးစားကြပါစို့။	Let us try.

(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c, p. 66)

By suggesting that Burmese is the language of all people in Burma, the text effectively renders Burma's linguistic diversity invisible, delegitimizing the many languages spoken by Burma's ethnic minorities.



၈။ တန်ဆောင်မုန်းလ ကတိန့်ပွဲ

(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c, p. 39)

**Figure 3.31 Illustration of Buddhist Ka-taine festival, first grade Myanmar reader**

In addition, no religious diversity is depicted anywhere in the Myanmar readers. No acknowledgement is made of Burma's Muslims, Christians or Hindus, which together make up 10-18% of the population (Central Intelligence Agency, 2011; Matthews, 2001, p. 5). Buddhism is the only religion mentioned in the textbooks, and references to it are abundant.<sup>65</sup> Buddhism is highlighted over 50 times in the Myanmar readers. Several textbook lessons contain excerpts from Theravada Buddhist scripture such as the Singalovada Sutta and the Mangala Sutta.<sup>66</sup> Over a dozen lessons are dedicated to naming Buddhist festivals and describing how they are celebrated. Textbook passages describe youth and families carrying out Buddhist practices and participating in Buddhist festivals, as if the entire population of the country shared this religion and its beliefs.

<sup>65</sup> The only exception to the textbooks' lack of religious diversity is a passing reference to Christmas in a short poem in the first grade reader. Next to a drawing of a calendar, the poem reads, 'Can Christmas day be seen?' (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 33). However, the passage does not explicitly state that Christmas is a Christian holiday, nor does it state that it is religious in nature.

<sup>66</sup> The Mangala Sutta can be found in the Khuddaka Nikaya, which is the fifth component of the Sutta Pitaka. The original Singalovada Sutta is included in the portion of Pali Buddhist scripture called the Pathika Vagga-Pali, which is the third component of the Sutta Pitaka.

For example, there is a 2-page lesson in the first grade Myanmar reader that depicts 12 Buddhist festivals, one celebrated each month over the course of the year. The accompanying illustrations show children participating in each festival, suggesting that all children in Burma celebrate these Buddhist holidays. In one of these illustrations (figure 3.31), a young girl participates in the Ka-taine festival (ကတိုင်းပွဲ), which takes place in the eighth month of the Burmese year (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c, p. 39).

Therefore, it is clear that the multicultural aspects of civic education policy in the Myanmar readers is shaped to encourage teachers to convey a version of Burma's diversity to students that is likely more palatable to the government, but significantly altered from the population's actual diversity characteristics. The repeated emphasis the textbooks place on Buddhism implies that it is the one and only 'true' religion of Burma and suggests that if a person is not Buddhist, they are not a truly integral part of Burma in all aspects of their lives. The absence of Christian, Muslim and other non-Buddhist practices and beliefs from the textbooks suggests that students from these religious backgrounds are outsiders, in a sense, who are learning about the 'real' Burmese religion from the Myanmar readers.

### **Myanmar readers' civic education pedagogical policy**

In addition to containing policies regarding the civic content that should be taught to students, the Myanmar readers implicitly suggest a number of pedagogical policies related to civic education. For one, the textbooks contain policy regarding the type of relationship that should be established between the teacher and the students to facilitate civic education.

#### *Hierarchical mentor/mentee relationship between teacher and students*

The Myanmar readers advocate that teachers position themselves as an authority figure who should be respected as a reliable source of information about academic content as well as civic guidance. While there is no text in the Myanmar readers that explicitly states this policy, throughout the textbooks there are stories, poems and visual illustrations of this mentor/mentee relationship in its idealized form. Teachers and other elders are repeatedly



depicted as spending serious guidance to youths who listen attentively and then promptly carry out the advice they were given.



(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c, p. 67)

**Figure 3.32 Illustration detail from 'Pupils' Duty' poem, kindergarten Myanmar reader**

The Myanmar readers' depiction of this relationship is very detailed and very consistent, which gives both teachers and students a clear idea of how to act out their respective mentor and mentee roles. In these poems, stories and illustrations, the role of giving advice is always significantly other than the person receiving it. Both the students and the teachers are shown sharply dressed in traditional Burmese clothing or the standard green and white student and teacher uniforms. The role of giving guidance are depicted either sitting or standing but they are always looking downwards towards the students they are advising. At least one of their hands is raised in front of them, usually with their index finger up, as if they are gesturing while speaking (figure 3.32, 3.36 and 3.34).<sup>61</sup>

The youths are always depicted listening silently and attentively to the guidance, in one of several poses considered respectful in Burmese culture. In many cases they are shown standing, with their arms folded at their chest, often with their heads slightly bowed and their eyes cast downwards, as in figure 3.32. In other cases, they are standing up straight, looking attentively at the figure giving advice, as in figure 3.34. If the youths are seated, they are shown sitting on

<sup>61</sup> To conserve space, the teacher and the youth in Figures 3.33 have been brought closer together than they were in the original image. Nothing else in the image was changed.

their knees with their feet pointing away from the elder giving the moral guidance, as depicted in figure 3.33.



(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c, p. 62-63)

**Figure 3.33 Illustration accompanying 'A Rich Man's Son' poem**

In some cases, when the text mentions civic guidance, the accompanying illustration shows the youth following the advice he or she has been given, either instead of or in addition to showing the civic guidance scene itself. For example, the illustration accompanying the lesson 'Be Polite' in the second grade reader (figure 3.8), depicts a young boy faithfully following the civic guidance of his teachers and parents. He is bending down and holding an item with two hands to show respect to the elder, just as he was instructed to do (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c, p. 27).



(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 46)

**Figure 3.34 Illustration accompanying 'Pupils' Duty' poem, grade 1 Myanmar reader**

The idea that all true teachers present themselves as authorities on academic and civic education matters is further reinforced in the passage entitled ‘Teachers’ Duty,’ included in the second grade Myanmar reader.<sup>62</sup> This lesson’s illustration consists of two scenes in which teachers are fulfilling the ‘teachers’ duties’ described in the text (figure 3.35). In the first scene a female teacher is shown ‘teaching skills, guiding and preaching’ (ဆက်တိုက်ညှိုးသစ် ပံ့ပိုးဆုံးမ). She is standing in front of a blackboard and behind a desk, gesturing with one arm towards her students, who are standing with their arms folded at their chest, listening intently, in silence. Below, a second scene shows a teacher sending their student, who has just graduated, to ‘appropriate’ (သင့်ရာအပ်ပို့) employment. In both scenes, the teacher is depicted as an authority with civic values and knowledge that she is dispensing to her students, to help them make good civic choices (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c, p. 37).



(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c, p. 37)

**Figure 3.35 ‘Teachers’ Duty’ poem and illustration, grade 2 Myanmar reader**

It is notable that this pedagogical policy is consistent with all three of the most common civic themes included in the textbook content. The hierarchical nature of this relationship, with the teacher as the more respected party, makes it clearly consistent with the theme ‘respect elders.’ The fact that both the teacher and the students have certain duties they are expected to perform in their respective mentor and mentee roles makes this policy consistent with the theme ‘fulfill responsibilities.’ Lastly, this policy is consistent with the theme ‘live and act in

<sup>62</sup> The full text of the poem can be found on page 136 of this chapter.

unity,' in that both the teacher and the students are relying on each other's strengths to benefit themselves and the nation. The teacher is providing his/her civic knowledge to students and the many students who come in contact with the teacher put the advice into practice. This enables the teachers' civic values to be implemented on a much broader scale, benefiting the nation more than if the teacher alone lived by these civic principles.

*Fully integrate civic education into the academic curriculum*

A second pedagogical policy the Myanmar readers encourage teachers to practice is teaching civic education by fully integrating it into the academic curriculum and into the everyday life of the classroom. While in other countries and contexts, civic education is often taught as a stand-alone class or series of curriculum units, in present-day Burma civic concepts are not presented in such an isolated fashion. For instance, they are integrated into all components of the Myanmar readers, including what some may consider the most unlikely of places. As detailed above, civic concepts can be found in mottos, lists of specific practices, stories and illustrations. They can even be found in some vocabulary word lists. For example, in the first grade Myanmar reader, a portion of one vocabulary word list reads

တိုင်းပြည်၊ ကြံ့ခိုင်၊ နိုင်ငံတော်၊ မြိုင်မြိုင်ဆိုင်ဆိုင်

country, strong, nation, harmoniously (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 6).

The fact that nouns referring to the Burmese nation are immediately followed by positive adjectives that one would use to describe a united and peaceful nation, suggests a number of civic messages, such as:

- (1) Burma is a strong and peaceful country
- (2) being from Burma should make one feel proud and secure
- (3) people from Burma should contribute to maintaining the country's strength and unity.

By modeling the integration of civic messages throughout all types of textbook content, the Myanmar readers encourage teachers to advocate civic messages throughout all sections of their lessons.

*Teachers' civic guidance should take multiple forms: showing the way, steering & preaching*

Additional pedagogical policies are suggested by the terms used in the Myanmar readers' text to describe how teachers convey civic concepts to students. Referring to elders' civic mentorship of youth, the Myanmar readers use two Burmese verbs that correspond most closely to the English verb 'to guide': လမ်းညွှန်, pronounced, 'lannyun,' and ယူဇ်, pronounced 'bay-bee-in.' These two terms are used with about equal frequency, but they have slightly different connotations.

The term 'lannyun' (လမ်းညွှန်) is a compound word composed of two smaller Burmese words. လမ်း, pronounced 'lan,' means 'road,' or 'path.' The word ညွှန်, pronounced 'nyun,' means 'to show' or 'to point.' Thus, this term conjures up an image of the teacher pointing students in the general direction they need to take to become good people and good citizens. This term does not suggest that teachers show students which way to turn at every fork in the road. Thus, it does not refer to hands-on, step-by-step civic guidance at a very detailed level. Instead, it refers to educating students in broad, overarching, civic values. In terms of pedagogy, this term suggests that once a teacher has 'shown students the way,' it is then the students' responsibility to pursue that path without constant shepherding. This term is commonly used when referring to guiding older students or adults, either in reference to a physical or figurative destination. The term 'lannyun' is used in the passage listing 'parents' duties' in the Myanmar reader, which states that parents are expected to "forbid the non-good, guide towards the good" (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009d, p. 37).

'Bay-bee-in' (ယူဇ်) is another Burmese term used in the Myanmar readers that means 'to guide.' Like 'lannyun,' it is a compound word. The first term, ယူ, pronounced 'bay,' means 'steering' or 'helm,' as in the helm of a ship. The second term, ဇ်, pronounced 'bee-in,' means 'to fix' or 'to repair.' So, this compound word conjures up the image of adjusting the sails on a sailboat or fine-tuning the angle of a ship's rudder to ensure it is going in the right direction and traveling at the proper speed. In contrast to the general nature of the guidance implied by the term 'lannyun,' 'bay-bee-in' suggests much more detailed civic guidance. Teachers are not merely pointing the student, or the ship as it may be, in the right direction. The teacher is

continuously making small adjustments to students' civic views and values as they are growing up, just as one would make adjustments to a ship's sails throughout a long journey. The pedagogical connotation of this word is that the teacher needs to be very hands-on, since without constant civic guidance, the children will veer off course and pick up immoral values and habits. The lesson 'Teachers' Duty' in the second grade Myanmar reader employs this term when stating that all teachers are expected to "[t]each skills, guide and preach" (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009d, p. 37).

These two terms both refer to the concept of civic guidance, but they represent two different approaches to this pursuit. Since the Myanmar readers use both terms, this suggests to teachers that they will likely need to employ both approaches, at various times, to guide their students. However, while these terms provide overarching pedagogical policy, they do not provide detailed information about exactly what activities a teacher should do in their classroom, to 'bay-bee-in' or 'lannyun' their students.

Another term used in the Myanmar readers, ဆုံးမ, pronounced 'sone-ma,' refers to one particular method of guiding youth. It is a specific method of expounding civic advice that corresponds roughly to the English verb 'to preach.' 'Preaching' is the civic education-related activity that is mentioned most frequently in the Myanmar readers. It appears three times at the kindergarten level, twice in first grade and four times in second grade.

Unlike the English verb 'to preach,' 'sone-ma' doesn't have strong religious connotations. When teachers are depicted 'preaching' to students, the advice is not religious in nature.<sup>63</sup> Instead, this term refers to advocating secular civic concepts such as the importance of respecting elders, and the importance of working in unity with your countrymen or peers, as evidenced by the following passages from the Myanmar readers.

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<sup>63</sup> While this is not a religious term, religious people can engage in this activity. For instance, in the kindergarten reader the text describes a monk 'preaching.' This is understood to mean that he is advocating general moral principles as opposed to religious doctrine. There is a different Burmese term for preaching religious doctrine, တရားဟော, pronounced 'tit-ya-haw.' This word is not usually used in the context of students' civic education in government schools and it is not used in the Myanmar readers.

အမကြီးအသုံးပြုခဲ့သော ဖတ်စာအုပ်များကို ကျွန်တော်က ရိုသေစွာ ကိုင်ပါသည်။  
ပစ္စည်းဟူသမျှရှိသေရန် ဖေဖေနှင့်မေမေက ကျွန်တော်တို့ကို အမြဲဆုံးမပါသည်။

I use the textbooks that my big sister used with respect. Daddy and mommy always preach to us to respect all property (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009d, p. 20).

အဘိုးအိုက “ချစ်သားတို့။ ထင်းစည်းကို အစည်းလိုက်ချိုးသော် မကျိုးနိုင်၊ တစ်ချောင်းစီချိုးသော် ကျိုးနိုင်၏။ ထို့ကြောင့် ချစ်သားတို့သည် ထင်းစည်းကဲ့သို့ စည်းစည်းလုံးလုံး နေကြပါ” ဟု ဆုံးမလေသည်။ သားတို့က “ကောင်းပါပြီဖခင်” ဟု ပြောကြလေသတည်း။

The old man preached to the lovely sons, ‘a bundle of firewood cannot be broken. A piece of firewood can be broken. Therefore, lovely sons, live in unity like a bundle of firewood.’ Sons said ‘Yes father’ (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009d, p. 55).

When a teacher ‘preaches,’ this involves standing in front of students, describing civic values and actions they should hold and/or enact in order to be a good person and good citizen. This can also include explanations of why these values and actions are important.

Preaching is something students absorb, but do not contribute to, contest or debate. When a teacher preaches certain civic concepts, the students are expected to accept them as fact and try to follow them to the best of their ability. This is clearly illustrated by the wording used in the kindergarten Myanmar reader, which urges students to “listen and *take in* the preaching” (ဆုံးမ နာယူ) (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c, p. 67). This process of silent, dutiful absorption is also illustrated in the images of students silently listening to elders’ preaching, as highlighted above (figures 3.32 through 3.34).

#### *Teach students to memorize & accept civic values without question*

The portrayal of students’ relatively passive role during their teachers’ preaching is just one of several aspects of the Myanmar readers that suggest students should accept civic concepts without question. The first through fourth grade Myanmar readers contain ‘exercise’ (လေ့ကျင့်ခန်း) sections immediately following most of the civic stories and passages. Each exercise section includes tasks for the students to complete, all of which are rigidly structured and designed to encourage students to repeat civic concepts, often word-for-word, from the preceding text. For instance, following a story about the Buddhist ‘Tha-din jut’ Light Festival in

the third grade Myanmar reader, students are asked to complete sentences by filling in the blank. The blank stands in for a portion of one word in the sentence. Students are provided with two possible letter combinations. The correct answer is the one that completes the partial word with the correct spelling. The wording of each fill-in-the blank question corresponds, almost exactly, with the wording used in the original civic passage. Below I've included them side by side for comparison.

**Fill in the blank question**

(က) လူကြီးမိဘများအား  
ရိုသေလေးစားခြင်းသည် မြန်မာ့ ယဉ်\_\_\_\_\_  
မှု ဖြစ်ပါသည်။  
(ကျေး၊ ကြေး)

a. Respecting elders is Myanmar  
cul\_\_\_\_\_  
(ture/tore)

(ခ) သီတင်းကျွတ်လပြည့်နေ့တွင်  
ဘိုးဘွားများနှင့် လူကြီး မိဘများကို လှည့်  
\_\_\_\_\_ ကန်တော့ကြပါသည်။  
(လည်၊ လယ်)

b. On the full moon day of Tha-din-jut  
month, we \_\_\_\_\_ound and gadaw  
grandparents and elders. (go aw, go  
ar)

(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009e, 19-20)

**Corresponding text from the civic  
passage**

လူကြီးမိဘများအား  
ရိုသေလေးစားခြင်းသည်  
မြန်မာယဉ်ကျေးမှုပင် ဖြစ်သည်ဟူ၍လည်း  
ဆုံးမကြပါသည်။

“They [elders] also preach that  
respecting elders is Myanmar culture.”

သီတင်းကျွတ်လပြည့်နေ့—ညချမ်းတွင်  
ကျွန်တော်တို့သည် ဘိုးဘွားများနှင့်  
လူကြီးမိဘများအား လှည့်လည်ကန်တော့  
ကြပါသည်။

“On the morning of full moon day of  
tha-din-jut month... we go around and  
gadaw grandparents and elders.”

Therefore, while this activity provides students with an opportunity to interact with the text, it does not encourage them to explore their own views on the civic concepts, or ask questions about them, nor does it encourage them to figure out how to apply these concepts in their own lives. The fill-in-the-blank activity does not even allow the space for students to phrase the civic concepts in their own words. Instead, it asks them to repeat the concept verbatim, using proper spelling.



Most exercise sections also include open-ended questions about the content of the preceding story or passage. However, like the fill-in-the-blank questions, these open-ended questions encourage students to repeat civic concepts without questioning, debating or seeking to apply them to their lives. While it is not explicitly stated, students are expected to answer these questions using exact phrases or sentences from the passage itself. This is made clear by the fact that the wording of the question is identical or nearly identical to the portion of the story or passage that the question asks about. So, in effect, each question has a specific, scripted answer. Below I have included them side-by-side for comparison.

Open ended question	Corresponding text from the civic passage
ကန်တော့ကြသော လူငယ်များအား ဘိုးဘွားများက မည်သို့ ဆုပေးသနည်း။	ဘိုးဘွားများက ဝမ်းသာအားရ ဆုပေးပါသည်။ ရေလိုအေးကြပါစေ၊ ပန်းလိုမွှေးကြပါစေ၊ လိုရာဆန္ဒ တစ်လုံးတစ်ဝ ပြည့်စုံကြပါစေဟု ဆုပေးပါ သည်။
What kind of wishes do grandparents give to young people who come to gadaw them?	“Grandparents gave wishes to us happily. May you be cool as water, may you be as fragrant as flowers, may all your wishes be fulfilled. These kinds of wishes were given.”
ကန်တော့ကြသော လူငယ်များအား ဘိုးဘွားများက မည်သို့ ဆုံးမသနည်း။	လူကြီးမိဘများအား ရိုသေလေးစားခြင်းသည် မြန်မာ့ယဉ်ကျေးမှုပင် ဖြစ်သည်ဟူ၍လည်း ဆုံးမကြပါသည်။
What do grandparents preach to the young people who come to gadaw them? (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009b, p. 19-20)	“They [elders] also preach that respecting elders is Myanmar culture.”

There was only one open-ended question in all of the primary level Myanmar readers that did not have a corresponding portion of text that was immediately obvious. One open-ended question in the exercise section after the story ‘The Turtle and the Hare’ in the second grade reader asks students to answer the following question.

ယုန်နှင့်လိပ်ပုံပြင်ကို ဖတ်ခြင်းအားဖြင့် မည်သည့်သင်ခန်းစာများ ရရှိသနည်း။  
“What lessons did you get from reading this rabbit and turtle story?” (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009d, p. 3).

While the text of the story did include a moral at the end, there was no sentence that began with ‘the lesson from this story is...’ Therefore, in this case, students need to use the

information they learned from the textbook passage to develop an answer to this question in their own words.

Another task students are asked to complete that does not appear to have a scripted answer is included in the exercise section after the passage titled ‘School library’ in the fourth grade Myanmar reader. The passage describes the benefits of studying hard and being disciplined. The students are then asked to, “Write five sentences about your school”

(သင်တို့၏ကျောင်းအကြောင်းကို စာ ငါးကြောင်း ခန့် စီကုံးရေးသားပါ။) (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009b, p. 18). This is the only case, in all the Myanmar readers, that students are asked to complete a task that connects the information in the civic passage to something in their own lives. While the students could choose to use exact phrases from the text to complete this task, that does not appear to be required.

Lastly, in many exercise sections, students are asked to make sentences using certain key words that have been selected from the preceding passage. For instance, after the passage ‘Tha-din jut Light Festival’ in the third grade Myanmar reader, students are asked to make sentences using the words light, wishes, gadaw, celebrate, and culture. While students could use sentences directly from the text that include the vocabulary words, this does not appear to be required nor necessarily expected. Therefore, this task provides an opportunity for students to use the vocabulary words, some of which are highly relevant to civic education, in a non-scripted way. While this does not necessarily promote critical thinking, it stands out from the vast majority of other tasks, which encourage students to merely repeat the written text.

In sum, it is clear that the Myanmar readers advocate a number of pedagogical policies related to civic education. The books’ images and text suggest that a hierarchical mentor/mentee relationship should be established between teachers and students, where the teacher is respected as the civic authority. The readers’ inclusion of civic concepts in all aspects of textbook content encourages teachers to deliver civic education by fully integrating it into the academic curriculum. The terminology used in the textbooks suggests that teachers should implement civic education using multiple forms of guidance, from hands-on steering to more general, hands-off advice. Lastly, most of the interactive features of the textbooks suggest that

students should memorize and accept civic concepts and be discouraged from questioning or debating them.

### **Connecting findings to the civic education literature**

In reflecting on how this authorized civic education policy from the Myanmar readers corresponds to the civic education components and approaches addressed in the academic literature, it is clear that they overlap to only a limited extent. While moral education is very prominent within the Myanmar readers' civic content, multicultural education and historical literacy are touched on much more briefly. Other civic education aspects and approaches prominent in civic education curricula across the globe are almost entirely absent from the Myanmar readers. These include human rights education, political literacy, and critical pedagogy.

The overlap between the textbook content and the academic literature concerning civic education policy is strongest in the area of **moral education**. As evident in the findings presented in this chapter, the Myanmar readers' civic content consists almost entirely of moral concepts. Many of these are the very moral virtues cited by Westheimer and Kahne (2004) as being key to cultivating 'good' citizens, such as obedience, diligence and helping others (p. 240-244). These are prominent sub-themes that the textbooks advocate within the overarching civic themes of respecting elders and fulfilling one's duties. The Myanmar readers' content also stresses the importance of values related to patriotism, another aspect of moral education, noted by Thomas (1993) to be key to civic education in many nations (p. 2-3). These include loyalty to one's country, patriotism and pride in the country's military strength. For instance, as noted above, within the theme 'fulfill your duties,' students are taught that their most essential duties include readiness to defend the nation and willingness to sacrifice oneself for one's country (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 13; 2009b, p. 36). Clearly, a very large portion of the Myanmar readers' content is dedicated to providing the children of Burma with a sense of moral values they should hold and practice in order to be considered a 'good' citizen. This suggests that those who composed the civic

education policy in the Myanmar readers share the views of Althof and Berkowitz (2006), that comprehensive civic education must include moral education since “societies need moral members. They need children to develop into moral adults” (p. 496).

While it is featured far less prominently than moral education, the Myanmar readers do include lessons related to **multicultural education**. However, it is conceptualized somewhat differently in the Burmese government’s policy than it is in the academic literature. Referring to multicultural education, Parker (2003) states that “the central citizenship question of our time [is] *How can we live together justly, in ways that are mutually satisfying, and which leave our differences, both individual and group, intact and our multiple identities recognized*” (p. 20, emphasis in original). Drawing on Parker’s characterization of this component of civic education, it is clear that the textbooks convey a form of multicultural education as they recognize some of Burma’s ethnic diversity and provide students with tools to identify people from different ethnic groups. This is evident in the first grade Myanmar reader’s lesson ‘Our Country’s Family,’ where the illustration shows different couples, labeled with the name of their ethnic group, in traditional dress specific to their ethnicity (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 44). The textbook content also strives to establish a sense of unity within Burma’s ethnic diversity. As noted in this chapter, the textbooks do this by showing people of different ethnicities happily living side by side and working together toward common goals (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 7).

However, as this chapter’s findings indicate, many of Burma’s ethnicities are not included in the textbooks, and those that are present are portrayed as if in caricature. Furthermore, as there is no mention of differences with Burmans beyond their region of origin and traditional dress, the text does little to cultivate a sense of respect for ethnic minorities. Instead it seems to trivialize their differences. In addition, other aspects of diversity within Burma’s population, such as religious and linguistic diversity, are completely absent from the Myanmar readers. The textbooks portray the entire population as fluent in Burmese language alone and adhering to the Buddhist religion. This renders Burma’s extensive linguistic and religious diversity

completely invisible, suggesting that the government does not want teachers to address these forms of diversity with their students. This may be due to the fact that religious and linguistic differences are linked to contentious political issues in Burma (Berlie, 2008; Kyaw Yin Hlaing, 2007). In this way, the government's civic education policy guides teachers to convey a version of Burma's diversity to students that is likely more palatable to the government, but significantly altered from the population's actual diversity characteristics. Thus, the multicultural education component of Burma's civic education policy only meets Parker's (2003) 'recognition of difference' criteria in the most superficial of ways. For the very same reasons, the Myanmar readers' content does not seem to meet Banks' (2007) definition of multicultural education as the provision of "knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to participate in cross-cultural interactions and in personal, social, and civic action" (p. viii). The textbooks contain a narrow and highly prescribed version of multicultural education endorsed by the Burmese government.

The Myanmar readers' civic education policy also contains aspects of **historical literacy**, to a limited degree. As Gagnon (1996) notes, historical literacy involves learning about the major events and processes that have taken place in the history of one's country, such as those that shaped the birth of the nation and led to the development of the particular political system presently in place (p. 242). The Myanmar readers mention a small number of historical figures and historical events that shaped the nation's historical and cultural development. The text describes how each historical figure accomplished this by providing a great service to the nation. For instance, General Aung San is described as having freed the country from colonialists, while U Pho Sein and Sein Baedar are historical figures noted for having made substantial contributions to the nation's cultural heritage (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009b, p. 14; 2009d, p. 42-43; 2009e, p. 7).

However, the textbooks do not appear to cultivate the more complex aspects of historical literacy such as the skill of learning to see historical events through the eyes of different minority groups, as advocated in the academic literature by Virta (2007). Nor do the Myanmar readers encourage youth to think critically about how history is portrayed within its pages, as

Zinn (2005), Marciano (1997) and other scholars have called for. So, students are not urged to ponder why certain historical figures and events are included, while others are left out.

Therefore, as with the multicultural education component of Burma's civic education policy, the historical literacy component is addressed briefly and only at a surface level.

The textbooks imply the existence of certain rights, but they fall short of including actual **human rights education**. In the textbooks' theme 'fulfill duties,' the text lists certain duties an individual or group is expected to fulfill towards others. In most cases, there is a reciprocal list of duties that the group or individual can expect to receive in return. For instance, teachers are to carry out certain duties for their students and students are expected to fulfill certain duties for their teachers. Similarly, there are passages on children's duties toward parents and parents' duties toward their children. This gives youth a sense of the duties others will fulfill towards them, which could be conceived as a form of rights.

However, this does not meet the definition of human rights education common in the academic literature. For example, Tibbitts (2002) describes human rights education as aiming "to strengthen respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and to ensure that respect in all societies" (p. 160). The 'rights' or duties the Myanmar readers subtly implicate are not fundamental freedoms. They do not mention granting any member of society freedom of speech, religion or freedom of assembly. Instead they refer to specific ways people are expected to adhere to societal expectations. For instance, students are told they must 'stand in unison' to greet their teacher and listen silently to 'take in the preaching' she dispenses (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 46). In return, the students can expect the teacher to 'teach skills, guide [and] preach' to them as well as 'prevent all danger' from reaching them (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009d, p. 37). While these are important tasks for students and teachers to carry out for Burmese government schooling to run as it is traditionally expected to, the text does not 'strengthen respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms,' even at an implicit level.

The textbooks also refrain from fostering **political literacy** in any form. They do not include any information on how the government functions at a national or local level, which Dudley and

Gitelson (2002) cite as a key part of political literacy. Similarly, aside from the line of one poem in the first grade Myanmar reader, which encourages youth to read the newspaper, the textbooks do not urge students to learn about current events affecting one's community or nation, as advocated by civic education curricula in other nations (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 3; Government of the United Kingdom, 1998, p. 13).

Transformative learning theory and its associated concept, **critical pedagogy**, are not fostered in the Myanmar readers. These concepts are centered on the idea that individuals can, and should, be given the skills to critically reflect on their own views and assumptions, so that they can recognize and challenge unjust political and social conditions in their society. Henry Giroux (1980) emphasizes that this involves teaching students "to think critically...That is, rather than being enslaved to the concrete, to the facts, they must learn to move beyond viewing issues in isolation. Facts, concepts, issues, and ideas must be seen within the network of connections that give them meaning" (p. 358-359). Not only do the Myanmar readers lack passages that challenge students to think critically, out of the hundreds of questions posed to students in the exercise sections of the textbooks, there are only three questions that aren't designed to be answered using a scripted response from the accompanying text. Moreover, even the questions that leave room for non-scripted answers do not encourage students to be critically reflective. Instead, they ask students to complete tasks such as use certain vocabulary words in a sentence (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009b, p. 18; 2009d, p. 3; 2009e, p. 19).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has laid out key groundwork that is essential to using Sutton and Levinson's (2001) 'policy as practice' framework to analyze civic education policy in the context of Burmese government schools. The findings presented here detail the content of nearly all written, authorized civic education policy currently available to Burmese teachers. This makes it possible to examine links between the written civic education policy and how teachers bring it to life, as they interpret it and put it into practice in their own educational settings. Future chapters in this dissertation will use the authorized policy described in this chapter as a reference point to

better understand how teachers reinforce, reinterpret and recreate civic education policy as they appropriate it throughout the implementation process.

In terms of empirical findings, this chapter established that the Myanmar readers are Burmese government schoolteachers' primary source of authorized civic education policy. This was followed by a presentation of the findings from an analysis of the text, images, design and ordering of content in the Myanmar readers, to reveal the key civic values and practices that the textbooks' civic policy encourages educators to convey to students. These civic values and practices include: (1) respect elders, (2) fulfill one's duties, and (3) live & act in unity with others.

In addition, the analysis revealed the textbooks' pedagogical policies detailing how educators should convey this content to students, the most prominent of which are: (1) establish a hierarchical mentor/mentee relationship with students, (2) integrate civic concepts into the academic curriculum, (3) use multiple forms of civic guidance, and (4) encourage students to accept civic concepts without question.

The findings presented in this chapter make it clear that moral education is the major focus of authorized civic education policy in Burma. According to the Myanmar readers, being a good person and good citizen is not about developing one's own sense of individuality, creativity or critical thinking skills. Instead, the textbooks' most prominent civic themes and pedagogical policies are intricately linked to the ideas of obedience, following orders and faithfully adhering to society's expectations. In addition, the textbooks do not focus on the rights or needs of citizens, but instead focus on citizens' responsibility to act in the interest of the 'greater good' of their community and country.

To some, such civic messages may suggest sinister overtones, since they could be used to undercut the importance of individual rights and legitimate abuses of power by the government and other powerful groups. While this is something to be wary of, it is important not to assume that these are 'bad' values to emphasize. The long-term effect of inculcating youth with values such as these depends on how these civic concepts are built upon throughout their schooling



and general upbringing. After all, while it is rarely addressed in the civic education literature, many of these very same values are advocated in schools across the globe, including the United States and other democracies. Conformity, respect and obedience, especially in the younger grades, are certainly not the sole purview of societies under authoritarian rule. In many societies, civic education begins with these values and principles as a foundation to build upon in later years with critical thinking and other civic skills.

Furthermore, the civic messages advocated in the Myanmar readers stem from core values within Burma's traditional culture(s) and are considered by many teachers to be a very positive influence on youth and the population in general. As in many other countries and contexts, children in Burma are taught to pay respect to their elders, to do what they are told and to think of others before themselves. This helps maintain what in Burma is considered well-ordered and harmonious interactions between elders and youth. These civic values are also intricately related to moral concepts central to Theravada Buddhism, Burma's official state religion. Thus, in the context of everyday life in Burma, these civic values that center on obedience, unquestioning respect for authority and following orders are far from sinister. They are seen as values and practices that help a person learn to be truly moral, proper and polite.

As a result, teachers champion much of Burma's authorized civic education policy. However, they do not wholly and uncritically accept it. Chapters 4 and 5 focus on teachers' response to and engagement with these policies. By examining the civic messages in teacher-student interactions, I will explore how and to what extent teachers reinforce, creatively reinterpret and/or resist the authorized civic education policies, as set out in the Myanmar readers.

## Chapter 4 Policy as puppetry?: Teachers' implementation of the civic policy in the Myanmar readers

There is control by the military. Control by them. We know this information too often. But I cannot do any more because I'm a government servant at that time. Whenever they ask for students, 'How many students you have to come and march in unison?' or they just [ask for] '30, 30,' I have to organize many of my students. I have to [tell the students], 'Ah you have to come, everybody. If you don't come, you will fail in the examination.' [laughs] We have to do like that. So, we just become their puppet you see. They control all the teachers, all the students. Ah, control the teacher first, the teacher has to also control the students, but the students, they have no idea, you see.

-Saya Sai Tai Leng

In his comments above, Saya Sai Tai Leng describes how, as a teacher and government servant, he felt compelled to carry out Burmese government policies even when he disagreed with them and felt they were unjust. He emphasizes that he felt 'controlled' by the government, using the term five times in this short quote. Describing himself as a puppet, he positions the government as a skilled puppeteer who facilely manipulates his strings. Saya Sai Tai Leng's metaphor highlights that, at its very core, policy is intended to condition and control people's actions and in some contexts it can be highly successful at achieving this end.

Using Sutton and Levinson's (2001) 'policy as practice' framework, this chapter examines how teachers living and working in a society under authoritarian rule implement the civic education policy embedded in the Myanmar readers in their own classrooms. To do this I employ Levinson et al.'s (2009) concept of 'policy appropriation,' their distinction between 'authorized' and 'unauthorized' policy, as well as their view of policy as 'a practice of power' (p. 767-768), as described in chapter one of this dissertation. Is education policy implementation in Burma an elaborate show of puppetry brought to life? To what degree do teachers comply with authorized civic education policy? To what extent do they reinforce it, resist implementing it and/or repurpose it for their own ends? This chapter explores these questions and examines the key contextual factors that shape the answers.

### **Recurring themes & forms of civic content in teacher-student interactions**

The analysis revealed that the civic content of teacher-student interactions very closely mirrors that in the Myanmar readers, in both form and content. The three civic themes emphasized most prominently in the Myanmar readers—(1) respect elders, (2) fulfill duties and (3) live & act in unity—are also among those most ardently advocated by teachers in their interactions with students. In addition, just like the textbooks, teachers often use mottos, specific practices, and stories to convey these ideas. In many cases teachers use the exact mottos, specific practices and stories that are found in the textbooks. At other times they draw on mottos, specific practices and stories that are not present in the Myanmar readers, but are popular and often repeated in everyday life in Burma. In yet other situations, teachers creatively craft their own unique mottos, specific practices and stories, based on their own life experiences. However, even in these cases, the content of the civic messages, as well as their style and structure, remain largely consistent with those in the textbooks.

Nevertheless, the striking similarity between the Myanmar readers and the content of teacher-student interactions does not mean that all teachers unconditionally accept and teach these concepts without questioning them. All teachers participating in this study describe critically engaging with the government’s civic education policy to some degree. While all teachers who participated in this study view the three most prominent civic concepts from the Myanmar readers as good and worthy of following in most cases, the majority of teachers voiced concern that adhering to them absolutely, and under all circumstances, would not only be wrong, but sometimes dangerous.<sup>64</sup>

Therefore, while teachers complied with the authorized curriculum policy most of the time, for each of the three themes we also find instances where teachers oppose implementing it in certain ways or under certain circumstances. They adjust, resist and/or repurpose the policy in an attempt to mitigate the negative effects they believe could arise from the policy if they do not take these steps. In many cases, the teachers’ motivation to alter the existing policy is a sense that the existing policy is unfair or unjust in some way, or that following the policy as it

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<sup>64</sup> 11 participants expressed this.

stands would not be in the ‘best interest’ of the students or the nation.<sup>65</sup> Because the concepts of ‘fairness,’ ‘justice,’ and ‘best interests’ play such a large role in teachers’ choices about how to implement policy, and since they are implicitly referenced in many of the teachers’ quotes I include in this chapter, here I will provide some insight into the meaning of these concepts in the Burmese context.

### *Fairness, justice and best interests*

Interviewees spoke frequently about fairness and justice, most often when they were referring to something they experienced that they believed was unfair or unjust. They seemed to use the terms ‘fair’ and ‘just’ interchangeably. In analyzing each case where they referred to this concept, it became clear that their implicit theory of fairness and justice is rooted in a sense of symmetry and balance. Interviewees frequently mentioned that a situation is ‘fair’ when what a person gives is proportional to what that person receives.<sup>66</sup> For instance, Sayama Mar Lar described how the government instructed her and her colleagues to attend a training over a school holiday they previously thought would be a much-needed break for them, as well. They planned to use this time to fulfill obligations to their family. They felt that the government’s requirement for them to attend the training was unfair since they had been hard at work for many months and they deserved this time off. After putting a great deal of time and effort into teaching their students, the government was withholding the time off that they had been promised. This created an unfair imbalance between what they had given and what they would get in return. Sayama Mar Lar described how one of her colleagues expressed his reasoning for why this situation was unfair when he complained to government officials.

For example, there was one teacher among us who thought that *it was not fair*, so he didn’t want to attend the training. He said that he had his family. He didn’t want to go. Then, they [the government officials] asked him if he would quit his job. So, because of his family he could not quit his job. At the same time he didn’t want to attend the training. There was nothing he could do. [my emphasis]

In another example, Hla Cho described how it is ‘natural’ for teachers to expect students to expend an amount of effort and perform at a certain quality that is equivalent to how much

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<sup>65</sup> 6 participants expressed this.

<sup>66</sup> 13 participants expressed this.

effort the teachers themselves put into teaching. She implies that it is fair for teachers to punish students who do not give their teachers the performance that the teachers' effort warranted.

Also they [teachers] punish because they, they expect, you know, more from the students. I mean, if the teachers, you know, teach really well in the classroom, they demand more, you know. *It's kind of like natural*. They demand, they want more from the students. They teach really well, really, I mean, carefully, I mean to convince the students. So they also expect more from the students. So they want to punish if the students don't perform really well. [my emphasis]

By the same token, interviewees stated that it's unfair to punish or inflict suffering on people who did not do anything to warrant it<sup>67</sup>. In fact, the infliction of suffering on those who don't deserve it is one of the most common situations that interviewees describe as unfair. For example, Saya U Aung Htoo describes how the people of Burma unfairly endure the government's economic and social policies that cause the population to suffer. The people are made to suffer even though they did nothing to warrant the suffering. Therefore the people want to rise up against the government to gain justice for the unfair situation they've had to endure.

Whenever they face social problems or economic problems or judicial problems, *they need justice*. They need truth. They can't get it, they get angry and ready to fight against it... Ah, most people [who] live in Burma suffer severe economic problems, so they can't survive. So when they find an answer to this problem, [they realize] this is because of the military government... So they want to be against the government. But leadership in Burma is weak. When the uprisings occur, they are not ready to promote it, to lead them to achieve success. [my emphasis]

The notion of 'best interests' is another concept mentioned by interviewees that is connected to the idea of fairness. In analyzing the actions that interviewees noted are in a person's or the nation's 'best interest,' it became clear that this is also rooted in the idea that what you give should be equivalent to what you get. However, it is oriented towards balance in the long term. While one may not get an immediate benefit from putting a lot of effort into a task once, or from enduring something difficult the first time, if one does this repeatedly, benefit will accrue

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<sup>67</sup> 8 participants expressed this.

over time.<sup>68</sup> Hla Cho gives the example of teachers' punishment of students being in the students' best interest. This is because punishment is widely believed in Burma to promote students' learning and good academic performance in the long run. Although the punishment causes the students some suffering, the teachers' actions are fair and in the students' best interest because the students will ultimately benefit from the punishment. Thus, between what one gives, or in this case what one endures, one will ultimately reach a balance with what one receives in return.

**Hla Cho:** To be honest, at that time, I mean, not only me, every student thinks that punishment encourages students' performance in school. So we didn't really think the punishment is bad. I mean, until now the parents, I mean the communities, think that *the punishment is fair and good for the students*.

**Brooke:** So you used to think that.

**Hla Cho:** Yeah, I used to think that. I mean everyone thinks that punishment is, I mean, necessary for the students to perform well in the schools. I mean, until now the punishment, I mean—they still use the punishment, um, that kind of regulation so, also the parents and the community still think the punishment is kind of essential for the students' performance. [my emphasis]

The concepts of fairness, justice and 'best interests' will remain important throughout this chapter as teachers describe how they made many of their decisions about whether or not to implement the authorized civic education policy as they believe it was intended. The remainder of this chapter is divided into three main sections, one dedicated to each of the most prominent civic themes. In each of these sections, I detail the extent to which teachers comply with the authorized policy, by implementing it as closely as possible to what they believe the original policy makers intended. I include examples of mottos, specific practices and stories teachers use to advocate each theme. I then identify the instances and conditions under which teachers avoid implementing components of the authorized policy.

### **Civic theme 1: Respect elders**

As in the Myanmar readers, the importance of respecting elders is, by far, the most prominent civic theme advocated in teacher-student interactions. When I spoke to teachers and students

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<sup>68</sup> 13 participants expressed this.

about their experiences of schooling in general, each and every interviewee discussed the importance of respecting elders without prompting, often raising it multiple times during a single interview. This theme is a concept that both teachers and students seem to view as part of the very fabric of schooling. Saya U Min Aung, a teacher from Yangon Division, emphasizes this point. “I said to my students, ‘you don’t need to be afraid of me, but respect me, respectation is very important... You have to respect your teachers.’”

#### *Teachers’ compliance with authorized policy*

The vast majority of instances when teachers discuss this civic concept with their students, they are in complete compliance with the policy in the Myanmar readers. The way they interpret and convey the meaning of this theme reflects the meaning in the textbooks. In fact, it is common for them to use the exact wording from the textbooks, often borrowing the textbooks’ mottos, specific practices and stories that pertain to respecting elders.<sup>69</sup>

#### ‘Respect elders’ in mottos, specific practices and stories

##### **Mottos**

When explicitly urging students to respect elders, teachers often do so using mottos.<sup>70</sup> As stated in chapter 4, mottos are proverbs, metaphors or short sayings that convey broad, overarching civic concepts condensed into very few words. When first encountering a motto, its meaning is often not entirely clear, especially for children of primary school age. It is obscured by metaphor, symbolism or vocabulary of a literary register. Mottos are particularly memorable because they are worded in a catchy way, set to a distinct tune or designed to be read with a certain rhythm.

Most of the mottos teachers use to encourage their students to respect elders are those present in the Myanmar readers.<sup>71</sup> For instance, Saya U Pone Myint, Sayama Hla Aye and Saya U Pyay Sone discussed using the motto ‘respect people with three heads,’ which is featured in

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<sup>69</sup> 10 participants reported this.

<sup>70</sup> 11 participants reported this.

<sup>71</sup> 9 participants reported this.

the story 'Open a shop in the backyard' in the second grade Myanmar reader. Sayama Hla Aye makes note of this story in the following exchange between these three teachers.

**Saya U Pyay Sone:** We guided them [the students] with these good things. For example... teachers instructed students to respect a person who has 3 heads. Would a person have 3 heads? No. So, because of old age, there are old men who cannot walk anymore. When they were sitting with their knees up to their chest, [there is] one head from this side [RN: points to his right knee], one head from this side [RN: points to his left knee], one head here [RN: points to his head]. Go ask them about their experience. They will teach you everything.

**Saya U Pone Myint:** They sit like this because they are old.

**Saya U Pyay Sone:** They sit like this.

**Saya U Pone Myint:** Related to behavior, there are so many things [in the textbooks].

**Sayama Hla Aye:** Open a shop in the backyard.

**Saya U Pone Myint:** ...proverbs, sayings, things that are related to behavior are in the curriculum of every standard, every subject, based on the ability of the children to understand and their age. These things are included systematically, in detail and intentionally.

"Three gems, parents and teachers, should be worshiped," is another motto teachers use to instruct students to respect elders. It originates from the Mangala Sutta, a Buddhist text, excerpts of which are present in the kindergarten Myanmar reader. This particular motto is the third stanza of the first Mangala Sutta excerpt. Nearly all students and teachers reported that mottos from the Mangala Sutta excerpts were used regularly to guide students regarding civic concepts in school. Five teachers singled out the motto listed above as particularly important for teaching students to respect elders. Sayama Sandar Win went into detail, reenacting how she typically explained the meaning of this motto to her students when she used it.

Sons and daughters, listen, I will sing a poem for you. [begins singing] Bad people should not be associated with or relied on, stay away from them. Wise people should be associated with, relied on and learned from. Three gems, parents and teachers, should be worshiped... [no longer singing] We will listen to the teaching of our grandfather, our grandmothers, those who are older than us, our parents, and the 3 gems, naw? And our teachers. With wise person, we will live with them closely. If we live with a wise person, for example, an educated person and an uneducated person, they speak very differently. An uneducated person will say things harshly. An educated person will not say harsh words, like that. Live together with the wise people, like that... Even though



[we]<sup>72</sup> don't understand, we will listen to what our elders have to say.

While, in this example, Sayama Mar Lar elaborated on the meaning of this motto using her own words when speaking to her students, her description remains entirely consistent with the concept of respecting elders as it is conveyed in the Myanmar readers. Therefore she is clearly complying with the authorized policy.

### **Specific practices**

Teachers also urge students to respect elders.<sup>73</sup> They often phrase this message in the form of specific practices, many of which come from the textbook.<sup>74</sup> As stated in chapter 3, specific practices are straightforward 'dos and don'ts,' stated in everyday language, that provide specific direction about how one should act in order to be considered a 'good' person. Unlike mottos, specific practices aren't usually designed to be chanted to a particular rhythm or tune, nor are they communicated using symbolism or metaphor. They are therefore easy to understand, even when encountering them for the first time. Furthermore, in most cases, the civic guidance they provide is much more detailed than that provided by mottos. While a motto conveys a broad civic concept, specific practices detail the actions one should take to put that motto into practice.

For example, Sayama Mar Lar explains that she tells all her students that they should bend at the waist when passing in front of an elder in order to show them respect. This specific practice is also included in the lesson 'Be polite' in the second grade Myanmar reader.

If you are passing in front of the elder or the teacher, you have to bend down in order to show your respect. I teach all my students this since a long time ago. When the [elder, foreign visitors] came, students bent down when passing them... [laughs] That is our traditional culture... Mm, in our culture, we have to respect the elders even if the person is one hour and one day older than ourselves.

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<sup>72</sup> Sayama Sandar Win did not use a subject here, so she either meant that she listens to her elders regardless of whether or not she understands what they are saying, or her students do this.

<sup>73</sup> 8 participants reported this.

<sup>74</sup> 7 participants reported this.

## Stories

Teachers also convey the importance of respecting elders to their students through stories.<sup>75</sup>

Without any prompting or specific questions about telling stories, ten of the 15 teachers I interviewed described telling stories to their students to convey civic concepts. Teachers draw these stories from a wide variety of sources, including the Myanmar readers, Buddhist scripture, well-known Burmese folk tales and Burmese history.<sup>76</sup> In some cases, teachers also create stories based on their own life experiences, or those of their family and friends.<sup>77</sup> However, regardless of where they come from, the stories teachers tell students depict human or animal characters making choices that either agree or conflict with civic values and practices that the teachers consider 'good.'

During their interviews with me, when teachers explained how they told civic stories to their students, they described the story by concluding with a positive or negative consequence for the characters depending on whether or not their decisions and actions aligned with 'good' civic values. Of the 13 stories teachers recounted to me in detail, they concluded each and every one of them in this way. Therefore, stories provide students with examples of how to put civic concepts into practice in their daily lives. The stories also provide examples of positive and negative consequences that can result from various choices and acts, many of which can be quite severe.

For instance, during a focus group interview, U Pone Myint described a story he tells his students to encourage them to respect their teachers. The story tells of a boy who died as a result of not paying respect to his teacher. This story is one of the Buddhist Jataka Tales, which is not present in the Myanmar readers, but it follows a similar structure to civic stories that are in the textbook. Saya U Pone Myint was the only teacher to describe telling this particular story to his students. However, the other teachers present at the focus group interview knew this story and recognized it as one that is sometimes used by teachers to convey to their students

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<sup>75</sup> 8 participants reported this.

<sup>76</sup> 7 participants described telling stories that originated from the Myanmar readers. 10 participants described telling stories that originated from Burmese folk tales or Burmese history.

<sup>77</sup> 3 participants reported this.

the importance of respecting teachers. In addition, a student I conducted an informal interview with, who attended government school in Shan State, described being told the same story by her primary school teacher.

Most importantly, however, this story is a good example of the wider pattern, described above, that is evident in all 13 civic stories that teachers described telling their students. It involves both animal and human characters, and it depicts one character faced with a decision in which he has clear 'good' and 'bad' options. One choice aligns with the concept 'respect elders,' while one does not. The main character chose the option that didn't pay respect to his teacher and suffered a severe consequence—a violent death.

**Sayama Hla Aye:** When we teach them [our students], in addition to the 38 mingala, we also use other stories that the Buddha has told and also life stories of the Buddha. For example, the Thu Wun Na Tha-Ma story... There are 10 volumes of the great stories. We taught them those.

**Saya U Pone Myint:** Because of the good friends they associate with, they are successful. Like that. We gave them examples... There is another story, this female teacher reminded me. Because of talking back to the teacher [you will] get stabbed by the spear in the throat. A prince who was practicing his spear skills saw a bird catching a fish, throw it in the air and then catch it in his mouth. He really admired that skill and applied that to his spear skills. So, his teacher was the bird. But, in front of the king, when he was asked who his teacher was, because his teacher was a bird, an animal, he was embarrassed and didn't want to say it, so he said, he had no teacher. [Then the next time he threw the spear to catch it in his mouth, he missed and it stabbed him in the throat.] Even though an animal, a teacher is a teacher. If you disrespect a teacher, because a teacher was an animal, you will be stabbed by a spear in the throat. So, think about it. I told them [my students].<sup>78</sup>

While this story is not included in the Myanmar readers, it portrays the concepts of respecting elders in the same way as it is portrayed in the textbooks. Thus, this is a compliant form of authorized policy implementation.

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<sup>78</sup> The version of this story the student from Shan State described her teacher recounting has a few slight differences from the story as described by Saya U Pone Myint. In this alternative version, the student talked back to his teacher, and then, to show off, he threw a spear up and tried to catch it in his throat. It stabbed him in the throat resulting in his death. The moral of the story, the importance of respecting elders, remains the same, as does the consequence of failing to abide by it.

### Feeling respect & acting out respect

Just like the Myanmar readers, teachers' comments about respect suggest that they believe it can take two forms. Respect can be felt and it can be acted out. When referring to respect as a feeling, participants remarked that respect can be found in a person's head, mind, or heart.<sup>79</sup> They imply that respect can be felt by the person who holds it, but the feeling itself is not directly accessible to others. This is evident in Saya U Pone Myint's comments about respect.

Pupils are always respectful of their teachers *in their mind*. They always have 'my teacher, my teacher' [in their mind]. Also, *in the mind* of the teacher, they always have 'my pupils, my pupils.' When entering the classroom, whether the students are interested in the lecture or not, Burmese students listen to their teachers respectfully, both *with their heart and their head*, [this has been the case] for generations. [my emphasis]

Most often participants talk about respect as something that can be acted out or performed.<sup>80</sup> The majority of acts that participants identified as 'respect' are acts of obedience.<sup>81</sup> Examples include quietly listening to someone when they speak and following rules. By engaging in these actions one demonstrates their respect of those they are obeying. They are also implying that they accept that person's authority. Acts of obedience were the very first thing to come to mind for Saya U Thiha Naing when I asked him about respect.

**Brooke:** In your definition of respect, how do the students show respect to you?

**Saya U Thiha Naing:** They follow my directions. Sometimes I let them speak. I let them speak. They speak because I allow. I allow [them] speech. If I don't allow [them] to speak... they totally stop.

Another common type of act participants identified as respect encompasses actions intended to meet the needs of others.<sup>82</sup> Examples include preparing food, giving massages, and carrying someone's bags for them. By taking care of others, one is showing them respect. It is considered particularly admirable when respect becomes so ingrained in a person that they anticipate and meet the needs of their elders without being asked to do so. This is often referred to as having a 'knowing mind.' For instance, just as a parent or teacher starts to feel

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<sup>79</sup> 7 participants referred to respect as a feeling.

<sup>80</sup> 12 participants referred to respect as something that can be acted out.

<sup>81</sup> 12 participants identified acts of obedience as acts of respect.

<sup>82</sup> 9 participants identified meeting the needs of others as acts of respect.

thirsty on a hot day, a student with a 'knowing mind' is already walking toward them with a glass of water. During one of our interviews, Sayama Nanda Aye uses her students as examples of highly respectful students with a 'knowing mind.' As the students approached us with cups of coffee and snacks, Sayama Nanda Aye made the following comment in the presence of the students.

[They have] Their knowing mind. So, now, this child just came and served the guests... We look at how they take care of us. They know what teachers need. They greet teachers when teachers come. They know that sayama is about to have lunch so they would bring sayama's lunchbox and prepare for sayama. Like this. This is one of the signs of respect.

A third set of actions commonly identified as respect includes acts of prostration or worship.<sup>83</sup> These are performances that a person of lower status acts out to a person of higher status to visibly show their respect. Examples include bowing when passing in front of elders, gadawing elders, and presenting gifts to elders. Students act out these respect performances both within and outside of formal, highly choreographed ceremonies, such as the teacher gadaw ceremony. For instance, Sayama Nanda Aye explains that not only did her students perform these acts of prostration regularly at school, they've continued to do this into adulthood.

When they saw me, [they showed] their respect, and it also has to do with our Buddhist culture... When they see us, even though they already got married, when they walk in front of us they still bend down to show their respect. They come and greet us like that. Even after they have grown up.

Sayama Mar Lar laments that, in contrast with her generation, today's students do not engage as often in acts of prostration such as gadawing their teachers. Her comments suggest that she sees this change as indicating that students today have less respect for their teachers.

At our school, we have a teacher gadaw ceremony every year. Even though older students came to gadaw older teachers respectfully and wholeheartedly, younger students really hesitated to raise their palms and gadaw teachers. It has gotten really different. For my own teachers, because I couldn't go, I would send things for them. When I can go, I go and gadaw them. Older students still respect teachers until now. Younger students have really started to hesitate to respect.

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<sup>83</sup> 9 participants identified acts of prostration or worship as acts of respect.

Like Sayama Mar Lar implies in her remarks above, several participants' comments imply that the feeling of respect and acts of respect go hand-in-hand.<sup>84</sup> While they are separate forms of respect, the feeling of respect is always accompanied by acts of respect and vice versa. They are an inseparable pair. For instance, Saya U Pone Myint explains that a person's feeling of respect is accompanied by a 'need' to act out this respect in the form of a visible act. "The need to show respect is always in children's head."

As noted in chapter 3, the Myanmar readers also convey the feeling and demonstration of respect as inseparable. In addition, the three forms of respect emphasized by teachers—obedience, care-taking and acts of prostration—are also prominently portrayed in the Myanmar readers as key forms of respect. Therefore, here again, it is clear that teachers' interpretation and implementation of the 'respect elders' civic theme mirrors this component of civic education policy embedded in the textbooks.

#### Categories of elders deserving of respect

When interacting with students, teachers not only advocate that elders be respected in general, they also specify certain categories of elders deserving of respect. The categories teachers emphasize largely mirror those advocated in the Myanmar readers and include teachers, parents and other extended family members, as well as monks and other elder community members.<sup>85</sup> Sayama Sandar Win recounts how she explained the meaning of 'respect elders' to her students. "We will listen to the teaching of our grandfather, our grandmothers, those who are older than us, our parents, and the 3 gems, naw? And our teachers."

Also similar to the content of the Myanmar readers, teachers repeatedly encourage students to respect people with higher levels of education than themselves and people who hold positions of higher authority.<sup>86</sup> Sayama Mar Lar highlighted this when reenacting how she urged her students to respect elders.

"The younger have to treat the elder with respect. Therefore, for me, I have to treat

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<sup>84</sup> 4 participants expressed this.

<sup>85</sup> 13, 9 and 4 participants advocated respecting teachers, parents, and monks respectively, while 8 participants advocated respecting other elder community members.

<sup>86</sup> 8 participants reported this.

those who are in a higher position than me, who have more education than me and who are older than me, with respect.”<sup>87</sup>

Like the Myanmar readers, two specific high status roles teachers refer to include monks and military generals. For instance, when urging his students to achieve great things, Saya U Min Aung refers to becoming a military general as one of the most respectable positions his students could aspire to.

“Sometimes you think you can’t do anything. You are very useless. Sometimes we think like that. But one day he can be a great person; a rich man, a boss or maybe a general. So every time I encourage my students. [I say] ‘Don’t worry, one day you can be a general... Don’t say you are useless... Don’t say like that.’ One day he could be a general. One day he could be a millionaire.”

In addition, teachers mention certain figures from Burma’s history as deserving of great respect.<sup>88</sup> Both teachers and students identified Burma’s kings as respected historical figures they taught about and/or learned about in school. Saya U Aung Htoo commented that not only did his teachers present Burma’s kings as historical figures he should respect, ‘appreciate’ and emulate, but that once he became a teacher, he passed this message on to his own students.

There’s no syllabus for ethics. But the students can get ethics from learning Burmese... [and] history. For example... the biography of King Thura-mine...When the students study about them [the kings], they appreciate their activities and their abilities and their nature. They can copy them. That’s one of the ways they can get ethics... When we were students, most of the schools where we are learning, there are student kings. Kings, such as Bayinnaung kings, Anawrahta Kings, Shan-set-ta Kings, Alaungpaya Kings. They are the Burmese Kings. They are famous. Ah, when the students learn about them, they can appreciate them. This is, they can get ethics.

Another historical figure teachers often teach students to respect is General Aung San. Nearly every teacher interviewed mentioned that they and/or other teachers at their school taught

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<sup>87</sup> As evidenced by this quote, the term ‘elder’ is often used to refer to people who are older than oneself in a temporal sense, but it can also be used more loosely, to refer to someone who is of higher status for a multitude of reasons. For students, the narrow and broad meanings of ‘elder’ almost always overlap; those with more education or in higher status positions are also older than them. However, as the students age, these definitions will not coincide with the same consistency, increasing the salience of the broader meaning of this term.

<sup>88</sup> 10 participants expressed this.

students about Aung San and his admirable achievements.<sup>89</sup> Aung San is also repeatedly featured as a respected figure in the Myanmar readers. Tharamu Lily Paw explains that she teaches her students about General Aung San and as a result her students automatically respect him because of the admirable things he did.

We can talk about how General Aung San was a patriot and about his sacrifice for his country... When people don't respect and cherish General Aung San it's just because they don't know him. When they know him they would just respect and value him as we do. All the headmasters also respect and value him. That's why they allow us to talk about him [to our students]. So, we talk about [him as] the king who built the fourth Burma, oh not king, the person. In order to escape from colonial rule, the person who built the country through education, politics, military and other things was General Aung San.

Sayama Sandar Win explained that she taught her students about General Aung San to inspire them to emulate his bravery in their own lives. By doing this, she suggests to her students that she considers General Aung San to be one of the figures from Burmese history who is most deserving of respect.

For example, when I teach about General Aung San, I told them that, General Aung San was very brave. He was not afraid of the English. He did not [just] take it when the people of Burma and the country were being attacked. I gave them the example of General Aung San.

#### *Teachers' alteration of authorized policy*

##### Motivation: Respecting elders can facilitate abuses of power

Several teachers reported teaching the concept of respecting elders somewhat differently than it is depicted in the Myanmar readers. Although this group of teachers felt it is important for students' civic development to teach them the importance of respecting elders, they were uncomfortable teaching students the forms of respect that the textbook portrays as synonymous with unquestioning obedience.<sup>90</sup> Their discomfort stems from two interrelated issues. First, the teachers don't agree that all elders are deserving of respect. Six participants mentioned at least one elder who they considered unworthy of respect because they had committed acts the teachers considered unjust. Therefore, while the teachers sought to teach

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<sup>89</sup> 9 participants described doing this.

<sup>90</sup> 6 participants expressed feeling this way.



students to respect elders in general, they preferred to avoid teaching students to respect certain elders who the teachers believed to have poor civic and moral virtues.

For instance, Tharamu Lily Paw believes some kings acted immorally in their personal life. She takes issue with the fact that, despite their unjust acts, the textbooks' portrayal of them is wholly good and designed to elicit the students' utmost respect. She disapproves of the government cherry-picking information to include in the textbooks and carefully choosing what facts to withhold in order to manufacture such undeserved respectable images of elders.

I have read books, Myanmar history written by an American person and other books from different perspectives. I have a passion for reading. Because I have read a lot, I notice the difference between those books and our [government-produced] history books. In some history, some kings were really good, were very sharp and intelligent. But, there are some kings who were not good in their personal life. We only see both the good and bad sides of the king in other books. But, in our textbooks, because we want to make children love their country and their kings, they only mention the good things about kings, so that children worship and respect them.

Teachers also voiced concerns that teaching students to respectfully obey elders without question could lead people to accept and tolerate leaders who are unfair, unjust and/or untruthful.<sup>91</sup> The teachers believe that blind obedience is a great power to hold over others and it leaves ample room for elders to abuse their power, if they choose to. Each of the teachers who voiced this concern illustrated this idea with a story of people obeying an elder without question, only to be fooled or taken advantage of. In each of the five stories, the motivation of the elder was to accrue benefit for him/herself, without regard for how this could disadvantage those who obey him/her. Two of the stories feature teachers as the elder who takes advantage of the fact that others are unquestioningly obedient. One story features a monk in this role, while the remaining stories focus on the abuse of power of the government itself. The teachers do not describe telling these stories to their students. They told these stories to me during our interviews as a way of explaining their concern about teaching students to unquestioningly respect elders. The policy alterations they engaged in as a result of their concerns will be detailed in the following subsection of this chapter.

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<sup>91</sup> 5 participants expressed this concern.

As a general rule, Saw Lah Eh believes elders should be respected and obeyed.<sup>92</sup> However, he witnessed a monk in his hometown abuse his power over the course of many years by asking villagers to donate money to the monastery even though they did not have money to spare and the monastery was not in dire need of funds. Saw Lah Eh considers the monk's actions unjust. He also voices his frustration with the automated, unthinking way in which the villagers obey the monk without using reason to assess whether or not the monk's requests are justified, especially since obeying the monk's requests is harmful to their own lives.

**Saw Lah Eh:** You know some monks are just doing unreasonable things. They are just asking for donations all the time and the village starves. The village people keep going to Thailand [due to economic hardship] and he is just trying to decorate the monastery. [laughs] People can still donate a lot. People compete. Competing all the time. 'Oh I can donate a lot this month.' People don't actually think about how—it's not in depth anymore. They believe in something... like my mother, 'oh you have to do [that]... when you go to the monastery. Oh, you have to listen to what the monks say. It's right. It's true.' I don't, because some of the monks don't actually follow their precepts... like one of the monks in the village, he's trying to decorate his monastery. Actually it's still okay for people. It's not going to be broken, but he's trying to decorate it all the time. Instead he should focus on other things. In the village the monks have the most influence, rather than the headman. The headman, if they want to do something, they go and talk to the monk, the abbot, the head of the monastery. They go and talk to him and maybe he gives them some suggestions. And if his suggestions are right, if it's right or wrong, most people think, 'oh that comes from the monk. He is one of the most influential people.' So they feel they should take it.

**Brooke:** Should take the advice?

**Saw Lah Eh:** Yeah, I mean the monk, he should've—he even knows these things, it is 'oh we cannot donate, the monk is asking for donation all the time, we are too desperate, the monastery is actually okay. It's not going to be broken soon. We don't have money now but we have to donate.' People are just pretending in the village. Whenever they have a ceremony, some kind of Buddhist ceremony, he modifies it a lot. People just go, pretending, donating. People are just pretending. Actually they don't like it but they are just pretending. But they... they don't question. They are afraid to question these things because they are the monks and they are the headmen. People are afraid to question the people who have a higher position—I don't know.

**Brooke:** Yeah, so before we were talking about how respecting elders is a very good thing but now I also hear that maybe it's not always a good thing. Do you think

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<sup>92</sup> In the table of interviewees in appendix 1, Saw Lah Eh is listed as one of the students I interviewed for this study because the bulk of the interview concerned his experience as a student. However, Saw Lah Eh also spent a year teaching in Burma after graduating high school and he made a number of observations from the perspective of a teacher, one of which is included here.

sometimes it's not a good thing?

**Saw Lah Eh:** Yeah, sometimes it's a good thing if you just generally respect people. Like, I think that's a good thing but when people... are not a very good one [person] then I think you—we should think about it. We should question.

Saya U Pyay Sone and Saya U Pone Myint share Saw Lah Eh's concerns even though they are fervent believers in the importance of respecting one's elders under most circumstances. They believe that teachers are moral, well-meaning and provide appropriate civic guidance to their students the vast majority of the time. However, they do not endorse obeying elders in a completely automated, unthinking way, since, in rare cases, teachers can give bad advice. They tell two stories, both drawn from Buddhist scripture, to illustrate this point. The first story features the character Angulimala, an extremely respectful and obedient pupil who is wrongfully accused of seducing his teacher's wife. Out of anger, his teacher instructs Angulimala to cut 1000 fingers off of people he encounters and present them back to him as a gift for having been his teacher. Angulimala carried out this request, which necessitated committing many violent and immoral acts. After collecting 999 fingers he encountered the Buddha, who shared his teachings with Angulimala, enabling him to act morally once again.

**Saya U Pyay Sone:** I have worries [about my students unquestioningly obeying teachers]. I am also afraid because when the teacher makes a mistake—in Buddhism we have an example of a teacher who taught his students and his students misunderstood the teacher's teaching and went around to cut 1000 fingers like Angulimala.<sup>93</sup> That is the teacher who guided him the wrong way. So, as he went around cutting 1000 fingers, he arrived in front of the Buddha. Because of the Buddha's teaching he left everything behind. He didn't get 1000 fingers... The teacher made a mistake...

**Saya U Pone Myint:** There is a saying. 'A lawyer with no mistakes and a drug addict who did not die, like that there are also teachers who are not good'...

While it is not in the original Buddhist text, Saya U Pyay Sone mentions that this situation occurred, at least in part, because of a student who misunderstood his teacher. This leaves room for the possibility that the teacher did not have malicious intentions and instead suggests that the teacher and the student share responsibility for the way this situation unfolded. Had the student thought carefully about his teacher's request, engaging his own knowledge of good

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<sup>93</sup> This is the name of a character in the story. The story of Angulimala comes from Buddhist scripture. It can be found in the Majjhima Nikaya and Therigatha commentaries.

civic and moral values, he could've engaged in a discussion with the teacher and cleared up the misunderstandings that ultimately led the student to harm others. In this way, the story emphasizes that unquestioningly following elders' directives, whether or not they were what the elder intended, could lead students to commit very harmful acts. Students should think carefully, both about the elders' intentions and the content of their requests. Thus, one's respect for elders should not be so absolute that it could result in unconditional obedience.

The second story *Saya U Pone Myint* and *Saya U Pyay Sone* tell features *Day-wah-det*, a character who appears in many Buddhist stories, attempting to cause trouble for Buddha by tempting him to do things he should not do. His role is similar to that played by Satan in Christian stories. In this story *Day-wah-det* is a teacher who advises his student to commit murder. The teachers preface this story by emphasizing the long-lasting effects of teachers' guidance, be it positive or negative.

**Saya U Pone Myint:** Because the teacher is not good, in our Buddhism, we also have a saying. 'When we lose in trade, we will lose only one time.' We can try not to lose the second time. When we get a husband and if you get the wrong husband, this mistake will impact your whole life. But, if the teacher's teaching went wrong, the whole cycle will go wrong. The cycle means your series of lives...

**Saya U Pyay Sone:** The whole life, her whole life... If the teacher is wrong the whole cycle, the series of lives will be wrong. People get the next life and the next life again, right? Because of a teacher named *Day-wah-det*,<sup>94</sup> the lives of *Asah-thet-thet* went wrong. Because of his teacher he killed his father.

**Saya U Pone Myint:** *Day-wah-det* was the teacher of *Asah-thet-thet*... He killed his father because his teacher told him that only if he killed his father he will become a king. Because his teacher was not good, he told him to kill his father. Because he killed his father, the earth swallowed him. So, if the teacher is not good, you will have to live that kind of life throughout your whole series of lives and there is no end. The pupil, *Asah-thet-thet*, is now still in hell and has not escaped. As teachers, if we are not good we are very worried that our students' whole cycle of lives will go wrong. That is why we-

**Saya U Pyay Sone:** The teacher is important.

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<sup>94</sup> *Day-wah-det* is a character in many Buddhist stories. He usually tries to cause trouble for Buddha. Similar to the role Satan plays in Christian texts.

In this story, Asah-thet-thet blindly obeys his teacher's instructions without considering the dire consequences of his actions. He believes his teacher without question and, as a result, he is doomed to go to hell.

Policy alteration: Teach critical thinking in tandem with 'respect elders'

The most common way teachers advocated altering this policy was by developing students' critical thinking skills as they are being taught to respect elders, thereby enabling them to deduce when the elders' requests are grossly immoral or fundamentally unjust. By doing this, teachers aim to add nuance to their students' understanding of this civic concept, so that they put it into practice in a way that is beneficial, and not detrimental to themselves or to society. Seven teachers reported wanting or intending to change the policy in this way. For instance, Saw Lah Eh voices his desire that all teachers would alter the 'respect elders' policy component by teaching it in tandem with critical thinking.

To me it [the concept of respecting elders] was not taught deeply, it's just at the surface. We are just familiar with it actually. But to understand these things more deeply you still need to learn more. You still have to think critically... It's like, the teacher tells you to respect your elders and then you respect but you don't actually know why in Burma. Maybe—only when you have more experience with these things maybe you will understand more. But in school they teach you like this and you listen but you don't know why. You don't know if it is good or not because the students, they don't have critical thinking skills. 'Oh that's our teachers, that's our elders, it must be good,' and then we just follow it. It's good. We think it's good. For me, you will know more if you experience more about these things, when you come across this in your life.

Five teachers described how they, and/or their teacher colleagues, actually taught students the concept of respecting elders in tandem with critical thinking skills. For instance, Saya U Pone Myint advocates teaching students to 'think in a scientific way' so they do not have to obey elders' requests blindly. By thinking 'scientifically' he means that students should be trained to gather evidence to assess whether following an elder's guidance is advantageous or disadvantageous. He gives two examples of how he encourages his students to use 'scientific thinking' to evaluate the legitimacy of elders' advice. In both examples, the hypothetical student concludes that the elders' advice was, indeed, good. Below, Saya U Pone Myint describes how he would develop his students' critical thinking skills by helping them

‘scientifically’ examine whether or not the students’ teacher was right to urge him to work hard in school.

**Brooke:** So, you’re telling me that it’s important to teach students to respect their teachers and their elders a lot. But you’re also telling me that sometimes teachers are not good. So, how do you help students decide what teachers to respect and follow their orders and what teachers not to?

**Saya U Pone Myint:** We teach them. We gave them examples. We compare them. For example, [RN: begins speaking as if to his students] ‘There is one family. Look at them. The father herds cows. The mother is taking care of the children. The situation is not good. Why? He did not think. He did not try to get an idea.<sup>95</sup> He did not know what would happen to the future of his life. He did not understand education. He did not think for his family. Now look at him. They barely have enough to eat. With all these children, his job is not good. That, you guys, look at his life. Look at it with 38 mingala, with the things that we have taught you—discipline, sayings, proverbs that we have taught you. Compare them. Make a decision. Think about them again. Finally, talk about it scientifically. Think about it in a scientific way, arts way, in whatever way you want. One thing will come up. That is a difficult life. Why? Because he did not follow education. Because he did not listen to his parents and teachers.’ [RN: tone and demeanor shift suggesting that he is no longer reenacting how he speaks to his students] We make them connect these things like this. We show them this kind of example. I gave them that kind of example. I asked them, ‘Parents who are poor right now, do they have education or no education? Are they educated or not educated? Let’s do a survey. You have to cooperate with me. Whose family has reached which standard? If none of you are educated, because you are uneducated you will not know how to think.’ There is no thought and they don’t know how to think.

Similarly, Sayama Mar Lar describes how her colleague, who taught at the same school as she did, regularly conveyed an altered version of the ‘respect elders’ concept by urging students to think critically about this civic practice. Using strong wording, she warns her students that if they do not gain enough ‘true’ education, they will not achieve the critical thinking skills necessary to avoid a future of blindly obeying their elders, unable to think for themselves. She further emphasizes the relevance of this issue to her students’ own lives by pointing out the poor quality of the education they are currently receiving and comparing it to the relatively high quality of education she received many years ago. Although the way Sayama Mar Lar’s colleague alters this policy component is quite similar to Saya U Pone Myint’s version of it

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<sup>95</sup> In quotes, underlining indicates English words that were used by the participant, within quotes primarily conveyed in Burmese.

above, it stands out because this teacher is implicitly accusing government officials of being unjust. Sayama Mar Lar suggests that they are intentionally denying students ‘true’ education in order to use the people’s unconditional respect and obedience for all elders to their advantage and to the detriment of the people.

The students were told an example. ‘For example, we graduated from 10<sup>th</sup> standard. We attended the university. The education that we got was real, real. Now, children took the 10<sup>th</sup> standard exam and cheated. The government does not allow [teachers] to say anything. This is not because [they] love you. If they love you, they will have to teach you the real education... You don’t get the real education. You cheated. You attended university. You graduated. You don’t know how to do anything. You don’t know anything... Because you don’t know anything, you will be told by other people what to do. You will become a ‘loo-pyee-in, loo-nyient’<sup>96</sup> who cannot try to do anything good for your own country. For us, we studied as much as we could. Now we also want to teach as well as we can. But the government is making you not get educated.’ The teacher said [all these things]. Then, the children think, ‘Why is the government making us not get educated?’ They don’t know how to think. Teachers say it again. Teachers explain it to them more. When you are not educated, when you don’t know anything, they will be able to rule you as long as they want. They are making our country poorer and incur more suffering. The teacher explained that to the children. They started to know a little.

Immediately after recounting this story, Sayama Mar Lar emphasized that she wholeheartedly agrees with her colleague’s message and admires her courage to voice this to the students. However, like many other teachers interviewed for this study, Sayama Mar Lar chose not to explicitly portray government authorities in such a negative light, since she feared the retribution she would receive from the school headmaster and government officials.

Three teachers connect critical thinking and the concept of respecting elders even more intimately, by urging their students to use this very civic principle to judge the conduct of some of the most powerful ‘elders’ in Burmese society. In this way the ‘respect elders’ concept becomes a tool to facilitate the development of students’ critical thinking skills. In a sense, teachers are training students to use the government’s very own civic policy to judge the

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<sup>96</sup> These two Burmese words, လူပျိုင်း, pronounced ‘loo-pyee-in’ and လူညံ့, pronounced ‘loo-nyient,’ are often used together to describe a type of person who hasn’t had much schooling or training of any kind. A ‘loo-nyient’ is a person who is unintelligent or dim. A ‘loo pyee-in’ is a person who has a limited ability to understand their surroundings. No one is born this way. Being a ‘loo-pyee-in, loo nyient’ is the result of either not attending school or not studying or trying hard while in school.

conduct of the government. In doing this, the teacher opens up a space where critiquing authorities is somewhat legitimated. For instance, Sayama Nanda Aye provides an example of how she alters this civic theme in this way.

I talk [to my students] about the U Thant event that happened. [RN: change in tone indicates she is reenacting something she said to her students] U Thant went to work for the country in foreign countries at the United Nations for 10 years, 12 years and died in that foreign country. When he died, as someone who has worked at the international level... He had become popular and well known in the world. So... Students wanted to bury him in a good place. Because he was a martyr he should be buried in Martyr's Hill. Martyr's Hill is where we buried our martyr General Aung San. They [the government] wanted to bury him in a cemetery where we bury normal people, poor people, like that. The event started from that. Because of that, it drops our dignity. Our government in Burma, dropped our dignity by not allowing the landing of the airplane that brought the leader of our country, who is well known by the world, to be cremated in our country. Because of that the airplane had to land in Thailand to refuel. [RN: change in tone indicates she is no longer reenacting what she said to her students] I said it like that in detail. I explained that to the child in detail, but for now I just tell you the summary.

Sayama Nanda Aye repurposes the 'respect elders' policy component, which is the most prominent civic concept in the Myanmar readers, and uses it to show her students that the Burmese government is unjust. She does this by emphasizing to her students that U Thant was an internationally-known and admired Burmese citizen who served as Secretary General of the United Nations. She then explained to her students that the government disrespected him by refusing to bury him in a prestigious location. The government then failed to show him respect again by refusing to allow the plane carrying his body to land in Burma when it first requested to do so.

Sayama Mar Lar alters this concept in a similar way and role-models it for her students; however, she is subtler in her criticism of the government. She would like her students to understand that she is critical of the government's handling of the education system, particularly the fact that they regularly allow students to cheat on exams. She would also like to develop students' critical thinking skills so they can critique the government on this and other issues. Therefore, she makes use of students' knowledge that Buddhist monks are highly respected 'elders' in Burmese society. She suggests to students that since the government



failed to respect the rules set by highly respected Buddhist monks, this is a point on which the government can be critiqued. She describes how she conveys this idea to her students. “Me, I have never said something like that. ‘I don’t like this education system.’ [I say] In Buddhism, cheating is a bad thing. Encouraging this thing, I don’t like it. It shouldn’t be this way. I told them only this much.” In saying this, Sayama Mar Lar is critiquing the government for not adhering to the very civic standards the government, itself, advocates. Sayama Mar Lar believes that by using the well-established practice of respecting elders, especially Buddhist monks, this enables her to critique the government with less fear of retribution. Engaging in this critique in the presence of her students encourages them to think critically about elders in positions of authority.

#### Policy alteration: ‘Faking it’

Another way the idea of respecting elders has been altered is by teachers and students decoupling the feeling of respect and the performance of it in cases where the elder has acted unjustly. Several teachers believe that these two forms of respect do not have to go hand in hand. Some teachers and students feel that respect can be acted out without a genuine feeling of respect motivating the act.<sup>97</sup> This alternative way of conceptualizing the practice of respecting elders is significant because it leaves room for ‘faking it.’ Because the feeling and performance of respect are widely considered to always go together, simply performing acts of respect can mask actual feelings of disrespect. This can give people a certain degree of protection to have their own critical reflections about power dynamics in society while not drawing unwanted negative attention to themselves from others. In particular, this would provide much needed protection in cases where teachers and/or students use their critical thinking skills and conclude that a particular elder is not deserving of respect.

This is markedly different from the original policy, as conveyed in the Myanmar readers, which advocates that all people should feel and perform respect towards elders, no matter what. Presenting elders in an entirely idealized way, the text suggests that either elders have no faults or that elders’ faults should be disregarded so that one can focus solely on their positive

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<sup>97</sup> 5 participants expressed this.

attributes. Therefore, these teachers have engaged in 'policy alteration' by communicating to students that respect can be a 'performance-only' affair and by simultaneously implying that elders can be 'bad' and undeserving of having their full reverence.

In one example, Saw Lah Eh explains that, in his experience, students often feel anger towards their teachers, which he considers a form of disrespect. However, since students have internalized the concept of 'faking' respect, students know to avoid showing visible signs of their anger and instead they maintain an outwardly respectful demeanor. They continue to remain silent in class and engage in other expected respect performances and therefore their actual disrespect goes undetected.

In Burma... it is not the real respect that you get from the students. People just have the idea that you have to respect the teachers... to me it's not only the idea that you have [that is important]. It's really important for it to come from the feeling, which will give you the right feeling, that *it's the real thing*.... Sometimes like when they [students] are angry with the teacher, when the teachers beat them, maybe if they got this feeling, they are angry, I don't think they respect the teacher anymore but on the surface they have to pretend they respect the teacher.

While two teachers made note of this performance-oriented version of 'respecting elders,' they do not report explicitly encouraging their students to engage in this practice. In fact, they lament that students' respect for elders no longer only originates from a genuine feeling of respect. However, on multiple occasions teachers describe how they, themselves, act out respect when they don't genuinely feel it. They do this in the presence of students.<sup>98</sup> Therefore, it may be that teachers are role-modeling this practice for students without intentionally doing so.

For example, Sayama Mar Lar describes how she fakes respect for government officials when she is faced with implementing a government policy she fundamentally disagrees with. She chooses to put this policy into practice in a way that makes it appear as if she is being fully obedient to the government's requests, when she is actually subtly attempting to derail what she believes is the ultimate purpose of the policy. Thus, Sayama Mar Lar is being respectfully

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<sup>98</sup> 6 participants reported this.

obedient to government officials at a surface level, while this is not accompanied by actual feelings of respect. This example is also included just below, where it will be described in greater detail.

Policy alteration: Withholding information to shape the meaning of 'respect elders'

There is one additional way teachers altered the authorized policy of respecting elders. Sayama Mar Lar sought to shape the meaning of this civic theme by emphasizing components of the textbooks' 'respect elders' policy that she agreed with, while downplaying or withholding aspects with which she disagreed. She thus acted as a gatekeeper between the authorized policy and her students.

In one instance, Sayama Mar Lar and her colleagues suspected that the intended purpose of a newly introduced government education policy was to heighten students' respect and obedience for elders in order to stem any potential anti-government sentiment or protest from students. While ordinarily these teachers enthusiastically taught their students to respect elders, they felt the timing of this policy directive suggested that the government was using this civic concept as a political tool to lessen students' likelihood of thinking critically about those in power, thus gaining fuller control over the population. Because Sayama Mar Lar and her fellow teachers believed that it is in the best interest of students and the country as a whole to think critically about the actions of their political leaders, they agreed, amongst themselves, to implement the new policy in a way that might reduce what they believed was the intended effect of the policy.

As the government policy specified, the teachers had the students chant the 38 mangala poems containing a motto about respecting elders. However, the teachers intentionally withheld the meaning of the poem from the students by not discussing it. As noted in chapter 3, because the 38 mangala poem is written in a literary register, it is not easily understood without explanation. Therefore, by implementing the policy in this way, the teachers sought to fulfill the minimum requirements of the policy so they did not get in trouble, while minimizing the amount that they encouraged their students to unquestioningly obey elders.

**Sayama Mar Lar:** It is right that they [government officials] tell us to teach 38 mingala in order to have respect in the mind of children. But teachers interpret their [the government's] main point to be preventing them [students] from going against them [the government]. That is why teachers are not teaching [the 38 mingala] with their desire in order to make students well-behaved. Since they tell us to chant it every morning, we just chant it every morning. It's just like that—The main point is to make a polite attitude appear in the mind of the children, in order to make students not go against them. Not to oppose them—Mm, mm, mm. It is important. [laughs] [RN: Sayama smiles at Brooke in a knowing, somewhat mischievous way.]

**Brooke:** [smiles and laughs along with Sayama Mar Lar] It's important for who?

**Sayama Mar Lar:** [laughs loudly in an amused/mischievous way] For the government. [RN: she says knowingly, smiling, laughing.] [Brooke laughs loudly, Sayama chuckles] We are taking it as, they are telling us to teach this for that [reason]. So, teachers don't try to make that happen in the mind of the students. They told us to tell students to chant every day, so we tell them to chant every day... In our mind we don't feel good, so we don't explain [the meaning].

### *Comparing authorized policy with teachers' implementation*

As demonstrated here, most of the messages teachers send to students about respecting elders are very closely aligned with the information in the Myanmar readers. Like the textbooks, all teachers interviewed reported frequently advocating that their students pay elders the utmost respect, often doing so with passion and enthusiasm. They do this in many of the same forms as the textbooks do, often using the same wording.<sup>99</sup> However, teachers also critically examine this theme, questioning the concept that all elders should be respected under all circumstances. Many teachers conclude that it is not in their students' best interest to adhere to this rule in an absolute fashion. In response to their own critiques, many teachers choose to alter aspects of this policy component so that their students learn how and when to respect elders according to guidelines that conform more closely to the teachers' own views.<sup>100</sup> Teachers use a number of different techniques to alter the 'respect elders' policy component, but in all cases teachers are striving to shape the policy to be fairer, more just and less likely to make their students subject to elders' abuses of power.

### **Civic theme 2: Fulfill Duties**

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<sup>99</sup> 10 participants reported this.

<sup>100</sup> 8 participants reported this.

### *Teachers' compliance with authorized policy*

Another civic theme teachers constantly convey to students is the importance of fulfilling one's duties<sup>101</sup>—a theme that is also repeatedly advocated throughout all the textbooks analyzed for this study. In fact, teachers consistently mirror the Myanmar readers in a number of ways as they communicate this theme to students,<sup>102</sup> indicating that they remain largely in compliance with the authorized policy regarding the concept of 'fulfilling duties.'

Teachers' comments suggest that they conceptualize this theme just as it is portrayed in the textbooks—that throughout a person's life, there are certain responsibilities everyone is expected to fulfill in relation to key people in their lives and they should strive to consistently and diligently perform these duties. For instance, when a person is a student, they have duties they should fulfill in relation to their teachers, such as studying hard and listening attentively to their teachers' advice. Parents have duties they are expected to fulfill with respect to their children, such as providing them with food and making it possible for them to attend school. Similarly, children have duties they are expected to perform for their parents, such as doing household chores. While these are the roles mentioned most often in the textbooks and in teacher-student interactions, the list of roles and their associated responsibilities goes on.

This concept is an integral part of teachers' worldview. They consider a good, orderly society to be one where individuals consistently and conscientiously fulfill their duties to others.

Participants' comments suggest that by fulfilling one's duties to others, a person demonstrates that they are a good person who is both responsible and reliable. This was made clear during interviews, when participants strived to represent themselves to me as the type of person who fulfills their duties. Many of them, with great pride, mentioned that they fulfilled their duties to various key people in their lives. When participants described their relations with their parents, they usually highlighted ways they regularly perform the duties widely expected of children. For instance, Sayama Mar Lar pointed out that she passed up a promotion, which required relocation, in order to stay near home to care for her aging mother. When discussing their

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<sup>101</sup> 11 participants reported this.

<sup>102</sup> 10 participants reported this.

school life, participants often emphasized that they fulfilled their duties to their teachers. For example, Hla Hla said the following about how diligently she fulfilled her duty of studying hard. “We study the whole day... the weekdays, or Saturday or Sunday or all [days] when it is important.” Teachers told of how they always fulfill their duties to their students, and they consider failing to fulfill these duties to be inconceivable for them. For example, Saya U Pyay Sone proudly emphasized that he abides strictly by this civic theme. He then went on to tell a story of how he successfully fulfilled one particular duty in relation to one of his students.

**Brooke:** Did you have any students who took you as a role model?

**Saya U Pyay Sone:** Aw, yes I have. Teachers have to, just like guide [students] towards good, naw? This is one of the teachers’ duties. Teachers have to guide only towards good. They cannot guide students towards bad. Right? So, for example...

Furthermore, just like in the textbooks, every time a teacher urges students to fulfill their responsibilities, they either explicitly or implicitly present the responsibilities as good. When interacting with their students, teachers almost never mention any duties that they imply are unjust or illegitimate. Even if carrying them out can be difficult, teachers present this as a noble and worthy pursuit. For instance, while teachers expressed an awareness that studying diligently for long hours can be a challenge for students, they still presented it to their students as a good duty that students should continually strive to fulfill.<sup>103</sup> This is the case for all sets of duties teachers commonly discuss with students, which include those that are expected of students, teachers, parents, children and citizens. For example, Sayama Hla Aye underlines the legitimacy of duties by stating that “ancient old people set these things [duties].” Sayama Hla Aye suggests that by virtue of the amount of time the duties have been in place, the duties should be considered good and legitimate. Also, by using the term ‘ancient’ [ရှေးဟောင်း] to describe the people who composed the lists of duties, she adds a certain air of reverence to their inception.

Not only do teachers repeatedly interpret and convey the meaning of ‘fulfill duties,’ as it is portrayed in the textbooks, in some cases they also borrow exact wording from the textbooks when discussing this concept. When referring to this civic theme, participants most often use

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<sup>103</sup> 6 participants reported this.

the words ‘duty’ [ဝတ်] or ‘responsibility’ [တာဝန်], which are the same two terms used to describe this concept in the Myanmar readers. One teacher describes this concept using the term ‘code of ethics’ [ကျင့်ဝတ်] which is not used in the textbooks, but which is connected to the term ‘duties’ through common linguistic roots. The Burmese word for ‘code of ethics’ is a compound word, made up of two components, ကျင့်, pronounced ‘gin,’ meaning practice and ဝတ်, pronounced ‘wut,’ meaning duties. So, this term conjures up an image of a person practicing their duties. Participants reinforce the idea that these duties are obligatory by frequently using the phrase ‘have to’ in conjunction with these terms.<sup>104</sup> For instance, Saya U Pone Myint and Sayama Hla Aye reinforced each other’s sentiment during the focus group they participated in together. They both referred to duties as something students ‘had to follow.’

**Saya U Pone Myint:** Students also have the duties that they *have to* follow.

**Sayama Hla Aye:** Duties that they *have to* follow. Ancient old people set these things [my emphasis].

#### ‘Fulfill duties’ in mottos, specific practices and stories

##### **Mottos**

In addition, teachers convey the concept of fulfilling duties to students using mottos, specific practices and/or stories, which are the same forms used to communicate this theme in the textbooks.<sup>105</sup> While teachers do not use the exact mottos found in the Myanmar readers, those that they do use are similar in form and meaning. The textbooks contain mottos that advocate fulfilling one’s duties in a general sense. For instance, the motto ‘don’t neglect responsibilities’ is used repeatedly throughout the Myanmar readers. This motto and close variations of it can be found in six different lessons in the first grade Myanmar reader alone (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009a, p. 13, 23, 33, 46, 50, 57). Teachers didn’t mention using this motto or any other that explicitly refers to fulfilling one’s duties in a general, abstract sense. Instead, teachers use mottos that advocate fulfilling one or more particular duties, which they specify in the motto itself. For instance, Saya U Pyay Sone uses the mottos ‘a lack of education is like blindness’ and ‘cleverness can only be found in letters’ to urge his students to fulfill their duty to study hard and become educated.

The kind of example that we gave to our children [students] is that an uneducated

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<sup>104</sup> 11 participants used the phrase ‘have to’ in conjunction with these terms.

<sup>105</sup> 9 participants reported this.

person is like a blind person. For example, if you show me Thai letters now, I don't know. Why do we have to study? 'Cleverness can only be found in letters.' Cleverness can be obtained only when you read. Cleverness can only be found in letters.

Teachers also use mottos to tell their students what duties they can expect others to fulfill for them.<sup>106</sup> For instance, Saya U Pone Myint tells his students that they can expect their teachers to help beautify their lives. He conveys this theme using mottos such as, 'teachers mold students like they mold a pot,' and 'teachers are like water, as they enable students to bloom.'

In order for the life of the pupils to be beautiful, pupils accept that the teachers play a big role. Teachers also know that they have a duty to beautify the life of their pupils. Sometimes teachers might be strict on their pupils, but it is just like the pot. When the potter molds the pot, the potter has no intention to break the pot. The potter intends to make the pot as beautiful as it can be... Have you ever seen a lotus flower that blooms in the water? In order for our lotus flower to be able to bloom beautifully, it needs water. So, teachers are like water... [RN: begins speaking in a poetry form, with rhyme]

In order for the life of the pupil  
To be new, fresh and beautiful  
The honorable teacher  
Fed the milk of education...

### Specific practices

Teachers also convey the concept of 'fulfilling one's duties' through specific practices.<sup>107</sup> This involves teaching students exactly what one needs to do to fulfill one's duties in concise, straightforward language. In many cases, teachers use the specific practices found in the Myanmar readers.<sup>108</sup> As stated in chapter 3, many of the textbook passages referring to duties are excerpts from the Singalovada Sutta, a Buddhist text that contains lists of basic duties associated with many of the roles one takes on during one's lifetime. The textbooks contain the following lists of duties from the Singalovada Sutta: 'Teachers' duties,' 'Students' duties,' 'Parents' duties,' and 'Sons' & daughters' duties.' Their inclusion in the textbooks has resulted in these lists becoming very well-known, especially to teachers who encounter them multiple times a year, throughout their career. Therefore, it is not surprising that when different participants referred to the duties associated with a certain role, such as 'students' duties,' they

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<sup>106</sup> 4 participants reported this.

<sup>107</sup> 8 participants reported this.

<sup>108</sup> 7 participants reported this.



often referred to the exact same list of duties—those from the textbooks’ Singalovada Sutta excerpts—as if it was a universally accepted list they had all been taught. In fact, when teachers mentioned the concept of fulfilling one’s duties during interviews, on several occasions, teachers spontaneously broke out into a recitation of these lists of duties, completely from memory.<sup>109</sup> When this occurred, they always listed the duties using the exact same wording and in the same order as they are presented in the textbooks. For instance, in the following dialogue, Sayama Hla Aye, Saya U Pone Myint and Saya U Pyay Sone listed teachers’ and students’ duties from memory, exactly as they are written in the Myanmar readers. They also accompanied these lists with explanations of what the individual duties entail.

**Brooke:** In your opinion, at school in Burma, do you try to develop your students to be good students for their country?

...<sup>110</sup>

**Sayama Hla Aye:** [For] that, we have teachers’ duty and pupils’ duty. Teachers’ duties are [RN: begins speaking in poetic language] teaching education, steering and preaching, not leaving out anything, preventing all danger, send to where appropriate. There are the 5 points.

**Saya U Pone Myint:** That is for teachers.

**Sayama Hla Aye:** Teachers... teaching education, steering and preaching.

**Saya U Pone Myint:** Not leaving out anything.

**Sayama Hla Aye:** Not leaving out anything means not keeping anything for the teacher and teach everything, naw?

...

**Saya U Pone Myint:** Steering and preaching means fixing and preaching.

**Sayama Hla Aye:** Yes, fixing and preaching.

...

**Saya U Pone Myint:** Preventing all the danger.

**Sayama Hla Aye:** The fourth point is, preventing all the danger meaning protecting children from getting into danger... The last point is [RN: slight pause]

**Saya U Pone Myint:** Send to where appropriate.

**Sayama Hla Aye:** Send them to where appropriate means, for example, if the university is appropriate, the university. If doing business is appropriate, doing business. We have to send them to a place that is appropriate.

**Saya U Pyay Sone:** We have to send to a place where the students can keep up.

**Saya U Pone Myint:** A place where the students can keep up.

**Sayama Hla Aye:** Based on their wathana,<sup>111</sup> naw?

<sup>109</sup> This happened with 4 participants.

<sup>110</sup> The ellipses in this dialogue mark points where the participants paused while the Burmese English translator translated their comments.

**Saya U Pone Myint:** Based on their wathana and where they can keep up.

**Sayama Hla Aye:** Where appropriate, naw?

...

**Saya U Pone Myint:** For teacher.

**Sayama Hla Aye:** Then, there are student duties too.

**Saya U Pone Myint:** Students also have duties that they have to follow.

**Sayama Hla Aye:** Duties that they have to follow. Ancient old people set these things.

**Saya U Pone Myint:** For teachers and also for students.

**Saya U Pyay Sone:** Teachers.

**Saya U Pone Myint:** For the pupils.

**Sayama Hla Aye:** For pupils, stand up in unison... Yes, 5 points... Stand up in unison means, when the teachers come students should stand up in unison and be active.

**Saya U Pone Myint:** Stand up in unison and greet their teachers, like that.

...

**Sayama Hla Aye:** Then, they have to listen to the preaching... They have to greet the teacher when teachers come. [RN: speaks one line in poetic language] 'When come, greet.' When come they have to go and greet their teacher.

...

**Saya U Pone Myint:** [RN: mimicking the voice of a student] 'Oh teacher!' Like that. And then, 'sayama, sayama, how are you?' 'And then, 'sayama, sayama, are you okay?' Like that.

...

**Saya U Pone Myint:** [RN: speaking in poetic language] When come, greet.

**Sayama Hla Aye:** Then, [RN: speaks a line in poetic language] 'take care of.' For example, if the teacher is thirsty, if they want to get hot water, or if they need a massage, like that.

**Saya U Pone Myint:** 'Saya, how are you? Do you need a massage?'

**Sayama Hla Aye:** 'What do you need?'

**Saya U Pyay Sone:** They have to take care of their teacher.

...

**Sayama Hla Aye:** The last point is learn, think, and study. They have to learn what teachers teach them. They have to think about it. They have to repeat after the teacher and they have to read that to the teacher. Learn, think and study, the last point.

Sayama Mar Lar, another teacher who spontaneously recited lists of duties from memory, just as they are written in the textbooks, listed and explained the meaning of the five teachers' duties in a very similar fashion. In both cases, the teachers followed the pattern of reciting the list of duties as a whole, then reciting one at a time, accompanied by an explanation of its meaning. This is a pattern teachers generally follow when they are teaching passages from the

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<sup>111</sup> This is a Pali word, also spelled 'Vāsanā,' which is commonly used in Burmese language. It refers to a person's habits, dispositions and/or their limitations.

textbook. Thus, the dialogue above is roughly equivalent to how teachers normally instruct their students about the importance of fulfilling one's duties, when they reach these lists of duties in the textbook. Teachers also accompany these explanations with requests for students to recite each duty several times, in small groups and as a class, in an effort to help them memorize the lists of duties.

### **Stories**

Stories are a third way teachers emphasize the importance of fulfilling one's duties when teaching their students.<sup>112</sup> By conveying this civic concept within a story, teachers are able to contextualize its importance to students' everyday lives. While teachers teach the textbooks' stories concerning fulfilling duties when they reach the relevant lesson, they also tell additional stories to students that center on this theme.<sup>113</sup> All the stories teachers tell pertaining to this theme reflect the form and characteristics of stories from the textbooks. Like in the textbooks, the other stories teachers tell often note the positive or negative consequences that could result from fulfilling or failing to fulfill one's duties.

For instance, Saw Lah Eh describes how his teacher would tell stories detailing the duties she expected her students to fulfill every day to ensure good hygiene. Saw Lah Eh describes how his teacher told the students that if they fail to cut their nails, they will encounter the negative consequence of worms growing underneath them, which the students will mistakenly consume when they eat their food.

**Saw Lah Eh:** She [our teacher] used to tell us stories, even when we were kids in grade one [RN: speaks as if he is the teacher] 'You have to cut your nails and if you don't cut your nails, when you eat there will be worms in there.' For the kids she can say a lot of things. She can make up lots of stories that are related to moral lessons. For your ethical behavior she can say a lot of things. Even when she punished the students, she was still very sweet. She smiles all the time.

**Brooke:** ...The stories for the moral lessons that she told you, were those from books or did she make them up?

**Saw Lah Eh:** Sometimes she made them up, sometimes they are from books. Some

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<sup>112</sup> 4 participants reported doing this.

<sup>113</sup> 1 participant reported teaching stories from the Myanmar readers, while all 4 participants reported telling stories from other sources.

stories are just like a myth or a legend.

While trimming one's nails is not a duty from the Myanmar readers' Singalovada Sutta excerpts, it resembles duties from other passages in the textbooks, such as the 'daily duties' lesson in the kindergarten Myanmar reader, which outlines the duties youth are expected to carry out on a daily basis, many of which are related to hygiene, including 'wash face... brush teeth... rinse mouth... [and] bathe" (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009c, p. 11-12).

#### The balance of duties between different roles

Like in the textbooks, in teachers' interactions with their students, they convey a clear sense of symmetry and balance inherent in the concept of fulfilling one's duties. While one is expected to fulfill certain duties to key people in their life, many of those very people are also expected to fulfill duties back to them, in return. The five sets of duties teachers commonly teach to students, which are the same five sets listed in the textbooks—four of them are part of balanced pairings. Teachers' duties benefit their students, while students' duties benefit their teachers. Similarly, parents' duties benefit their children, while sons' and daughters' duties benefit their parents. Of course, many of these duties are beneficial to others as well, including the person performing them. For instance, when students study hard, it not only helps a teacher conduct effective classes, it also benefits students by enabling them to become more educated. However, the main beneficiary of each set of duties also has duties of their own to carry out in return. When teachers discuss the civic concept of fulfilling one's duties, they often refer to this sense of balance. For instance, in the dialogue with Sayama Hla Aye, Saya U Pone Myint and Saya U Pyay Sone, included above, they describe teachers' duties and immediately follow this with a description of students' duties, implying that they come in a pair.

**Sayama Hla Aye:** We have teachers' duty and pupils' duty. Teachers' duties are...  
[Sayama Hla Aye, Saya U Pone Myint and Saya U Pyay Sone list and describe teachers' duties]

**Sayama Hla Aye:** Then, *there are student duties too.*

**Saya U Pone Myint:** *Students also have the duties that they have to follow.*

**Sayama Hla Aye:** Duties that they have to follow. Ancient old people set these things.

**Saya U Pone Myint:** *For teachers and also for students.* [my emphasis]

In contrast, there is a fifth set of duties that has no complementary set of duties in the Myanmar readers to balance it out—citizens’ duties. A number of teachers took issue with this apparent imbalance. This will be elaborated on below, as it is part of teachers’ motivation for altering the textbooks policy concerning ‘fulfilling duties’ in select circumstances.

*Teachers’ alteration of the authorized policy*

Motivation: The government’s non-recognition and non-fulfillment of duties to citizens is unjust

Citizens’ duties are the one set of duties in the Myanmar readers that have no complementary set of duties to balance it out. While the citizens must perform these duties for the government and the country, there are not duties listed that the government should fulfill for citizens. Three teachers mentioned this imbalance in their interviews and stated that they feel this is unjust. In addition, one student reported that his teacher noted this imbalance and the injustice of it during class. Saya Sai Tai Leng remarks on this imbalance, suggesting that it is unfair.

I think many [aspects] of our education are also very clever. So if you see the student textbook, some of the rhymes, some of the stories, focus [on] civics. Yeah. About the character. About the school story. So from that one, you can teach your students, what is civics. And what you should do. And also what to do to become a good citizen. So it is a little, ah, one way naw?

Saya Sai Tai Leng made these remarks in his interview. He didn’t point out this perceived injustice to his students. In addition, he never considered rectifying this imbalance by, himself, teaching his students about what duties he believes the government should fulfill for the people of Burma. Being a government school teacher, he felt bound to teach only what the government had explicitly included in the textbook and nothing else. Critiquing the government, by pointing out the imbalanced nature of ‘citizens’ duties’ in the textbook, would’ve been even more dangerous. In his comments below, Saya Sai Tai Leng notes that he was repeatedly reminded by his boss and colleagues to act according to these unwritten rules.

When I became a teacher I had to be careful at that time...because I became a teacher and a government servant. Somebody also frightened me, like my headmaster. She also worried about me. ‘You don’t need to teach so much time about this one. It will [go] against your job.’ Just like that.... I also, I cannot go against them [the government]. I cannot criticize them. They have their party. Also, in the school they inform on each

other. 'Hey we have to do our party policy.' Like that.

Tharamu Lily Paw identified the same imbalance between the many duties people are expected to fulfill for the government and the lack of duties the government is required to fulfill for the people in return, based on her life experiences. She also sees this as a gross injustice. However, like Saya Sai Tai Leng, Tharamu Lily Paw does not share this view with her students. In contrast to Saya Sai Tai Leng and Tharamu Lily Paw, Saya Zaw Win actively seeks to rectify this imbalance as he teaches his students about the concept of fulfilling duties. This will be discussed below.

Policy alteration: Rectifying imbalance between duties & encouraging critique of government

Saya Zaw Win alters the authorized policy concerning 'fulfilling duties' by identifying duties he believes the government is responsible to fulfill in relation to the people of Burma. He then teaches this to his students, rectifying the asymmetry he and other teachers perceived in the textbooks' portrayal of this concept, since they included citizens' duties, but not government's duties. He conveys this idea to his students in the form of a story, in which he directly compares the relationship between the government and Burma's population with the relationship between a father and his children. He specifies that just as it is a father's duty to provide food for his children, it is a government's duty to provide electricity for its population. The concept of parents' duties is well known to the students, likely making the idea of the government having duties to the people of Burma easier to understand. Saya Zaw Win also goes further, critiquing the government for not fulfilling its duties to the people, giving the example of repeated blackouts throughout Burma.

**Brooke:** As if I was your student, can you tell me something that you told your students? Like, how would you have told me about my country, Burma?

**Saya Zaw Win:** So I have to tell [you] as if you are my student... For example, let's say we have a power blackout. I would tell them, 'other people's countries don't have power black outs. Why does our country have power black outs? Right? Whose responsibility is this? In a house, there is nothing to eat. Right? There is no electricity. Your father is responsible to find something for you to eat. How about electricity? Right now it is also like that. Government is the parents. If the parents aren't good, children will be in trouble. Parents who have no parental dignity are bad. Therefore, I can't stand this government.' Something like this.

Saw Lah Eh reported that one of his teachers also altered the concept of fulfilling duties in the same way. Saw Lah Eh explains that his teacher subtly implied that it is the government's duty to provide education to its citizens, but it is not fulfilling this responsibility. Interestingly, this teacher stops short of explicitly stating that the government was not fulfilling its duties to the people. Instead, he lists problems people in Burma are facing and asks the rhetorical question, "Whose fault do you think it is?"

[My teacher is] a Karen, he's very old already, very nationalistic [RN: laughs]... When he talked about the Burmese government, one of the things he talked about was that people keep going to Thailand and then they cannot study in school anymore and why and he asked 'who do you think... whose fault do you think it is?' ...And telling us about situations from other countries. Like the governments are giving opportunities to people and their rights, and these things and we can make a little bit of a connection from that even though he didn't tell us explicitly. [RN: laughs] We liked him very much. We started to realize more.

In making these statements to their students, Saya Zaw Win and Saw Lah Eh's teacher are also encouraging their students to critique the government based on whether or not the government itself adheres to the concept of fulfilling its duties. If the government fulfills its duties to others, these teachers suggest that it can be considered 'good.' If the government's duties remain unfulfilled, teachers suggest that this is a situation where criticism of the government is legitimate. In this way, teachers have altered this theme so it is a tool to facilitate students' critical thinking abilities, just as teachers did with the 'respect elders' theme.

It is notable that the two teachers who sought to foster students' critical thinking with this concept are both non-government teachers. Saya Zaw Win is a private tutor and the teacher Eh described made those comments while teaching a private English language course in rural Ayeyawaddy Division. So, both of these teachers may have felt freer to make these statements as a result of not being a government servant and not teaching within a government school setting.

Sayama Mar Lar, a government school teacher, described wanting to explain to students that the government had duties to fulfill to the people of Burma and they were failing to fulfill them, particularly in the area of education. However, she felt that making this critique would result in

retribution from the government. She explains that, when speaking to her students, she therefore cloaked this critique in language that did not directly implicate the government as the entity responsible for providing infrastructure for education. However, she hoped the students would make this connection on their own, after she listed the problems with education and prompted her students by saying, “You try to think, why is that the case?”

‘Because our government is not good, we are [dealing with] this, naw? Had our government been good—’ We didn’t dare to refer to those kind of government matters this way. [Instead we said] ‘If our education is good, if we can have fewer students with enough teachers, you will be more educated. Now that we got to teach in small rooms with a lot of students, you don’t learn anything. It is because our country is insufficient in everything. You try to think, why is that the case?’

Saya U Aung Htoo also alters the authorized policy concerning ‘fulfilling duties’ by teaching his students an additional citizens’ duty that doesn’t appear in the Myanmar readers. The citizens’ duties he describes conveying to his students are: (1) defend your country, (2) facilitate your country’s progress/development, (3) be united, and (4) participate in politics. While the first three of these specific practices closely mirror concepts conveyed in the Myanmar readers, the fourth duty—that all citizens should participate in politics—is something Saya U Aung Htoo personally believes should be a citizen’s duty. However, it is not advocated in the textbooks, nor does the Burmese government commonly convey it to the population through other means. In fact, in most cases the government discourages political participation, so this additional citizens’ duty likely goes against the wishes of the Burmese government. Through his policy alteration, Saya U Aung Htoo brings an increased sense of balance, resolving, to some extent, the textbooks’ non-recognition of government duties by encouraging students to participate in politics. Becoming politically active will encourage students to consider what duties they believe the government should fulfill and it will give them the opportunity to demand the government fulfill them. In the interview excerpt below, Saya U Aung Htoo describes how he conveyed this altered list of citizens’ duties to his students.

**Brooke:** In your experience teaching, did you try to develop students’ ethics?

**Saya U Aung Htoo:** Ah, especially when I teach them, I talk about thinking. Thinking, I talk about the civil duty. Civil duty... Civil duty means every citizen in a country has a civil duty. He has to defend his country. He has to make his country progress. Every citizen



has duty.

**Brooke:** To defend their country. To help their country progress. What other things are civil duty?

**Saya U Aung Htoo:** Ah, unity. Unity. Ah, every citizen living here should be united, so that we have strength. Without strength any[thing] can't be achieved.

**Brooke:** Are there other things too?

**Saya U Aung Htoo:** Ah, SLORC government, SPDC government, under the SLORC government, SPDC government I mostly talk about politics. Everyone should participate in politics. Politics is part of your life.

**Brooke:** That's part of civil duty?

**Saya U Aung Htoo:** Yes. If everyone, everyone is interested in politics and participates in it, we are sure to achieve success.

By couching one unauthorized duty in a list of otherwise authorized citizens' duties, Saya U Aung Htoo's alteration of this component of civic education policy cleverly capitalizes on the fact that practices labeled as a 'duty' are widely recognized as important responsibilities people *must* fulfill. In other words, by teaching his students that political participation is a 'duty,' he is borrowing the official, authoritative nature of this term to lend legitimacy to his own agenda.

#### *Comparing authorized policy with teachers' implementation*

The vast majority of the time, teachers comply with the 'fulfill duties' portion of Burma's authorized civic education policy.<sup>114</sup> Teachers convey the theme of fulfilling one's duties in a way that closely mirrors the textbooks' content. They teach lists of duties as good and legitimate, and encourage students to strive to fulfill them even when it proves to be a challenge. However, teachers also critically wrestle with some aspects of this policy, such as the fairness of the distribution of duties, as portrayed in the textbooks. In response to these critiques, in a small number of cases, teachers alter this policy, choosing to change it so it reflects their own views to a greater extent.<sup>115</sup> Their policy changes include teaching their students 'duties' that are not contained in the authorized version of this policy, in an effort to bring greater balance between citizens' and government's duties. In addition, teachers' policy alterations included encouraging students to critique the government based on its own track record fulfilling its duties to the people of Burma.

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<sup>114</sup> 12 participants reported this.

<sup>115</sup> 4 participants reported this.

### Civic theme 3: ‘Live & act in unity’

#### *Teachers’ compliance with authorized policy*

When interacting with their students, teachers frequently advocate the importance of living and acting in unity with others.<sup>116</sup> In most cases, they convey this idea to students in a way that is very consistent with the content of the Myanmar readers, both in terms of the meaning of this concept and the forms they use to communicate it.<sup>117</sup> Like the textbooks, teachers conceptualize ‘living and acting in unity’ as the idea that we live in a diverse world—in regards to ethnicity, religion, age, occupation and other factors—and it is essential to cultivate love and compassion for one another, enabling us to live peacefully side by side and help each other achieve our goals. Teachers emphasize that being united in this way ultimately benefits both the individuals directly involved and the larger group—be it their own classroom or school community, their town or the nation as a whole. During interviews, the importance of living and acting in unity was either explicitly mentioned or strongly implied by all but one participant.

Participants’ comments suggest that they view adhering to this civic theme as a mark of a ‘good person.’ They speak with great warmth and praise about people who live in accordance with this concept. For instance, Sayama Mar Lar, a Burman teacher, spoke with excitement and joy about her Karen friends who lived in unity with people of other ethnic groups. She said that having experienced living in unity with them is one of the reasons she loves teaching her students about this civic concept.

In addition to praising her Karen friends, Sayama Mar Lar implied that she is also the type of person who lives and acts in unity with others. Several other teachers emphasized that they live according to this concept as well, both in their personal lives and in their work as a teacher. This suggests that the teachers see this quality as integral to being a good teacher, in addition to being a central component of being a good person. For example, Tharamu Say Say, a Karen teacher, emphasized that she successfully manages a multiethnic classroom by following one of the main principles of being united—having love and compassion for her diverse group of

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<sup>116</sup> 13 participants reported this.

<sup>117</sup> 11 participants reported this.

students. In fact, Tharamu Say Say goes so far as to say that she is blind to her students' various ethnicities and loves all her students equally.

In the classroom, I told you, that Myanmar and Karen, I keep them in my mind together. I love them all. We are all national, the same. So, we love together so we all... we don't see our Karen or Myanmar, like this. We are the same, naw... for me I love them together. Even though I am Karen, but it looks like I love Myanmar more than Karen [RN: Tharamu Say Say and Brooke both laugh] because they are very naughty. The naughty person maybe we love more, you know? Myanmar is sometimes a little bit sharper and naughty. Karen is very cool. Myanmar is sharper and more talkative. So some person who is talkative, [RN: laughs] it looks like we love them more.

Sayama Yi Yi, a Muslim teacher, spoke with great pride about living and acting in unity with other religions, both in regards to the nation as a whole, which is largely Buddhist, and in regards to her coworkers and community members, who were predominantly Christian.

Even though I am a citizen of a country with a different religion, I still love this country. I cannot stand being separated from it... When they go to church on Sunday, together with other Burmese teachers, we went to church with them too. So, it was like that. In my mind, if we don't believe in that, it is fine. But we shouldn't go against it. When in Rome, we have to act like Romans. They would call me gala-teacher, gala-teacher.<sup>118</sup> They love me. I also try my best to get along with them.

Based on the examples above, it is clear that teachers feel strongly that living and acting in unity with others is integral to being a good person, and they strive to do this in their own lives.

#### Teaching theme through mottos, specific practices and stories

Teachers also place great importance on teaching this concept to their students. Eight participants described in detail how this topic was integrated into lectures and other teacher-student interactions in classroom settings. Based on their descriptions, it is clear that they use mottos, specific practices and stories to teach students about living and acting in unity with others, many of which are drawn directly from the Myanmar readers.

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<sup>118</sup> 'Gala' is a Burmese word, which literally means 'foreigner,' but which is used almost exclusively to refer to people of Indian descent. While this term often has derogatory overtones, Sayama Yi Yi implies that this nickname was used to show her affection.

## **Mottos**

Some of the mottos teachers use to convey this civic theme to students are those included in the textbooks.<sup>119</sup> For instance, Sayama Mar Lar made students' civic development a priority, choosing to describe the meaning of the unity mottos to her students in considerable detail. She explains that since she feels living and acting in unity is such a beautiful concept, teaching her students about this gives her a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment.

For me, when I was teaching that [unity motto], a long time ago, I am very satisfied. When I was living in Burma, I teach that all the ethnic groups, living together in our country, they all help each other, they all work together. Because of that, our country will progress.

Saya U Aung Htoo developed his very own unity motto—'unity is strength'—which is not contained in the Myanmar readers. While this motto is unique in its wording, it closely mirrors the textbooks' messages about unity. For instance, the idea that unity leads to greater strength can be found in the textbooks in the form of stories such as the Jataka Tale, 'The Wise Owl,' from the fourth grade Myanmar reader, which is detailed in chapter 3. This story depicts an elephant and a monkey working together to accomplish a common goal that neither would've been able to accomplish alone. The story ends with the statement, "working together in unity will bring success in everything" (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009b, p. 32).<sup>1</sup> Saya U Aung Htoo has taken this idea and condensed it into the form of a motto, which he uses in interactions with his students.

## **Specific Practices**

Teachers regularly use specific practices, in the form of succinct dos and don'ts, to guide the students to live and act in unity with others.<sup>120</sup> Teachers draw on unity-related specific practices from the textbooks as well as from other well-known government documents.<sup>121</sup> Closely mirroring the textbook content, Saya U Aung Htoo tells his students that they should live in unity with others and he explains why in straightforward, easy to understand language that is typical of specific practices. "Unity—every citizen living here [in Burma] should be united, so

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<sup>119</sup> 2 participants described using mottos from the Myanmar readers to convey this theme.

<sup>120</sup> 10 participants reported this.

<sup>121</sup> 7 participants reported this.

that we have strength. Without strength any[thing] can't be achieved." While Saya U Aung Htoo advises students as to what they should do, Tharamu Lily Paw uses specific practices to advise them about what they should not do in order to live and act in unity with others.

...[one of] the Union rules, for example, [is] "no disintegration of national solidarity." You cannot be the person who disintegrates the solidarity. So, we have to tell children there are 8 ethnic groups. And these 8 ethnic groups, we cannot disintegrate their solidarity. That's all we tell them. We don't talk about anything higher than that. We tell them what they might be able to understand.

As Tharamu Lily Paw notes, this particular specific practice that she teaches her students is not in the Myanmar readers. However, it mirrors the specific practices from the textbooks in form and message. It is one of five national objectives, or 'Union rules' as she calls them, which are widely publicized by the government. Several of the national objectives are related to living and acting in unity.<sup>122</sup>

### **Stories**

Teachers also convey the importance of living and acting in unity through stories.<sup>123</sup> Most stories used to convey this theme portray a diverse set of people who come together in unity and reap positive rewards as a result. In some cases, teachers tell stories of diverse groups who remain in disunity and therefore face negative consequences. Teachers tell the stories in a very streamlined fashion, focusing almost exclusively on the link between the characters' adherence or lack of adherence to this civic theme and the resulting positive or negative consequences. There are few, if any, other components to the stories. The stories never broach the topic of why disunity might exist or what obstacles to unity individuals and groups face. Similarly, the stories presented unity in a very black and white fashion. There was never any gray area where characters were 'united' with smaller sub-groups based on their ethnicity or other differentiating factor. Characters in the stories are either 'united' all together or 'not united' at all. As these characteristics of teachers' unity stories mirror the textbook content very closely, it

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<sup>122</sup> In full, the 5 national objectives are: (1) Non-disintegration of the Union (2) Non-disintegration of national solidarity (3) Perpetuation of sovereignty (4) Dynamism of Patriotic Spirit with a view to promoting national prestige and integrity (5) Development of the nation and emergence of a peaceful and modern state (Philp & Mercer, 2002).

<sup>123</sup> 12 participants reported this.

is clear that teachers are remaining very faithful to the government's civic education policy as they implement it in their classrooms.

Also like the textbooks, the setting of teachers' unity stories varied. Several teachers described telling stories set in Burma's ancient past. These historical stories usually emphasize how the ancient kingdoms of Burma benefitted as a result of Burma's many ethnic groups living and acting in unity. For instance, Tharamu Lily Paw described the story of Burma's history that she learned in school, which is the same story that she passes on to her own students now that she is a teacher. "Right now, we know there are 8 main ethnic groups in our country. We have learned that these 8 main ethnic groups have been living together in unity since the first Burma era. There was no discrimination." Saya Zaw Win describes telling his students a unity story set in the future, while other unity stories take place in the present, such as the story told by Sayama Mar Lar. She emphasized to students that ethnic groups are living and acting in unity in the present day and this will benefit Burma soon. "When I was living in Burma, I teach that all the ethnic groups, living together in our country, they all help each other, they all work together. Because of that, our country will progress."

While most unity stories are told by teachers, this is not always the case. Some teachers passed this opportunity on to their students. Hla Hla, a Burman student, describes how a teacher asked her and her classmates to develop a story based on the theme 'live and act in unity,' and to act out the story in the form of a play.

**Hla Hla:** Sometimes we have to participate in plays at school... Mostly we did comedies. How should I say it? [RN: pause] Oh, I almost forgot. We had to wear all kinds of ethnic groups' clothes and act. The drama is about if we all live together, enemies cannot fight us. We all held hands. At the beginning we did not get along. So, other people came to fight us. Later, when we live in unity, we are not being fought against. Something like that.

**Brooke:** Wow. So in that drama, who did you dress up as?

**Hla Hla:** I wore a Myanmar blouse.

...

**Brooke:** And was the teacher there telling [you] what to do for the drama? Like who should dress up as what and what they should say or could you make your own script?

**Hla Hla:** They didn't guide us. It is like a competition. Every class has to compete. They are divided in to sections. Each class can decide what they want to do.

**Translator:** For the drama, you have to make up your own story? Or they give you the story and you have to act?

**Hla Hla:** They gave us the title.

...

**Translator:** So only a topic is given and the rest, you have to do it on your own? [RN: Hla Hla nodded]

It is notable that even in this case where students were given the freedom to develop their own unity story, students replicated the meaning of unity in a way that is consistent with the textbooks' and teachers' messages. In addition, the focus and structure of the story very closely mirror that of teachers' unity stories. The students' story focused on the positive consequences of unity and the negative consequences of disunity, while remaining streamlined by omitting any discussion of challenges associated with achieving or maintaining unity.

#### Acting vs. living in unity

When participants speak about unity or convey the importance of this civic theme to their students, they describe unity in two ways, which I refer to as 'acting in unity' and 'living in unity.' As noted in chapter 3, this same distinction can be found in the Myanmar readers. Thus, here again, we find teachers' classroom practice to be very close to the authorized civic education policy. Participants describe diverse individuals or groups working together, actively helping each other achieve success in their endeavors.<sup>124</sup> I refer to this as 'acting in unity.' In some cases this involves acting in concert, toward common goals. For instance, when recounting how she taught a passage about unity from the textbook, Sayama Mar Lar described 'being united' as actions people take to help each other be successful.

**Brooke:** [RN: pointing to a paragraph in the 1st grade Myanmar reader about how all ethnicities are united] What do you think about teaching students this paragraph? Do you feel good about teaching them a paragraph like this one?

**Sayama Mar Lar:** When I was teaching I had a lot of friends who are Karen. The Karen ladies love us and we also love them too. For me, when I was teaching that [unity], a long time ago, I am very satisfied. When I was living in Burma, I teach that all the ethnic groups, living together in our country, they all help each other, they all work together. Because of that, our country will progress.

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<sup>124</sup> 11 participants described unity in this way.

Secondly, when participants speak of diverse groups feeling a sense of unity that enables them to live peacefully, side by side, I refer to this as the concept of 'living in unity.'<sup>125</sup> Participants often suggest that living in unity is made possible by the existence of compassion and understanding. In the following interaction between Tharamu Lily Paw and me, she refers to unity as a feeling and as something embedded in the way students think and feel, as opposed to being brought about by their actions. However, she laments that many of her students have not achieved the compassion and understanding they need to cultivate their own ability to live in unity with other ethnic groups.

**Brooke:** Do you think the students in Burma *feel unity* between ethnic groups?

**Tharamu Lily Paw:** Ethnic groups, yes they do. It really exists. But some children are ethnocentric. For me, I have known 5 ethnic groups, they are Karen, Pa-o, Shan, Kachin and Kayah. So I have to deal with 5 ethnic groups. So, some children have the attachment to their ethnic group. So, we have to tell them that these 8 ethnic groups have been living together since a long, long time ago. Don't *think* this way in your time... Mostly, they hate Burman. It is hate. [my emphasis]

#### With unity comes strength and success

In many comments participants made about unity, they either implied or explicitly stated that living and acting in unity with others makes a person strong and with that strength they can be successful at anything they endeavor to do.<sup>126</sup> As stated in chapter 3, this is also a prominent subtheme within the Myanmar readers, indicating teachers' faithful implementation of the authorized civic education policy. Prime examples of this within teachers' comments include Saya U Aung Htoo's motto, 'unity is strength,' and his statement that "every citizen living here [in Burma] should be united, so that we have strength. Without strength anything can't be achieved." Participants also repeatedly stated the inverse of this concept; disunity makes one weak and therefore one will fail in their pursuits. For instance, Saya U Aung Htoo stated that the disunity within political parties caused them to be weak and therefore they were ultimately unsuccessful in reaching their goals.

After 1948 some political parties emerged, but they fight against each other. They forget, the life and death, they forget those who risk their life and death for independence. They are personal, they are political politics and personal conflicts...

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<sup>125</sup> 9 participants described unity in this way.

<sup>126</sup> 9 participants made comments with this meaning.



People's Freedom League divided into 2 parties and they continue to fight against each other. So, General Ne Win seized power. When the politics are weak, armed forces will seize power. This is the nature of politics.

### *Teachers' alteration of authorized policy*

By and large teachers view the concept of living and acting in unity in a very positive light. While they acknowledge that there are many ways in which the people of Burma have not yet achieved this ideal, teachers generally consider unity a wonderful goal to strive for. This is a key reason why, the vast majority of the time, teachers implemented this theme so true to the civic education policy in the textbooks. However, in a select number of cases during our interviews, teachers described putting this component of the civic education policy into practice in an altered form.<sup>127</sup>

### Motivation: Government's unjust use of unity and disunity as tools for their own benefit

Teachers' motivation for this policy alteration was that they believed the government unjustly uses the power of unity in ways that benefit the government and disadvantage the broader population.<sup>128</sup> While they do not do so in class or in front of their students, in teachers' conversations with me they suggest that the government has been trying to encourage Burma's population to live in unity with the government, while trying to discourage Burma's population from becoming united together against the government. For example, Sayama Mar Lar describes the government attempting to foster unity between itself and students while trying to erode unity between the students and teachers.

What we especially noticed was, at that time, in the mind of teachers, they are dividing students and teachers. We had this thought. Before, if we are doing something, students and teachers always consult each other and do it together. Now, they [government officials] are dividing students and teachers. What we heard was, [the government told students] 'No need to accept everything that teachers said.' We heard things like that. Because we heard that, there are those [thoughts] in the chests of the teachers.

These critiques motivated some teachers to avoid conveying the concept of unity as it is portrayed in the textbook, when speaking with their students.

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<sup>127</sup> 4 participants reported this.

<sup>128</sup> 6 participants indicated that they held this view.

Policy alteration: Strength brought about by unity can be used for the benefit of different groups

In the textbooks and in most teacher-student interactions, unity is portrayed as a benign, virtuous civic concept that all people should strive to adhere to throughout their lives. However, in select instances, teachers alter this unity policy component, depicting unity to their students as a tool that can be used to strengthen one group to act against the interest of another group.<sup>129</sup> For instance, Saya Zaw Win stated that if stronger unity could be established among the people of Burma, they could unite against the government and bring about an end to military rule, resulting in a democratic Burma.

They [my students] ask when their country will get democracy. Will their country get democracy? How do teachers think about it? Why don't we have democracy yet?...It is impossible to give them the answer. But I told them that we will get democracy when everyone gets involved. When everyone takes their part. You all do your job. I'm doing my job. But there are a lot of people who don't do their job. We cannot get democracy this way. Something like that.

This is distinct from the benign, civic practice of 'being united' in that not everyone is uniting together. Certain groups are establishing unity and using the resulting strength against other groups. Or, groups are doing what they can to prevent other groups from uniting as part of a defensive strategy to keep them weak and unable to act against their own group.

*Comparing authorized policy with teachers' implementation*

Like the other two civic themes, teachers remain largely faithful to the authorized policy concerning living and acting in unity when they implement this policy in their own classrooms.<sup>130</sup> They mirror the textbooks' meaning of unity, as well as the forms in which the textbooks convey it.<sup>131</sup> In most cases, teachers do this enthusiastically because they wholeheartedly endorse the idea that everyone in Burmese society should work toward living and acting in unity. However, in a small number of cases, teachers are critical of the government for attempting to orchestrate the emergence of unity and disunity in situations

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<sup>129</sup> 4 participants reported this.

<sup>130</sup> 11 participants reported this.

<sup>131</sup> 6 participants reported this.

and in ways that benefit the government, while disadvantaging the broader population.<sup>132</sup>

Motivated by this perceived injustice, some teachers implement the unity policy in an altered form.<sup>133</sup> They teach students that unity can be used as a tool to strengthen groups, thereby enabling them to more effectively oppose the government. Implicit in this policy alteration is the idea that the government can and should be opposed and eventually deposed.

### **Connecting findings to the civic education literature**

The findings in this chapter reveal that when teachers implement civic education policy in their own classrooms, they go beyond the textbook content and cover a much wider range of civic education components and approaches. As noted in chapter 3, the authorized civic education policy in the Myanmar readers covers a relatively small portion of the civic education components and approaches that are prevalent within the academic literature. The textbooks' civic education content consists almost wholly of moral education, while a limited number of textbook lessons reference aspects of multicultural education and historical literacy. In contrast, educators teach these topics as well as aspects of human rights education, participatory civic education and critical pedagogy.

Just like in the textbooks, **moral education** makes up the bulk of civic education messages teachers convey to their students, and as noted throughout this chapter the moral virtues teachers advocate closely mirror those in the Myanmar readers. Similarly, in the area of **multicultural education**, teachers convey the very same messages that are present in the Myanmar readers. When they speak to their students about diversity, they only refer to different ethnic groups, while religious and linguistic diversity remain unmentioned. Teachers champion how ethnic groups can live and work together in harmony whilst refraining from any discussion of disagreement, discord or violence between ethnic groups—of which there are countless examples in Burma's present and past. If educators touch on differences between ethnic groups at all, their comments concern variations in traditional dress or region of origin, just like the textbooks. No teachers described discussing substantial differences between ethnic

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<sup>132</sup> 5 participants expressed this.

<sup>133</sup> 4 participants reported this.

groups with their students, such as differences in cultural or religious beliefs, or differing views of historical events. Therefore, like the Myanmar readers, the multicultural concepts teachers convey to their students address primarily surface-level issues and do not provide students with the “knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to participate in cross-cultural interactions and in personal, social, and civic action,” as Banks (2007) believes all multicultural education should do (p. viii).

Teachers expand their students’ **historical literacy** beyond what the textbook content provides in this area. For instance, some teachers describe encouraging their students to see a historical event from different perspectives, which Virta (2007) suggests is essential for comprehensive historical literacy (p. 19).<sup>134</sup> Sayama Nanda Aye did this when she taught her students about the ‘U Thant event,’ encouraging them to understand the event from both the perspective of the government as well as the students protesting the government’s refusal to bury U Thant on highly respected ground. In addition, in telling the story of this historical event and highlighting the disagreement between the government and the protesters, Sayama Nanda Aye gives her students the tools to think critically about this part of history and to critically assess the justice of the government’s actions at that time. In this way, Sayama Nanda Aye begins to train her students in the form of critical historical literacy advocated by Zinn (2005), Marciano (1997) and other scholars.

**Human rights education** is an area of civic education into which teachers have ventured with their students, despite the fact that it is wholly absent from the authorized civic education policy in the Myanmar readers. Moreover, since this is a topic teachers are aware the government is very sensitive about, two out of the three teachers who broached this topic did so outside of the government school context. Saw Lah Eh’s teacher and Saya Zaw Win both addressed this topic while teaching their students the civic theme ‘fulfill duties.’ They emphasized that the government has duties it is responsible for fulfilling for the people of

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<sup>134</sup> 8 participants report engaging in this practice.

Burma and these are rights all Burmese citizens are entitled to receive.<sup>135</sup> In particular, they noted that these included fundamental human needs such as access to basic education and a reliable source of electricity. By simply making students aware that they have rights, the teachers were taking the very first steps towards Tibbitts' (2002) description of human rights education as that which aims "to strengthen respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and to ensure that respect in all societies" (p. 160). Furthermore, as Meintjes (1997) suggests, these teachers seemed to convey the concept of human rights to their students as a form of empowerment, encouraging them to expect these rights from the government throughout their lives.

Teachers also conveyed aspects of **participatory civic education** to their students, even though it doesn't appear in the authorized civic education policy.<sup>136</sup> Advocated by Kymlicka (2003, p. 50), Walker (2002, p. 184) and others, participatory civic education is centered on the idea that it is not enough for people to merely learn how to be a good citizen in theory. Citizens must actively fulfill their citizenship responsibilities, which vary from context to context, but could include volunteering for local organizations, voting or pushing for political change on important local and national issues. Saya U Aung Htoo taught this concept to his students in the Burmese context by explaining to them that it is their civic duty to engage actively in civic pursuits. To my students, "I talk about the civil duty... Civil duty means every citizen in a country has a civil duty... I mostly talk about politics. Everyone should participate in politics. Politics is part of your life... If everyone, everyone is interested in politics and participates in it, we are sure to achieve success."

Lastly, there are a number of instances where teachers convey civic concepts using a critically-oriented, **transformative learning** approach.<sup>137</sup> By teaching in this way, educators develop students' critical thinking skills. As there are a number of examples noted throughout this chapter, I will just touch on one here. Mezirow (2000) defines transformative learning as a

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<sup>135</sup> The third teacher who mentioned teaching human rights education was Sayama Mar Lar, who was referring to her colleague, a history teacher who taught her students about human rights. This case will be discussed in detail in chapter 5.

<sup>136</sup> 5 participants engaged in this practice.

<sup>137</sup> 8 participants engaged in this practice.

“process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets)” (p. 7). This is precisely what Saw Lah Eh’s teacher and Saya Zaw Win do when they expose their students to the idea that the government can owe citizens basic human rights. These teachers do not just lecture about this to students. They convey this idea using metaphor and leading questions. Saya Zaw Win equates the new idea of citizen’s rights with the much more familiar concept that children are entitled to expect basic needs to be provided by their parents. After describing the absence of basic rights in the lives of Burmese citizens, Saw Lah Eh’s teacher asked his students, ‘Who do you think... whose fault do you think it is?’ In this way these teachers foster their students’ critical thinking skills by encouraging them to wrestle with this new idea and make sense of it in reference to their own understandings.

In sum, when comparing the findings from this chapter with those from chapter 3, as well as the academic literature on civic education, it becomes clear that the teachers tasked with implementing the authorized civic education policy from the Myanmar readers are largely compliant with the policy. However, they also push beyond it, teaching their students various other aspects of civic education that are championed in the academic literature, but that are not present in the textbooks.

## **Conclusion**

The findings presented in this chapter enable us to get at the heart of Sutton and Levinson’s (2001) ‘policy as practice’ concept and how it works in the Burma context. Heeding Levinson et al.’s (2009) call to view the policy-making process in a more democratized form (p. 769-770), this chapter explored the process of continued ‘policymaking’ by Burmese teachers long after the official, authorized policy had been set down in writing in its ‘finalized’ form. Here, we have examined how Burmese teachers have taken authorized policy in the Myanmar readers, interpreted it, critically engaged with it and put it into practice in various forms in their own classrooms. We’ve seen how they have elaborated on the authorized policy, adding additional details and adaptations they consider important for their particular students and their educational environment. This has given us a glimpse into the dynamic process of policy

appropriation where Burmese educators engage in the ‘creative interpretive practice’ of operationalizing policy (p. 768).

The content of this chapter has contextualized Burmese teachers’ choices regarding how they appropriate the authorized civic education policy as they put it into practice. This has helped make it possible to avoid casting teachers’ policy implementation as ‘better’ or ‘worse’ depending on the degree to which it conforms to the authorized policy. Instead, framing teachers’ choices in a broader context has enabled us to focus on gaining a fuller understanding of why teachers implemented the policy the way they did.

Key to understanding how and why Burmese teachers appropriate civic education policy the way they do is Levinson et al.’s (2009) conceptualization of ‘policy as a practice of power’ (p. 769-770). It is clear that in the Burma context, the authorized policy in the Myanmar readers does indeed “codif[y] and exten[d] the interests of those that disproportionately wield power” (p. 769). It is the military and government officials who set the authorized policy in the textbooks and according to the teachers, these authorities don’t welcome open debate on changes to the policy. Engaging in an open, rational discussion with them about possible policy adjustments is not something teachers see as a possibility. In fact, teachers express that not only could they be punished for deviating from the textbooks’ policy, they could be punished for suggesting the authorities consider changing the policy in anyway. Saya Sai Tai Leng emphasizes this point in the comment that leads off this chapter, where he states that implementing the government’s policies makes him feel like a puppet, forced to submit to the will of the government, his puppeteer. This view is also evident in comments made by other teachers who express that they would like to teach using content or pedagogy not present in the Myanmar readers, but that doing so could result in negative consequences that they would prefer to avoid. The occasions when teachers reported feeling controlled by the government generally occurred when they strongly disagreed with the authorized policy.

However, while teachers, at times, feel that the government is their ‘puppeteer’ controlling their every move in the classroom by enforcing strict adherence to the authorized policy, findings indicate that, the majority of the time, teachers wanted to implement the policy as

they believed it was intended. Teachers chose to implement the authorized civic education policy from the Myanmar readers as faithfully as possible because they wholeheartedly agreed with the civic concepts it advocated. Of the three most prominent civic themes in the textbooks—respect elders, fulfill duties, and live & act in unity—the teachers wanted their students to learn and adhere to each one. For the most part, teachers did not feel forced to implement these components of the policy. They taught these concepts because they felt it was in the best interest of their students, and ultimately the nation.

What also comes across in a powerful way in this chapter is that despite the many constraints, including the threat of government retribution, teachers have the will and the agency to implement policy in unauthorized forms when they have a strong desire to do so. When teachers did not want to teach a particular component of authorized civic education policy, they engaged in policy alteration, molding the policy to better fit their views. In some cases these were small adjustments, while in others they were more substantial changes. In most instances of policy alteration, teachers carefully chose the modifications with the government's watchful eye in mind. They sought to alter the policy in ways that were not obvious, so government authorities would not rebuke them for straying from the textbook content.

Thus, at least within the confines of their own classrooms, teachers have tweaked and adjusted the government's civic education policies in accordance with their own convictions, in some cases creating completely new policy that stands in opposition to that condoned by the government. Teachers have also expanded the range of civic education topics addressed. While the textbooks cover moral education and touch briefly on multicultural education and historical literacy, some Burmese educators add additional civic education topics, teaching their students critical thinking, participatory civic education and human rights education.

In sum, using Sutton and Levinson's (2001) 'policy as practice' concept as a framework for this dissertation study enables us to see and understand the civic education policymaking process beyond what is written in static, official documents. Using this more democratic view of policy reveals how teachers in Burma make and remake policy through engaging in classroom practice iteratively over time. Through continuous policy implementation, patterns of practice emerge



and teachers' new and altered policies begin to take shape. Thus, it is in teacher-student interactions that Burma's civic education policy is brought to life. The education policy that may appear static and unchanging on the pages of the Myanmar readers becomes dynamic and flexible as teachers repeatedly interpret and implement it.

## Chapter 5 Teaching the unwritten rules of citizenship through ‘protective coaching’: Self-censorship, civic illiteracy and non-participation in civic life

“If only [the students] knew our feeling inside, naw? That we take care of them, more than ourselves.” -Tharamu Say Say

“Some people might think and might see that we restrict the freedom of our pupils, but teachers take these actions in order to prepare their pupils for the danger of future disturbances, obstacles and life-storms.” -Saya U Pone Myint

As Tharamu Say Say and Saya U Pone Myint illustrate in the quotes above, teachers see themselves as their students’ protectors.<sup>138</sup> Emphasizing her commitment to this role, Tharamu Say Say states that she puts her students’ safety and well-being ahead of her own. By using the term ‘life-storm,’ Saya U Pone Myint evokes vivid imagery of the potential severity of the dangers students might encounter. The primary danger teachers identify in both their lives and the lives of their students is ill treatment from Burma’s authoritarian government.<sup>139</sup> The government strongly discourages the population from making any statements or engaging in any activities that suggest one may not be wholly supportive of the government, its officials and all of its policies. These unsanctioned activities include fundamental freedoms and basic human rights, including freedom of speech and freedom of association. Engaging in these prohibited activities can result in severe punishments, including job loss, arrest and even imprisonment. However, most of the rules about what the government does and does not approve of are not written down. As Aung San Suu Kyi (2011) eloquently expressed, Burma is “a precarious world with its own unwritten rules and regulations.” Along with the rest of Burma’s population, teachers have learned these unwritten rules over time, through a process of socialization. They have observed and learned what activities tend to provoke government retribution and which do not. Teachers consider it essential to pass this invaluable knowledge on to their students. Thus, they spend a great deal of time helping students master these unwritten rules of Burmese

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<sup>138</sup> 10 participants expressed this view.

<sup>139</sup> 10 participants expressed this view.

citizenship so they will be able to safely navigate the precarious landscape of Burma's civic life throughout their lives.

### **Coaching analogy**

Teachers' descriptions of their protective role suggest that it is coach-like in the sense that teachers not only provide their students with information and skills to stay safe from the government, they also observe their students' ability to put these skills and concepts into practice in their own lives, over an extended period of time. Just as a sports coach monitors players' ongoing performance and provides specific assistance targeting the skills that need improvement, teachers provide tailored, on-the-spot guidance when students err.<sup>140</sup> The coaching analogy I make here is my own, as none of the teachers explicitly described themselves as a 'coach.' However, the analogy of a coach seemed fitting as some teachers use sports terms and analogies when describing how they interact with their students.

The sports terms and analogies teachers use include the concept of being 'in bounds' or 'out of bounds.'<sup>141</sup> Teachers use this imagery when they describe helping students identify the citizenship rules they should abide by to stay safe. One stays 'in bounds' by engaging only in government-condoned activities, while going out of bounds involves participating in unapproved activities that could bring about government retribution. Teachers' wording suggests that they visualize this spatially, as an area of safe territory surrounded by unsafe territory, separated by a clearly marked boundary line. Teachers urge students to 'stay in bounds,' much like sports coaches advise their players. For example, Tharamu Lily Paw used this boundary analogy when describing what topics are safe and which are too dangerous to discuss in class.

We can talk within the boundary. Beyond that, we have no right to criticize. We can talk about how General Aung San was a patriot and about his sacrifice for his country. We don't dare to cross to the other side of the boundary. We don't dare to talk about his daughter.

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<sup>140</sup> 7 participants described 'coaching' students in this way.

<sup>141</sup> 3 participants reported this.

Since the topic of General Aung San is condoned by the government, Tharamu Lily Paw notes that discussing this is ‘within the boundary.’ However, talking about General Aung San’s daughter, Aung San Suu Kyi, falls well outside the boundary. Because Aung San Suu Kyi is a leading member of the National League for Democracy, the main opposition party in Burma, and frequently critiques the government, Tharamu Lily Paw has concluded that she is a figure the government would disapprove of her mentioning in class. By ‘staying in bounds’ while teaching, Tharamu Lily Paw role-models this protective practice for her students.

Later in our interview, Tharamu Lily Paw goes on to use the additional terms—‘line’ and ‘tilt’—that connote this boundary concept. Like a coach urging a gymnast not to tilt too far to either side while on a balance beam, Tharamu Lily Paw states that students must not deviate from the education ‘line’ [လိနီ] or path that they are following. She warns that if their anti-government feelings become too intense, this can cause students to ‘tilt’ over the boundary line and go ‘out of bounds,’ where they engage in unsanctioned activities and risk incurring punishment at the hands of the government. Once students ‘tilt,’ they are no longer strictly focused on their education, they are veering towards precarious political engagement.

The more difficulties they [students] face and the more access they have to outside knowledge, the more they started to complain about the political situation, to tell you the truth. When they start to complain we had to tell them to strictly follow their education and don’t get into any other *line*. Your education is not complete yet...Most of the students, they are interested in the political... Some children have too much feeling that they started to *tilt*. They feel so strong about their country, right? So they would like to go outside education... *Tilting* means they wanted to get involved in a little bit of this, a little bit of that. [my emphasis]

Teachers also describe students who went ‘out of bounds,’ into unsafe territory as having ‘fouled’ [ဖော့င်း]. Just as a sports coach reminds their players to keep the ball within the field of play so as not to foul, teachers in Burma coach their students to avoid fouling by keeping their comments and actions within the range of activities the government finds palatable and non-threatening. For instance, Tharamu Lily Paw makes the following comment about her ongoing concern that her students will foul. “Some students get outside knowledge, it depends on their

community. They like to criticize about things. Sometimes we have to warn them because we don't want them to foul."

### Motivations behind protective coaching

There are a number of factors that motivate teachers to act as protective coaches for their students. For one, teachers consider it a professional responsibility to equip students with the skills they need to avoid danger throughout their lives.<sup>142</sup> In fact, this responsibility is included in the 'Teachers' duty' passage from the Singlovada Sutta, a portion of Buddhist scripture. This passage, which is also included in the second grade Myanmar reader, notes that teachers are expected to 'prevent all danger' from reaching their students.

ဆရာဝန်	Teachers' Duty
အတတ်လည်းသင်၊ ပဲ့ပြင်ဆုံးမ	Teach skills, steer [and] preach
သိပ္ပံမချန်၊ ဘေးရန်ဆီးကာ	[Give] knowledge without omissions, prevent all danger
သင့်ရာအပ်ပို့၊ ဆရာတို့	Send [students] to where appropriate, teachers
ကျင့်ဖို့ ဝတ်ငါးဖြာ။	Five duties to practice

(Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2009d, p. 37)

Teachers feel very passionately about these duties, including the duty to protect their students. When interviewing teachers, they would bring up this list of duties unprompted and discuss them with enthusiasm.<sup>143</sup> For instance, when I asked Sayama Mar Lar how teachers' lives were different from the lives of non-teachers, she began reciting lines from the 'teachers' duty' passage above. Almost immediately, the translator who was assisting with the interview, who had also worked as a teacher, spontaneously began chanting the lines of the passage in unison with Sayama Mar Lar, from memory. Once finished, they looked at each other and chuckled. Then, Sayama Mar Lar explained to me what each line meant in her own words, assuring me that "if a student is about to be in danger, teachers protect them."

<sup>142</sup> 10 participants expressed this view.

<sup>143</sup> 5 participants did this.

A second reason teachers seek to protect their students is that they genuinely care for their students' well being. Teachers describe feeling a deep love and connection with their students, in some cases comparing this to the love they have for their own children.<sup>144</sup> As Sayama Mar Lar notes, "teachers... consider students as their own sons and daughters. Considering them as their own sons and daughters, teachers love the students just like parents. And students also... love them [their teachers] like their own parents." Tharamu Say Say vividly depicts the love she feels for her students when she tells a story of how she sacrificed for them, because of this love.

I love [my students] very much. Even though they are naughty, I take care of them. I love them. The whole year they didn't try in their lessons. Then, close to the exam, they tried their best. But me also. If they stay up until 2 o'clock, 3 o'clock at night, I sit together with them. I never go to bed also. They came and did exercises and sung their lessons... sometimes the other [teachers called them] 'your sons... your sons.'

Thus teachers have a powerful personal stake in protecting their students from harm. If their students were arrested, imprisoned or otherwise punished by the government, the teachers would be emotionally affected on a personal level.

Thirdly, teachers are motivated to act as protective coaches to their students in order to protect themselves. Teachers fear that they will be held responsible for their students' actions if their students go out of bounds.<sup>145</sup> For instance, when one of Tharamu Say Say's students arrived at her home and told her he intended to take part in a pro-democracy protest, she hurriedly provided him with protective coaching, both for his safety as well as her own. Making such politically sensitive statements to Tharamu Say Say within earshot of others puts both of them at risk, even if Tharamu Say Say discourages him from protesting.

One of the students came to my house. And my house is open, up and down like this and the window is open, all the sitting room. So if we speak inside all the sounds go outside. He came and said 'Teacher, this afternoon, when you hear the sound of the guns shooting, know that we all are dead.' I said, 'sh, sh, sh, sh.' Yeah, because maybe the other person will come and look like this. So no no no, don't speak very loud like this, I told him.

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<sup>144</sup> 5 participants expressed this view.

<sup>145</sup> 3 participants expressed this concern.

Tharamu Say Say shushes her student because she is afraid of the consequences his comments will bring upon them from government authorities if they learn about the remarks. When Tharamu Say Say reenacted this scene, her shushing was immediate and rushed, as if the students' words had panicked her and she felt she had to stop him from putting them in any further danger.

Furthermore, several teachers noted that in the 1980s and early 1990s teachers were required to sign a statement promising that they themselves would never engage in politics.<sup>146</sup> In some cases, teachers were also assigned a group of students to monitor for potential political involvement. The teachers were expected to prevent the students' political activity, and if they failed, the government could hold teachers responsible and possibly punish them. While none of the teachers interviewed for this study personally experienced being officially assigned a group of students to monitor, they assume that this policy has merely transitioned from being explicit to implicit. Therefore, they act as if the government still holds them responsible, at least in part, for their students' actions. Therefore, this is a powerful motivator for being an effective protective coach.

Although it is rare, teachers occasionally refrain from protective coaching for their own security.<sup>147</sup> As noted above, providing protective coaching for their students usually helps ensure the safety of the student as well as the teacher themselves. However, this is not always the case. For instance, if a student is already associated with anti-government groups, providing them with protective coaching causes the teachers to go 'out of bounds,' as the government forbids contact with these groups. Tharamu Lily Paw described her reticence to continue providing protective coaching to her students who have already communicated with 'the other side,' meaning groups who oppose the government, many of which are located across the border, in Thailand. She was worried that having further contact with students at this point would displease the government and implicate her in her students' rebellious activities. Note that, here again, she used the sports term 'foul.'

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<sup>146</sup> 6 participants reported this.

<sup>147</sup> 1 participant reported this.

Sometimes students don't come to school. When we heard that they get connected with the other side, we go see them. If we are going to control the person who is about to get involved with them, we have to worry that we will foul.

By this, Tharamu Lily Paw means that she fears the act of associating with her students who have gone out of bounds will be frowned upon by the government and may result in negative consequences for her.

### **Content of protective coaching**

There are two main types of protective coaching that teachers provide students. For one, teachers equip students with information about what the government expects of them and then coaches the students to conform to those expectations. With this type of coaching teachers intend to help students stay 'in bounds.'<sup>148</sup> However, teachers also recognize that staying within these boundaries is difficult and not always possible. So, a second type of protective coaching they provide students consists of techniques to mitigate the chances that they will be punished in the event that they do cross into unsafe territory.<sup>149</sup> Within each type of protective coaching there are specific lessons teachers convey to students that emerge prominently in teacher-student interactions. In this section I will describe the most prominent of these lessons and illustrate how teachers coach their students to adhere to them.

Most of teachers' messages to students about how to stay in bounds relate to 3 rules of Burmese citizenship: (1) do not criticize the government, (2) treat politically sensitive topics as taboo, and (3) obey all of the government's requests, without question, even if they are unjust. Based on the government's policies, laws and popular slogans, and by observing who government officials have punished and why, the teachers have come to the conclusion that these three citizenship rules are among those that Burmese citizens are most likely to be punished for violating. Therefore, because the teachers want to keep their students safe, these are the rules they are most adamant that their students follow. Many of the teachers I

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<sup>148</sup> 9 participants provided their students with this type of protective coaching.

<sup>149</sup> 11 participants provided their students with this type of protective coaching.



interviewed for this study coached their students to adhere to all 3 of these rules.<sup>150</sup> Below I will describe the range of acts teachers consider to be ‘in bounds’ and ‘out of bounds’ in relation to each rule. I will then explore how teachers heeded these rules in their own lives as well as how they coach their students to comply with them.

*(1) Do not criticize the government*

‘Do not criticize the government’ is a key rule of Burmese citizenship that teachers very diligently teach their students to adhere to.<sup>151</sup> It is present, both explicitly in Burma’s laws and implicitly in the slogans the government frequently touts. Section 124A of Burma’s penal code (1957) explicitly criminalizes criticism of the government and the state, making it punishable by imprisonment.<sup>152</sup> Similarly, section 5 of the Emergency Provisions Act (1950) forbids acting or speaking in ways that could cause others’ “respect of the government to be diminished, or to disobey rules, or to be disloyal to the government.” A number of other laws employ vague wording that prohibits all citizens from engaging in activities that threaten the “sovereignty and security of the Union of Burma,” or which are a “threat to the peace of the people,” such as the Law for the Protection of the Stable, Peaceful, and Systematic Transfer of State Responsibility and the Successful Implementation of National Convention Tasks, Free from Disruption and Opposition (1996). The Burmese government has used these laws repeatedly to punish and imprison citizens for criticizing the government, as they define this as a form of threatening the ‘security’ of the nation and ‘the peace of the people’ (Gutter & Sen, 2001, p. 13; Liddell, 1997). While the wording differs, this citizenship rule is also implied in some of the government’s most frequently used slogans. For example, the slogan that commands all citizens to “oppose those relying on external elements, acting as stooges, holding negative views”<sup>153</sup> suggests that

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<sup>150</sup> 7 participants reported teaching all three rules.

<sup>151</sup> 8 participants reported this.

<sup>152</sup> The text of this section of the Penal Code is the following, “Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, bring to attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards [the Government established by law for the Union or for the constituent units thereof,] shall be punished with transportation for life or an shorter term, to which fine may be added, or with imprisonment which may extend to three years, to which fine may be added, or with fine” (Union of Burma, 1957).

<sup>153</sup> This slogan can be found on many of the government-sponsored, red and white billboards found in Burma’s urban areas, such as the one depicted in figure 1.3 in chapter one of this dissertation. This same

citizens should ostracize and refuse to interact with any person who criticizes or ‘holds negative views’ about the Burmese government.

While this citizenship rule is clearly present in Burma’s laws and slogans, the details of what this rule entails—what is considered an illegal form of government criticism and what isn’t—remains largely unwritten. This is where teachers play a vital role, fleshing out for their students, what is ‘in bounds’ and ‘out of bounds’ in relation to this rule. Saya Sai Tai Leng, like almost every participant interviewed for this study, expressed the importance of avoiding any criticism of the government without prompting. In the following interview excerpt he elaborates on his perception of where the boundaries of this rule lie.

You must not argue with them [government officials], you must not criticize. They don’t want that kind of [thing]. They want [people] to agree every time. ‘Yes. Yes. It’s okay. You are doing very well.’ They only like that kind of person.

Tharamu Lily Paw provides her perspective on the same rule, and like Saya Sai Tai Leng, she suggests that everyone must follow it without question.

Even the city authorities cannot complain about the education system when they don’t like it. In this era it is even worse, especially our era, under military rule, you know, right? Under military rule you have to follow orders like ‘one blood, one voice, one order.’<sup>154</sup> They control everything at the top. Even when you feel there is no freedom you have no right to complain. They just want to get water. They don’t want to know if there is a hole in the water pot<sup>155</sup> ... Some head teachers know that the junior teachers are having a difficult time but they can’t do anything because they don’t have any right to complain either.

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slogan can also be found on the cover of the *New Light of Myanmar*, Burma’s most widely available newspaper, and in the front matter of nearly every book published in Burma (*New Light of Myanmar*, 2007b, p. 2).

<sup>154</sup> This slogan, often used in a military setting, is meant to emphasize the importance of unity. It suggests that just as people share communal ancestry (blood), they should speak with one voice and all obey the same command. Any dissenting voices are not acceptable.

<sup>155</sup> In this metaphor the government’s needs are symbolized by the water while the methods of obtaining them are symbolized by the broken water pot. The government could reach their objectives more efficiently if they fixed the hole in the water pot, but Tharamu Lily Paw believes the government would rather have civil servants use the inefficient method and avoid critiquing the government’s inefficiencies.

In addition, Tharamu Lily Paw's quote above suggests that people have not been able to criticize the government freely, without fear of government retribution for a long time, but this has become a much more severe problem under the present military government. This suggests that she sees these citizenship rules as being somewhat flexible over time. They may change according to the wishes of those in power. They are not timeless rules, like the three key moral principles emphasized in the Myanmar readers, described in the previous two chapters of this dissertation.

#### Preventative measures

Teachers coach students to abide by this citizenship rule in a number of different ways. First and foremost, teachers use preventative measures to inhibit the concept of critiquing the government from even occurring to students. For instance, all government schoolteachers interviewed described creating a classroom environment free of government critique. While all teachers disagreed with certain aspects of the government's policies and practices, they refrained from criticizing the government throughout most aspects of their lives, paying particular attention to adhering to this rule in the presence of their students. In this way, teachers continuously role model this citizenship rule for their students, informing them about how to follow this rule in their own lives.

When interviewing teachers, I asked several of them if they shared their views on the government with their students. Every teacher answered saying that they never do this. For instance, Sayama Yi Yi responded with an incredulous tone, as if she was surprised that I would even consider that a possibility.

What do you mean opinion? About this country? About this country's government? No, we have no permission to talk about it.

Tharamu Say Say has a similar response. However, she takes this a step further, going on to claim that she has so little knowledge of politics that she is incapable of critiquing the government and communicating this to her students, even if she wanted to. She makes this claim despite the fact that she demonstrated substantial knowledge of political issues at other

points during my interviews with her. However, by claiming ignorance she identifies herself as falling squarely 'in bounds' in relation to this key citizenship rule.

**Brooke:** Do you ever talk about your ideas about the government to your students?

**Tharamu Say Say:** No. Never.

**Brooke:** Tell me about why not.

**Tharamu Say Say:** Because of our government we can't speak freely in our—[short pause] Yes, even, because for the political also, we don't understand. We don't understand the political also. So, for me, I never listened to the BBC or VOA,<sup>156</sup> like this. Just only teaching at home<sup>157</sup> and then taking a rest. [laughs] Morning, go to work. So, I don't understand political [things] and we don't speak about this to the students.

Note that while I asked both teachers if they shared their views about the government with their students, I did not specify what type of views. Yet, both Sayama Yi Yi and Tharamu Say Say assumed I meant negative, critical views. This is evident in Sayama Yi Yi's highly surprised tone as well as her claim that she doesn't have permission to discuss this, as it is unlikely the government would oppose positive commentary about its policies. This is evident in Tharamu Say Say's comments as she claims she is unequipped to voice any views on the government since she doesn't listen to BBC or VOA, which are two radio broadcasts known to be critical of the government. Positive perspectives on the government are widely available in almost all forms of media, which Tharamu Say Say likely encounters regularly. I also asked this question to several other teachers and, like Sayama Yi Yi and Tharamu Say Say, each and every person assumed I was referring to negative, critical views of the government and insisted they do not voice these opinions in front of their students. This occurred even in instances when we had not yet discussed our respective views on the government. The consistency of these responses suggests that most teachers have at least some negative views about the government and its policies and that most teachers strive to maintain a classroom free of explicit government critique.

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<sup>156</sup> The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the Voice of America (VOA) broadcast radio news programs that can be picked up in Burma. These programs broadcast news that has been banned by Burmese government media censors and therefore is unavailable from any other media inside Burma. As a result, listening to the BBC or VOA has become known as a way for people in Burma to circumvent the government's censorship to become more politically informed.

<sup>157</sup> Tharamu Say Say tutored students in her home in addition to teaching in a government school.

Another preventative measure teachers employ to keep their classrooms free of criticism of the government is to make sure all books and other media accessible to students is government-sanctioned.<sup>158</sup> Teachers consider this important, as non-sanctioned information sources could contain critiques of the Burmese government or information that contradicts official government accounts of events. In Tharamu Say Say's quote above, she mentions the BBC and VOA, implying that she would never provide her students with access to these non-sanctioned broadcasts, as she herself doesn't listen to them. Meanwhile, teachers facilitate students' access to government-sanctioned information sources, such as school textbooks, which do not call attention to any of the government's flaws. For instance, Sayama Nanda Aye states, "we only taught what they issued. We cannot talk about anything more than what is said in the book." Then, Sayama Nanda Aye and Sayama Thida go on to emphasize that they only provide their students with information included in government-issued texts, even though they are well aware that these texts often do not present an accurate account of events.

**Sayama Nanda Aye:** Burma's history... It can only be talked about as if it is a fairytale. Nothing else can be said... If we want to talk about our country to the children, we can only talk about it as if it is a fairytale. One cannot tell the truth about what is happening.

**Sayama Thida:** The truth about what is happening cannot be told.

**Sayama Nanda Aye:** What is it, what it looks like—all the history can only be described as a fairytale... In telling the truth, if we don't tell it as a fairytale and we tell as we want, we will be arrested. In education line [field], we will have to resign and we will be put into prison.

**Brooke:** If you could tell the truth, what are the things that you would want to tell?

**Sayama Thida:** We will talk about that the government is not good.

**Sayama Nanda Aye:** The government is not good. Currently, your education—a long time ago, education system was like this. From when it was developing it has regressed to this situation. [I would] say that. When I say that, I will have to start mentioning about the government. If these things are mentioned in the lecture, we will be accused of talking about something that is not related to the lecture.

**Sayama Thida:** Talking about things that are not related to the lecture. We will be fired.

**Sayama Nanda Aye:** We will be fired.

**Sayama Thida:** And we will be put into jail.

Sayama Nanda Aye equates the content of the government textbooks to a fairytale, emphasizing the tenuous relationship between the contents of the books and reality.

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<sup>158</sup> 7 participants reported this.

Furthermore, like in fairytales, the textbooks present an idealized view of reality in which the government is presented as beyond reproach. By teaching solely from the textbooks and by keeping their classrooms free of all unauthorized media, Burmese teachers create an environment that encourages a positive view of the government and discourages critique of Burma's leaders.

#### Coaching students back into bounds

While teachers consistently role model abstaining from government critique and create a classroom environment largely devoid of this practice, there are inevitably some students who fail to follow their teachers' example.<sup>159</sup> Several teachers expressed the belief that this occurs when students are exposed to people critiquing the government outside of school, in settings such as their home, their place of worship, and in social situations with their peers.<sup>160</sup> As Tharamu Lily Paw notes, some students live in communities where critiquing the government is common practice, while others do not. She refers to 'outside' knowledge, by which she means knowledge that is not sanctioned by the government, much of which is produced outside of Burma and is critical of the Burmese government.

Some students get outside knowledge, it depends on their community. They like to criticize about things. Sometimes we have to warn them because we don't want them to foul.

When students do violate this citizenship rule and criticize the government, or when teachers believe a student is about to do so, teachers respond with protective coaching tailored to the situation.<sup>161</sup> In these cases, teachers are essentially coaching students back into bounds after an actual or imminent boundary violation. Often, in these instances, what teachers consider 'in bounds' and 'out of bounds' becomes more explicit, as teachers often explain to students what they did to violate the boundary and why it is important to avoid doing this in the future.<sup>162</sup>

An examination of such instances reveals that the range of acts teachers consider 'out of bounds' in relation to this rule encompass, but also extend far beyond, simply voicing one's

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<sup>159</sup> 4 participants reported this.

<sup>160</sup> 4 participants expressed this.

<sup>161</sup> 5 participants reported this.

<sup>162</sup> 5 participants reported this.

criticism of the government. For instance, teachers seek to inhibit students from engaging in activities that are violent or otherwise oppositional towards the government, such as joining an armed opposition group, publicly protesting, or otherwise supporting armed or unarmed resistance movements through words or actions.<sup>163</sup> These acts fall clearly ‘out of bounds’ since they all imply criticism of the government. Each act is intended to bring about change in the government or its policies. Thus, aligning oneself with these groups suggests one also holds views that don’t match those of the government, even if one does not express criticism verbally. For instance, Tharamu Lily Paw provided protective coaching to a student who sought to join the Karen National Union, an armed opposition movement associated with the Karen ethnic minority group. She did this by emphasizing the dangers of ‘going out of bounds’ in an attempt to ‘intimidate’ the student from going through with his plans.

We told them to think carefully when they enter, they cannot exit. We had to intimidate them like that. But, if their feeling is still very strong we have to tell them how General Aung San fought. You cannot do like this. You have to do it slowly, step by step.

Hla Hla, a student who attended school in Yangon, noted that her teachers provided protective coaching when they believed the students were about to violate the citizenship rule, ‘don’t criticize the government.’ The teachers thought that the students were about to ‘go out of bounds’ by joining the pro-democracy ‘saffron revolution’ protests in 2007. If they did so, the students would be publicly expressing criticism of the government. The teachers’ protective coaching didn’t rely on threats or evoking fear. Instead, they did all he could to prevent students from behaving in ways they felt made students more likely to protest, such as assembling in large groups. At one point a highly ranked teacher closed the school entirely to prevent students from gathering together and emboldening each other to participate in the protests.

**Hla Hla:** We [my friends and I] talked about the demonstration. During that time, during the September event, it was our exam time. My friends told me, ‘after our exam, let’s go to demonstrate.’ They called me but our exam was postponed for 1 month. I don’t think that friend did that [protested]. She just said it. [laughs]

**Brooke:** in 2007?

**Hla Hla:** Yes... If the students are gathering teachers don’t allow it. They would scold the students and try to scatter the group... A male teacher, a highly ranked teacher, like the

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<sup>163</sup> 6 participants reported this.

headmaster. He went around the school and checked. He also closed the school.

Teachers also provide protective coaching when students criticize the government in more subtle ways. For instance, Tharamu Lily Paw describes how a student told a joke in class that contained an implicit government critique. She conveys the narrative enthusiastically, using a tone that suggests she feels a sense of glee at the fact that such a young student made such a witty joke that critiqued the political situation so insightfully. Although she was clearly amused by the joke, she was also concerned for the student's safety, as well as her own. After muffling her laughter, she responded to the student with protective coaching, shushing him and telling him to 'shut up.' In this way she made it clear to him that making jokes at the government's expense is out of bounds.

**Brooke:** Did a student ever say something you would've been afraid to say?

**Tharamu Lily Paw:** Yes... There are many.

**Brooke:** Give us one example.

**Tharamu Lily Paw:** [pause] Set-jay<sup>164</sup> [pause] Set-jay [pause] set-jay. [pause] to give you an example, now, what we have is, we have to pay set-jay. So we have to pay set-jay. And there are times that we have to pay set-jay. And there are times that we don't have enough books... So, for that, every month when we get our salary, we would chip in 500 kyat to help students who are in need. We buy books for them. Sometimes the books run out. We got upset and we happened to say, 'can you even get a book for yourself?' to the students. Then a student replied 'our father is not only working to feed us. He has 3 other sons.' So I asked 'where did those 3 sons come from?' And he said like that. Then I laughed. And I liked it because he cannot even speak Burmese really well but he was able to say those things.

**Translator:** [in English] KNU, DKBA, then the SPDC. 3 sons!... My parents have to, have to take care of these people as well, you don't know? [laughs.]

**Brooke:** [laughs] So [he was] talking about the complicated political situation by saying '3 sons.'

**Translator:** Yeah. [RN: gleeful tone] He cannot buy the books because, his parents didn't have enough money to buy books, because they have to take care of these 'other people.' They have to give a fee. [laughs.]

**Brooke:** [laughs loudly] Oh that's really funny...What did you do when the student said that?

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<sup>164</sup> 'Set-jay' is a Burmese word for a type of informal tax or 'protection fee' that soldiers demand villagers pay them. These soldiers may come from one of many armies including the national State Peace and Development Council's (SPDC) army, or ethnic minority armies such as the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) or the Karen National Union (KNU). In theory, in exchange for paying this protection fee, the army will not harm or steal from that family and will keep the family safe from other armies' troops who patrol or travel through their village.



**Tharamu Lily Paw:** [smiling] I just laugh. And then told him to stop. Like shut up. [laughs]

It is clear from these examples that teachers consider government critiques to be dangerous and inadvisable regardless of how implicit they are, how gently they are worded or how genuinely helpful the person is trying to be towards bettering their community and nation.

*(2) Treat politically sensitive topics as taboo*

Another rule of Burmese citizenship that teachers encourage their students to follow is to treat politically sensitive topics as taboo.<sup>165</sup> Referring to them as ‘political’ or politically sensitive, the topics teachers identify as off-limits are those they believe the government does not want people to openly discuss. The teachers believe that mentioning them would therefore be unsafe, ‘out of bounds’ and punishable by force. Teachers’ protective coaching on this matter involves helping students identify which topics are off limits and then training the students to avoid mentioning them.

The details of exactly what politically sensitive subject matter this second rule prohibits is unclear, as there has been no list of taboo topics publically released by the government. However, the government has published a memorandum that lists the guidelines enforced by the Press Scrutiny Board, outlining characteristics of print media that are barred from publication. While no teacher mentioned this particular memorandum, teachers’ protective coaching in regards to this citizenship rule closely mirrors the guidelines it contains. This is likely because the characteristics that make a topic disagreeable to the government have become relatively common knowledge in Burma. This memorandum states that the following will not be tolerated:

- a. anything detrimental to the Burmese socialist program;
- b. anything detrimental to the ideology of the state;
- c. anything detrimental to the socialist economy;
- d. anything which might be harmful to national solidarity and unity;
- e. anything which might be harmful to security, the rule of law, peace and public order;
- f. any incorrect idea and opinions which do not accord with the times;
- g. any descriptions which, though factually correct, are unsuitable because of the time or circumstances of their writing;

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<sup>165</sup> 8 participants reported this.

- h. any obscene (pornographic) writing;
- i. any writing which would encourage crimes and unnatural cruelty and violence;
- j. any criticism of a non-constructive type of the work of government departments;
- k. any libel or slander of any individuals.

Memorandum to all Printers and Publishers Concerning the Submission of Manuscripts for Scrutiny (1975)

While such guidelines provide some help in determining what types of topics the government disapproves of, it leaves a great deal of room for interpretation. For example, it is left unsaid what topics would be 'detrimental to the Burmese socialist program' or the 'ideology of the state.' It is left up to individual Burmese citizens to decide what likely falls into these categories. Teachers described developing their own understanding of where the boundary lies between safe and unsafe topics based on their own observations and life experiences.<sup>166</sup>

Topics that teachers deem politically sensitive encompass a range of contemporary and historical figures, events, and societal issues that are, in various ways, politically problematic for the government. For instance, some topics have been designated off limits because they have become widely associated with criticism of the government. They embarrass the government by calling attention to its weaknesses or failures. Thus, if one makes a comment about a politically sensitive topic, it could be interpreted as implicitly criticizing the government, 'which might be harmful to national solidarity and unity.' Other topics call attention to what many Burmese people see as injustices perpetrated against them by the military and other governmental authorities, which could be 'factually correct, [but] unsuitable because of the time or circumstances of their writing.' Even mentioning such topics in the context of explicit praise of the government is not condoned by teachers, as one's comment could prompt responses from others that are unflattering towards the government. Widespread public knowledge and dialogue about such topics is dangerous for the government since it could incite more citizens to take up arms or engage in other forms of resistance against the authorities, which would be considered 'harmful to security, the rule of law, peace and public order.' Thus, these are topics that the government would like to impose a complete moratorium on, as that would be to their

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<sup>166</sup> 6 participants described doing this.

political advantage. By silencing discussion of these controversial topics, the problematic people, events and societal issues are rendered effectively invisible and cease to threaten the government's rule, as they would no longer encourage citizens to question the status quo.

#### Preventative measures

To decrease the chance that discussing politically sensitive topics would even occur to their students, teachers role model this citizenship rule by almost always treating these topics as taboo, especially in their classroom.<sup>167</sup> For instance, they refrain from mentioning all contemporary and historical figures they consider 'out of bounds.' For instance, as noted earlier in this chapter, Tharamu Lily Paw expressed that she would never discuss Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the main political opposition party in Burma, with her students. In fact, all of the government schoolteachers interviewed for this study refrain from mentioning her in their classroom, as they consider her a highly politically sensitive topic. Aung San Suu Kyi has publicly criticized the government and its policies repeatedly since she became part of the Burmese political landscape in 1988. Furthermore, the government has faced widespread domestic and international criticism for its treatment of her, as they held her under house arrest for 15 years. So, just mentioning Aung San Suu Kyi's name can imply criticism of the government or remind others of the government's weaknesses.

Additional topics teachers avoid broaching because they consider them unsafe include the historical figure U Thant and what teachers refer to as the 'U Thant event.' U Thant was Secretary-General of the United Nations from 1961 to 1971 and had close ties to Burma's pro-democracy movement. When he died in 1974, Burma's military government encountered intense criticism for failing to accord him the respect he was widely thought to deserve. Despite outrage from students and others inside Burma, the government would only agree to bury him in an ordinary cemetery. As a result, just before his burial, in an act of resistance, students took his body and buried him in a place of honor on the campus of Rangoon University. Because these students took an action that communicated a very strong criticism of the government's stance on this matter, and because U Thant himself supported a return to democracy in Burma,

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<sup>167</sup> 16 participants reported this.

mentioning U Thant or the 'U Thant event' has been designated 'out of bounds' by teachers. It would likely be seen by the government as violating several of the criteria in the memorandum mentioned above, such as being "detrimental to the ideology of the state" (U Kyaw Myaing, 1975). For instance, Tharamu Lily Paw notes that she doesn't teach about U Thant or the events surrounding his death, nor did she learn about this in school when she was a student.

We teach only about things that happen before independence. We don't teach anything about what happened after independence... For example, I have heard about the U Thant uprising. It happened before I was born. And there are many other uprisings. They don't let us know.

Other events teachers treat as taboo include all pro-democracy protests that have taken place in Burma since the military took power in 1962 such as the protests in 1988 and the more recent 'Saffron Revolution' in 2007. These protests were sparked and sustained by people's criticism of the government and their desire to encourage the government to change. Through their protests, the people of Burma questioned the government's rule. Thus, the government felt threatened by these protests, leading them to suppress them through violent means. The Burmese government was then heavily criticized by the international community for suppressing these protests with violence. The government would likely prefer these events not be discussed, as they bring to mind criticism of the government and questions about the government's legitimacy. This could encourage future protests, which would violate the guidelines on the government's memorandum, as this would be "harmful to security, the rule of law, peace and public order" (U Kyaw Myaing, 1975). Thus, when in front of their students, teachers role model how to avoid mentioning these politically sensitive events. In Tharamu Lily's comment above, she notes that when she was a student she was not told about any 'uprisings' or protests in school. Similarly, Sayama Yi Yi notes that she talks about uprisings openly among her close teacher colleagues, but doesn't discuss this taboo topic in more public settings.

Among us [teachers], we all have our dissatisfaction with the government. Even about this uprising, we talk about it openly at school. We don't talk about this outside. All my friends are very open.

All of the government teachers interviewed for this study refrained from mentioning politically sensitive societal issues in front of their students. These include topics such as political prisoners

and forced labor as well as human rights and democracy. Mentioning these issues in the context of Burma is off limits because no matter what one says about these topics, they have become widely associated with criticism of the government. Thus, these topics are now politically charged and any reference to them contains at least implicit criticism of the government. Therefore, avoiding these topics is essential to staying 'in bounds.' Sayama Mar Lar noted that while she steers clear of mentioning controversial societal issues herself, there was another teacher in her school who went out of bounds by speaking to students about the taboo topic of human rights. As a result, the school headmaster reprimanded her.

**Brooke:** Is there ever a time when you wanted to teach differently but it's against the rules? Or do they [government authorities] let you teach any way you want?

**Sayama Mar Lar:** ...There was nothing at the middle school [level], but there are some in the high school level. At the high school level, teachers teach history. [One teacher said] 'Humans, in order to get human rights, have to try.' This teacher taught history. She is a history major. She taught thoroughly. The headmaster came to warn her. 'You, don't teach like this. The children's spirit will rise up.' The children will make noise. Don't teach like this.' The teacher replied 'I teach the history that is related to the history subject.'<sup>168</sup> The headmaster explained to her. The headmaster didn't like her. [They] had a problem. The teacher said, 'what is democracy, humans must have freedom.' She taught that. The headmaster knew that. All children listened to her, they agreed. They said, 'what teacher said is true.' They accepted it. But the headmaster didn't like it.

Note that the headmaster Sayama Mar Lar describes here believes that knowledge of human rights and democracy will cause students to engage in unsafe activities. She notes that the students' spirit will 'rise up,' leading them to 'make noise,' likely meaning that students will protest or openly voice criticism of the government in other ways. Therefore, it seems that both the headmaster and Sayama Mar Lar consider teachers' silence on politically sensitive societal issues to be an important preventative measure encouraging students to stay 'in bounds.'

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<sup>168</sup> Two different words for 'history' are used in this sentence. 'The first is သမိုင်း, pronounced 'tha-mine,' meaning the real history that occurred. The second is သမိုင်းကျောင်း, pronounced 'tha-mine jown,' meaning the school history subject.

### Coaching students back into bounds

While teachers rarely encountered students who broached taboo topics, on a few occasions teachers did need to coach students back into bounds after they violated this citizenship rule.<sup>169</sup> For instance, one of Sayama Yi Yi's students indirectly mentioned pro-democracy protests while they were happening in September 2007, by repeatedly asking her 'What is going on in Yangon?' Because of the politically sensitive nature of this event, she gave a vague answer to the student's questions and told the class that this topic was off limits.

Because they are children, they don't really understand anything, they don't understand politics. But sometimes, they like to ask questions like, 'something is going on in Yangon, what is going on in Yangon?' They are very interested about it... When they ask me that, I just answered them as appropriate. I also told them that if I tell you in detail, I could be fired. This recent September uprising, children understood that.

Sayama Yi Yi highlighted the danger of discussing the protests by detailing possible negative consequences that could occur. In this way, Sayama Yi Yi notified her students that this topic is 'out of bounds' and encouraged them to abide by the citizenship rule of avoiding politically sensitive topics.

### *(3) Obey the government, even if the order is unjust or wrong*

A third citizenship rule that teachers consistently coach students to abide by is to always obey the government, even when what they ask is unjust or wrong.<sup>170</sup> There are certain laws in Burma that state that all citizens must obey government authorities. However, as with the other citizenship rules described above, much of the official written policy on this issue is vague and imprecise. Therefore, teachers play an important role, informing their students about what they believe is 'in bounds' and 'out of bounds' in relation to this rule.

Section 188 of Burma's Penal Code (1957) states that all orders from "lawfully empowered" public servants must be followed, otherwise one can be imprisoned and/or fined. In addition, some of the slogans the government publicizes on highly visible billboards suggest that the people should always obey the government. For instance, a large red and white billboard in Mandalay, Burma's second largest city, reads "Tatmadaw and the people, cooperate and crush all those harming the union" (see figure 5.1). The Tatmadaw is the Burmese name for the

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<sup>169</sup> 4 participants reported this.

<sup>170</sup> 8 participants reported this.

government military, which is seen by the Burmese population as largely synonymous with the government as the Tatmadaw ruled the country from 1988 to 2009 and remains a powerful force in the Burmese government today. As everyday Burmese citizens are considered of lower status than members of the Tatmadaw, any ‘cooperation’ between the Tatmadaw and the people is most likely to consist of the people obeying requests and orders they receive from the military. By stating, unequivocally, that the Tatmadaw and the people of Burma ‘cooperate’ at all times, the billboard suggests that the only proper way for citizens to conduct themselves is to obey the military. The latter half of the billboard’s text contains an implied threat, that if a citizen fails to ‘cooperate’ with the Tatmadaw, they may find themselves labeled as someone who is ‘harmful to the union’ and will therefore be ‘crushed.’



(source: author's photo)

**Figure 5.1 Billboard emphasizing the importance of obeying the Burmese military**

In fact, several teachers described grave consequences they themselves, or others they know, incurred as a result of not obeying the government.<sup>171</sup> For instance, as noted in chapter 4, Sayama Mar Lar's fellow teacher refused an order to attend a teacher training because he felt it was unfair. He was threatened with the loss of his job. Then, after further 'out of bounds' comments and actions, he was later imprisoned. These negative consequences seem to have stemmed from his refusal to obey the government's orders.

**Sayama Mar Lar:** For example, there was one teacher among us who thought that it was not fair, so he didn't want to attend the training. He said that he had his family. He didn't want to go. Then, they asked him if he would quit his job. So, because of his family he could not quit his job. At the same, time he didn't want to attend the training. There was nothing he could do.

**Brooke:** But this isn't you sayama, this is another teacher?

**Sayama Mar Lar:** [Nods] Finally that teacher had more and more disputes with them [education authorities]. Finally they imprisoned him. When they imprisoned him, we all were very unhappy. We were also scared. We were afraid that we will be fired. We also have our family. We wanted to say [what he had said]. We did not dare. The teacher wanted to say. He said it. When he said it he got imprisoned.

Moreover, these imperative government orders include those issued by various government authorities, at many different levels. Teachers consider all of these orders to be important to follow since they see them all as originating with high-level government authorities; some of them are voiced by that higher authority, while others are passed down through lower-level officials such as headmasters or local education officers.<sup>172</sup> Tharamu Lily Paw emphasizes this point when she explains that she faithfully executed all the orders she was given, stating that "whatever order came, it was their [the government's] order." This even extended to orders she felt were very unethical, such as being asked to lie repeatedly on school accounting documents. She explained that this was a request the government made of many teachers, all of whom felt compelled to do what the government asked.

We have to lie about the accounting too. Sometimes when we are at the [teacher] training and the head teacher was talking in front of us, in the back the teachers were saying that they already knew how to do all of this. By looking at that you can see we just have to follow whatever they tell us to do. Right or wrong, doesn't matter... And

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<sup>171</sup> 3 participants reported this.

<sup>172</sup> 4 participants expressed this view.



even the ministry level is controlled by the military. They are all at the top. Every order that comes from the top is from them. Whatever order came, it was their order.

### Preventative measures

Teachers adhere to this citizenship rule in their own lives in order to stay 'in bounds' and avoid punishment by the government.<sup>173</sup> However, by doing this, teachers also act as role models for students, showing them how to put this citizenship rule into practice in their own lives.

Educators also create an environment where government orders are followed without question.<sup>174</sup> In this way, teachers make it less likely that their students will consider disobeying government requests. All government schoolteachers interviewed for this study described following orders, even when they disagreed with those orders. For instance, Sayama Mar Lar tells of how she performed the orders she was given, even when this caused her emotional distress and when she felt it was unfair.

Sometimes I have important things [to do]. I need to go. I have to ask for permission from the headmaster, which is difficult. If the headmaster doesn't give me permission, [I] can't go. I got angry. I wanted to go. I had a situation. My mother is at home alone and she is not well. I wanted to go see her. They would not allow it. I could not go. Those things, I don't like. Another one is, during the examination period, we need to monitor the examination center. They chose me to monitor the examination center. I didn't want to. Because when the school closes, I have a lot of things to do at home. My mother is not well. I wanted to take care of her. So I didn't want to go but they assigned me to go and monitor the examination center in another town. And I had to go. My mother was not well, I felt bad.

Furthermore, just as government orders are passed down to teachers through lower-level civil servants, when the government has orders for students, it is often the teachers' job to relay them. Many of the teachers interviewed for this study described instances when they passed the government's orders on to their students. In each case, the teachers communicated the citizenship rule, 'obey the government,' hand-in-hand with the order itself, presenting it as an imperative act the students had no choice but to perform. In some cases, teachers described to students specific negative consequences they would experience if they didn't comply.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> 8 participants reported this.

<sup>174</sup> 8 participants reported this.

<sup>175</sup> 6 participants reported this.

For example, when Saya Sai Tai Leng described how he delivered government orders to his students, note that he used the imperative phrase ‘have to.’ He also told the students they had to assent; otherwise he would fail them in their upcoming examination. In addition, Saya Sai Tai Leng makes it clear that he always delivers the government’s orders to his students in this uncompromising way, even when he didn’t think the order was right or fair. He explained that he felt under duress by the government to compel his students to comply.

There is control by the military. Control by them. We know this information too often. But I cannot do any more because I was a government servant at that time. Whenever they ask for students, ‘how many students do you have to come and march in unison?’ Or they just [ask for] ‘30, 30.’ I have to organize many of my students. I have to [tell the students], ‘ah you have to come, everybody. If you don’t come, you will fail in the examination.’ [laughs] We have to do like that. So, we just become their puppet you see. They control all the teachers, all the students. Ah, control the teacher first, the teacher has to also control the students, but the students, they have no idea, you see. They also have to go in the sunshine, whenever, raining or sometimes very sunny. They have to go marching all the time. They have to make the people—the students, all [on] the government’s side, the military government.

Sayama Mar Lar describes how she also urged her students to comply with the citizenship rule ‘obey the government, when she and her colleagues were put in a similar situation to that described by Saya Sai Tai Leng. The teachers were required to pass along an order for students to clean the village in preparation for a visiting government minister. Sayama Mar Lar and the other teachers thought it was wrong and unfair to ask students to do this. One teacher at Sayama Mar Lar’s school voiced his opposition to this order. Sayama Mar Lar agreed with him and she told her students she felt the order was unfair. However, she concluded her statement to her students by emphasizing that they had to comply nonetheless, since whatever “they [government officials] ask us, we have to go do it.” Therefore, telling her students to follow the citizenship rule ‘obey the government,’ remained her overriding message.

**Sayama Mar Lar:** Then this teacher—When the minister is coming to Yay-nan-mayay Township, people here, including the students, have to go help clean the road. [The government officials said] ‘Go do it. People in the village go. Go make it clean.’ He [the teacher] said, ‘they are human, we are also human... If they are coming, come. If they want to see us during school time, come see. We will ask what we have to ask and we will say what we have to say. We don’t need to do this kind of preparation for them.’ He said that.

**Brooke:** In this situation how did you feel? Did you also think your students shouldn't do that?

**Sayama Mar Lar:** For the cleanliness of the village, we have a village municipality. They have to do it. Students don't need to do it. Students, inside the school, will clean the school... I told the children that this is not related to the children. Children should not have to do it. Children have to study. There is time to study. There is time for children to rest. There is time for sports. Not related to children. Children should not have to do it. [But] They ask us, we have to go do it.

#### Coaching students back into bounds

In the case of this citizenship rule, teachers didn't describe any instances when a student refused to comply with an order from the government. Therefore, compared to the other citizenship rules discussed above, which students occasionally violated, teachers spent relatively little time coaching students back in to bounds in relation to this rule. However, had students refused government orders, teachers would have engaged in protective coaching to help them stay in bounds, as evidenced by their desire to protect their students from harm and their belief that neglecting government orders would result in punishment.

#### **Penalty Mitigation Techniques**

Teachers spend a great deal of time teaching students to always follow these three key citizenship rules so that they will stay safe and 'in bounds.' However, teachers are well aware that abiding by these citizenship rules is difficult and not always possible for their students. Even the teachers, who have had a great deal of practice staying 'in bounds,' occasionally foul, sometimes by choice and sometimes by accident.<sup>176</sup> Even Sayama Yi Yi, who seemed to stay in bounds very diligently, both in her classroom and throughout much of her interview with me, admitted that she may have occasionally made an 'out of bounds' comment in class.

**Brooke:** Have you ever said anything in your classroom that the government wouldn't have wanted you to say?

**Sayama Yi Yi:** I don't know what I say. Sometimes a few words may slip out of my mouth. I cannot say for sure. But there are rules that said we cannot talk about it.

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<sup>176</sup> 8 participants reported this.

Therefore, teachers have an arsenal of what I will refer to as ‘penalty mitigation techniques.’ Using these techniques helps ensure that people who speak and act ‘out of bounds’ incur as little government retribution as possible. The techniques are designed to reduce the chances of getting reported to government authorities. Additionally, several of these techniques can also mitigate the severity of the punishment one receives in the event that one’s transgression is reported. Teachers describe using the five penalty mitigation techniques in their own lives as well as role modeling them for their students. Since they cannot guard their students from going out of bounds at all times, throughout their lives, teaching students to use these mitigation techniques serves as an extra layer of protection against the danger of government retribution.

Also, by teaching and role modeling these penalty mitigation techniques to their students, teachers add nuance to students’ understanding of the boundary between safe and unsafe activities. Often, when teachers emphasize the three key citizenship rules to their students, they do so in a very absolute way. In an effort to be as clear as possible for their students, teachers refer to what is ‘in bounds’ and ‘out of bounds’ as if the boundary is fixed, unmoving and unrelenting. However, teachers are well aware that there are ways to push this boundary and reveal that it does, indeed, have some flexibility. This is what these penalty mitigation techniques are designed for—to strategically navigate these boundaries in ways that allow one more freedom to say and do what one would like to, without incurring punishment for it.

#### *Penalty mitigation techniques: Who should foul*

##### (1) Allow the person most immune to government retribution to foul

One of the penalty mitigation techniques concerns making strategic decisions about who should foul. While fouling is risky for all people, interviewees expressed that certain people have some level of immunity against government retribution and can therefore violate the citizenship rules to some degree without being punished, while others cannot.<sup>177</sup> According to their connections, their job and other factors, interviewees seem to envision various people in Burmese society falling at different points along an immunity continuum. At one end are those

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<sup>177</sup> 8 participants expressed this belief.

monitored particularly closely by the Burmese government and punished for even very minor out of bounds activities. Interviewees noted that these include people who have been caught by the government for fouling in the past, or who have close connections with people who have been caught. In addition, interviewees noted that students as well as government schoolteachers and other civil servants fall on this, more vulnerable end of the continuum. At the other extreme are people who can foul relatively grievously and not incur punishment. Interviewees noted that monks, private tutors and those with close ties to high level military and government personnel fall to one side of this continuum. In a sense, the range of safe, 'in bounds' activities is broader for some people and more constricted for others. Therefore, if the aim is to reduce the overall amount of punishment doled out by the government for going out of bounds, it is safer to allow those with more immunity to foul instead of those who are more vulnerable to government retribution.

Sayama Yi Yi notes how she made use of this penalty mitigation technique when she attended a teacher training. She explains that some teachers at the training fouled by making comments that revealed their displeasure with the government. She notes that they were able to do this because they were the wives of high-level military personnel.

And then we went to attend the training. When we went to attend the teacher training, other teachers talked about their feelings. [laughs] But their husbands are military officers. [laughs] They are teaching at university level. They have a higher position. They talked about their dissatisfaction with the government, but not a lot. For example, when we talked about that we will have to take the exam, and the exam questions are from Naypyidaw<sup>178</sup>, they said 'I don't care if the exam is from Naypyidaw or wherever.' They said something like that. They may also have their feeling inside. Their dissatisfaction, naw?

Sayama Yi Yi chose not to express her views about the government while at the training, leaving that to 'other teachers.' This is likely because she felt particularly vulnerable to government retribution. This was something she expressed several times during our interview. Her husband had been involved in anti-government activities and imprisoned as a result. She felt that because her husband had gone out of bounds so grievously, she had

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<sup>178</sup> Naypyidaw is the name of Burma's capital city.

to be even more careful to stay in bounds than the average person. She worried that the government may have been keeping a closer eye on her than others and if she was caught fouling, the government might give her a more severe punishment than others due to the political history in her immediate family. She makes this clear when she describes how she voted in favor of the government's 2008 constitution even though she didn't actually support it.

Because my husband is like that [known for anti-government activities], the story is getting messier. I just wanted it to be over with. So I just went there and voted as they [the government authorities] wanted. At the voting place, there's a small room that we get in and vote. All the teachers near the room told me and all the other people to just make a checkmark.<sup>179</sup>

Not only do teachers use this penalty mitigation technique in their own lives, some teachers also teach their students to use it.<sup>180</sup> For instance, Saya U Thiha Naing, a monk who held free English and general knowledge classes in his village, described how he urged his students to allow him to go out of bounds but to avoid doing so themselves, since he felt being a monk gave him greater immunity to government retribution. Because his classes were unconnected to the public school system, Saya U Thiha Naing felt he had more freedom to speak openly to his students about the government's faults than teachers employed in government schools. While he encouraged his students to think critically about the government's actions, he also warned them to avoid being too vocal about their criticisms. In the following interview excerpt, Saya U Thiha Naing describes fouling by teaching his students lines from a poem, then explaining that the lines contain political commentary couched in symbolism that can be used to criticize the government. When his students openly voiced their agreement with his criticism of the government, he 'shushed' them and urged them to apply this penalty mitigation technique.

**Saya U Thiha Naing:** My class inside Burma is very free... I teach what I want. I want to—I think this subject, the students really—they should know about that so I teach it... Mostly in the general knowledge class, naw? In the knowledge class. Ah, the poem I said, 'The Person of Compassion'... It also has, you know, one political sentence. Oh, I

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<sup>179</sup> Making a checkmark indicates that one votes 'yes,' as opposed to an X, which indicates a 'no' vote. In this case the teacher voted 'yes' to approve the government's new constitution.

<sup>180</sup> 2 participants reported teaching this to their students.

think, two sentences because not to disturb like the SPDC and the NLD. [almost chuckling] You know? These two, two sentences. [in a whisper] I like that about it... The meaning is ah, how can we say? Don't press. Don't press the weaker group. Don't press. If you are strong, you are a very strong group, you have power. So, don't press the weak group... When I get to that sentence I talk, I talk... [chuckles] I talked 'now *you know who*, who has taken power in Burma. Ah, are *they* fair?' I said that. 'Do *they* press?' They said 'Yes!' They don't know about the NLD. They know the people. They press the people. 'Very different, education, army education and our people's education.' Something like that, they talk.

**Brooke:** That's what the students said?

**Saya U Thiha Naing:** Yeah. [RN: chuckling, whispering] I told 'shhhh' I will tell. Ah, don't talk a lot. It is dangerous for you. I'm a monk. Ah, I have no attachment. [RN: chuckles] I have no girlfriends. I have no—I just have my mother. If I go in the jail, in the prison please take, take care of my mother. Let me talk. You don't talk. You have many work to do. [RN: chuckles] So, I talk. They love it. I also use funny way. Ah, I make jokes about the SPDC sometimes... When I was a monk, naw, I was very brave. [RN: chuckles] ... You know Burmese people are afraid of the police, naw? They can't fight. I fight. I am a monk. You know, because, in Mandalay, in Sagaing, there are many monks. Monks are powerful. In Mandalay and Sagaing. Naw? They [government authorities] are afraid of monks.

#### *Penalty mitigation techniques: When to foul*

A second set of penalty mitigation techniques primarily concerns *when* one should foul. Of course, teachers advise students to always avoid fouling. However, if a person feels they must foul, there are places and situations to do it that are safer than others. They are the following: foul only in the presence of people you trust, and foul when you can shift the blame onto someone else. I will describe each of these mitigation techniques in detail and provide examples.

#### (2) Foul in the presence of people you trust

One of the penalty mitigation techniques teachers feel is particularly important is to only go out of bounds when one is in the presence of highly trusted friends and family.<sup>181</sup> These highly trusted individuals should be people one has established a sense of loyalty with on the basis of a family relationship or long-term friendship. These are people one feels absolutely certain will not report one's boundary violations to government authorities, nor will they discuss one's 'out of bounds' actions with other people who cannot be trusted to

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<sup>181</sup> 7 participants expressed this.

keep this information secret from the government. Thus, to qualify as highly trusted friends and family, they must understand what is in and out of bounds. They must also be sensitive to the dangers of fouling and have a strong desire to keep their friends and family safe from government retribution. Equipped with these understandings, they know what information to keep under wraps and they understand the importance of doing so to protect their family members and close friends. This penalty mitigation technique is primarily designed to prevent one from being reported to government authorities for going out of bounds. When only in the presence of highly trusted friends and family, then one can go out of bounds as frequently and as obviously as one would like to, with little fear of punishment. In contrast, if one fouls in front of people whom one is not close to, information about one's boundary violation may end up with the government, likely resulting in negative consequences.

In the following interview excerpt, Sayama Thida and Sayama Nanda Aye note that they use this penalty mitigation technique when they feel the need to voice their criticism of the government. As this clearly violates the citizenship rule, 'do not criticize the government,' both teachers emphasize that they are 'very selective' about who they foul in front of, doing so only in front of 'friends that can be trusted.' They also remain cognizant of people in the vicinity who could overhear them, in case they are government informers.

**Sayama Thida:** In every teashop there is at least one informer.

**Sayama Nanda Aye:** In every teashop, since the beginning, they [the government authorities] have their own intelligence.

**Sayama Thida:** Even among our teachers, we cannot talk about it. All the teachers, everyone has feelings.

**Sayama Nanda Aye:** Because they have these feelings, they talk about it.

**Sayama Thida:** We talked about it when we were at the teashop. 'I don't know how it is done. This government is this and that.' If we happen to say this, at night—

[RN: Sayama Nanda Aye and Sayama Thida look at each other knowingly and break into chuckles. Sayama Thida doesn't seem to feel that she needs to verbally complete her thought about what will happen at night if they get caught criticizing the government. She seems to assume that what would happen at night is implicitly understood. This is likely because it is commonly known that nighttime is when the military or government authorities tend to take people from their homes to question them and/or punish them if they are suspected of fouling]



**Brooke:** Did you talk to other teachers sometimes about how you felt about the government?

**Sayama Nanda Aye & Sayama Thida:** [RN: spoke almost in unison] We have to be very selective when we talk about it. [RN: Sayama Nanda Aye & Sayama Thida laugh]

**Sayama Nanda Aye:** [RN: speaking animatedly] If it is the friends that can be trusted, we share about this. There are those who cannot be trusted.

Teachers practiced this penalty mitigation technique in their own lives, both inside and outside the classroom.<sup>182</sup> As Sayama Thida and Sayama Nanda Aye emphasize in the interview excerpt above, teachers practice this mitigation technique when interacting with other teachers. Similarly, Sayama Yi Yi describes using this mitigation technique while attending a teacher training. The teachers and the teacher trainers spoke ‘openly’ to each other, criticizing the low wages the government pays teachers. While their comments were clearly ‘out of bounds,’ Sayama Yi Yi notes that the teachers and teacher trainers were ‘really close,’ suggesting that if that was not the case, they wouldn’t have intentionally fouled in front of each other.

All the teachers are also with their hope. They are hoping that their salary will increase. For some people, they have left their jobs. Now, they are doing their own business... Even teachers at the universities, they have to also open a tuition school at their home. Because we were really close, they talked to us openly. They said that they also don’t make enough. Their hope was, from teaching at the university, and teaching us, when they get more experiences they will get scholarship to go study in foreign countries.

Most teachers interviewed for this study also describe applying this penalty mitigation technique in their own classrooms to decide what is safe to do and say in front of their students.<sup>183</sup> For example, Tharamu Lily Paw states that she is careful not to foul in front of her students, as she does not count her students among her highly trusted family and friends. She notes that children pass information on to their parents and different families have loyalties to different political groups. Some families are loyal to the government and would be likely to pass information about teachers’ boundary violations on to government authorities. However, the danger for Tharamu Lily Paw is not limited to government retribution. Because she taught in one of Burma’s border regions where both government troops and ethnic minority armies were

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<sup>182</sup> 7 participants report engaging in this practice.

<sup>183</sup> 8 participants report engaging in this practice.

active, she attempted to steer clear of saying or doing anything in class that would displease the government or any of these other powerful stakeholders.

Even though they are children, we still have to be afraid of them because there are so many kinds of children. There are different kinds of parents. There are children of the [government] authorities... They tell their parents, most of the time. They always tell their school experience at home... Especially in our area, it is a tripartite area. We have to be really careful about what we say. We have DKBA children. We have KNU sons and daughters.<sup>184</sup> And among the civilians we have people who are working in government organizations. Children of the town chief. Even among children, there are different kinds of children. So we have to be careful about those things. Children will simply tell their school experience at home.

Applying this same penalty mitigation technique, Sayama Yi Yi also tries to always remain in bounds in front of her students. Since her students are young and inexperienced in regards to citizenship rules and the dangers of breaking them, she doesn't trust her students to keep her boundary violations secret. As noted earlier in this chapter, she provides protective coaching in response to her students when they ask about the 2007 'Saffron Revolution' protests in class. One of her politically curious students was also her son. Since any mention of this highly politically sensitive event would cause Sayama Yi Yi to foul, responding to her students' queries while remaining 'in bounds' was a significant challenge. However, she skillfully navigated the situation without referring directly to the protests in class, thus successfully remaining in safe territory in front of her students. However, she notes that once she reached home, she explained everything she knew about the protests to her son in detail. Although he was a student in her class, she did this at home, in a one-on-one conversation with him, as that was a safer environment in which to foul. Since they were family, he was more likely than the other students to keep Sayama Yi Yi's boundary violation secret.

Because they are children, they don't really understand anything, they don't understand politics. But sometimes, they like to ask questions like, 'something is going on in Yangon, what is going on in Yangon?' They are very interested about it... When they ask me that, I just answered them as appropriate. I also told them that if I tell you in detail, I could be fired. This recent September uprising, children understood that... But my older son was

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<sup>184</sup> DKBA and KNU are abbreviations for ethnic minority armies, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army and the Karen National Union.

in 4th standard. He was very interested about the event. He also asked me questions. I did not tell him in the class. Because he was my son, I told him at home, as much as I understand. Because this is politics, I don't really understand as well. He is very interested... I have to close his mouth too.

Similarly, Sayama Thida and Sayama Nanda Aye avoided fouling during class because they don't trust that all of their students can keep their boundary violations secret. In addition, they feel that their classroom is far too public a place to foul safely. However, if a particular student whom they do trust wants to know about a politically sensitive topic, they wait until they can speak to the student in a much more private, one-on-one setting.

**Brooke:** Have the students ever said anything to you... about the government?

**Sayama Thida:** I have heard of that. I also observe the situation to know which student is— It is like recruiting. Sometimes, I talk to the students, but not in the classroom. During break time.

**Sayama Nanda Aye:** We talk about it. Yes. If there is something that they want to know, they ask questions.

**Sayama Thida:** Students come and ask questions.

**Sayama Nanda Aye:** Where there is something that they want to know, they come and ask.

**Sayama Thida:** We have to explain it to them.

**Sayama Nanda Aye:** We have to answer. When it's only the child and me, I tell the child about what he wants to know. In that situation, because we know that the child wants to know, we have to tell the child. In those situations we happen to talk about those things.

Saya U Aung Htoo adhered to this same penalty mitigation technique but unlike Sayama Thida and Sayama Nanda Aye, and most other teachers interviewed for this study, he deemed all of his students to be among those he trusted. He felt safe going out of bounds in their presence and therefore he discussed politically sensitive topics in class. In contrast, he refrained from fouling any time there was a person in his classroom who he wasn't familiar with. He worried that people he didn't know could be government informants. Therefore, in their presence he tried to stay in bounds since fouling in front of them made him feel vulnerable to government retribution.

**Saya U Aung Htoo:** [I tell my students] If everyone, everyone is interested in politics and participates in it, we are sure to achieve success.

**Brooke:** You said that you talked about that under SLORC.

**Saya U Aung Htoo:** Yes.

**Brooke:** Did you talk about that under the SPDC?<sup>185</sup>

**Saya U Aung Htoo:** Yes, yes. Within the class, there is a little freedom.

**Brooke:** Tell me about that.

**Saya U Aung Htoo:** Yes. When the situation is good, I try to talk about politics. If the situation is not good, I don't talk about politics. Because I may be arrested for my talk.

**Brooke:** What makes the situation good?

**Saya U Aung Htoo:** Some people came to my school and watched. They are my pupil or intelligence, I don't know. So when I saw a stranger there, I don't tell this about politics.

**Brooke:** So if the stranger's not there—

**Saya U Aung Htoo:** I talk about politics. But most students are not interested in politics. I think it is because of the educational policy. They, they try and, the education policy tries to make students stay away from politics.

While teachers didn't describe teaching their students about this penalty mitigation technique in explicit terms, teachers told of numerous instances in which students watched their teachers role model this mitigation technique.<sup>186</sup> Evidence that students learned this mitigation technique and put it into practice in their own lives is provided by several teachers who describe certain students of theirs who refrained from going out of bounds in the presence of people they didn't trust.<sup>187</sup> For example, Tharamu Lily Paw explained that she repeatedly asked her students about Saw Ba U Gyi, but they refused to answer her. This was the case because the students were aware that Saw Ba U Gyi is a controversial political figure that one shouldn't mention if one hopes to stay in bounds. He was the first president of the Karen National Union, a Karen political party that has long opposed and engaged in armed resistance against the Burmese government. Although Tharamu Lily Paw felt she had a 'very close' relationship with her students, the students didn't fully trust her. She had told them she is half Burman and half Karen, but she didn't speak Karen language. For these reasons, the students were unsure of whether or not to trust her until they met her father, whose Karen background was much more obvious, particularly because he was a native Karen speaker. After she gained their trust, the students told her 'everything' about Saw Ba U Gyi.

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<sup>185</sup> SLORC and SPDC are abbreviations for names the Burmese military government has used to refer to itself during different stages of its rule. The government was called the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) during the beginning of its rule, starting in 1998. It then changed its name to the State Peace and Development Council in 1997.

<sup>186</sup> 7 participants reported this.

<sup>187</sup> 4 participants described their students putting this mitigation technique into practice.

I will tell you one of my experiences. Because I understand English there are some students who came to me to get help for their homework. Some children have been to this side. They live on this side and they went back with the DKBA. So, I asked them, how it was like to be on the other side and I asked them about I heard about Saw Ba U Gyi. And I asked them if what I have heard is true. They are very close to me. They get along with me. No matter how many times I asked, they would not tell me. I know that they know but they would not tell me. Because they don't trust me. Because I have half Burman blood... Father is Karen. Mother is Burmese... Because my mother disagreed, she didn't come me. But later my father came to visit me and after that they know that I am real Karen. Then they tell me about everything.

In addition, during interviews I conducted with former students and teachers from Burma, some participants hesitated to go out of bounds in front of me because we hadn't yet established enough trust.<sup>188</sup> For instance, Hla Hla, a former student from Yangon, hesitated to criticize the government during her interview with me, as this would've caused her to foul. When I asked Hla Hla what topics shouldn't be discussed at school, she responded immediately, with ease. Then when I began asking about any possible violations of this unwritten rule, she shyly admitted to fouling and her responses were slow, and hesitant. They contained very long pauses and some vague and evasive answers. In one instance she said she didn't remember the content of any conversations about politics that she had participated in. When I asked her what she thought of the 2007 'Saffron Revolution' protests, her first response was that she had no opinion about that event. Only after a very long, awkward pause did she note that the treatment of monks involved in the protest made her feel uncomfortable.

**Brooke:** What topics should you not talk about in school?

**Hla Hla:** Aw, don't talk about politics. Even if a friend is talking about politics, don't get involved. The mothers said it like that.

...

**Brooke:** Did you talk about politics sometimes with your friends?

**Hla Hla:** [laughs slightly, smiles, nods.] I talked.

**Brooke:** Like, try to tell me, show me what a conversation was like between you and your friends about politics. Like, what would you say, or what would they say?

**Hla Hla:** That, I don't remember. [RN: Long pause - 15 seconds] Mm, we don't talk about it like the elder people. We talk about the demonstration. During that time, during the September event, it was our exam time. My friends told me, 'after our exam, let's go to demonstrate.' They called me but our exam was postponed for 1 month. I don't think

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<sup>188</sup> This occurred with 3 participants.

that friend did that. She just said it. [RN: laughing]

**Brooke:** in 2007?

**Hla Hla:** Yes.

**Brooke:** What did you think about the September uprising?

**Hla Hla:** I don't see it in any particular way. Just like that. Ah, what should I say? [RN: long pause - 20 seconds] ... Watching them on TV, from the satellite, I saw police beating up monks. I felt bad. There's nothing I can do.

### (3) Foul when you can shift the blame onto someone else

Another penalty mitigation technique that concerns when to foul is to go out of bounds when one can shift the blame for one's actions onto someone else. If a person can show that, as a result of other people's actions, they were maneuvered into a position where they had little choice but to foul, it reduces their own responsibility for it. Fouling under these conditions provides a certain amount of protection from government retribution since one can show that they did not commit the boundary violation because they wanted to. While this does not absolve the boundary violator of all fault for their foul, it could mitigate the potential punishment they would receive from the government in the event that they are caught. Several interviewees described instances when they and/or their colleagues used this mitigation technique.<sup>189</sup> In most cases, they attributed their boundary violation to someone who was superior to them in rank, such as a supervisor or a high-level government minister. They claimed that they went out of bounds as a result of a request or order they received from their superior, which they felt unable to decline.

When Sayama Yi Yi's students asked about the pro-democracy protests in Yangon, she faced the difficult task of giving them protective coaching without violating any boundaries herself. She had to respond in a way that made it clear they shouldn't mention this politically charged event without mentioning the event in question. She was worried that as she provided the protective coaching she would appear to others to be supportive of the protests and to be 'influencing' and 'recruiting' her students to share her view. As that would clearly be well out of bounds, she sought advice from her headmaster about what to say to the students. The headmaster gave her directions both verbally and in writing. Equipped with orders from her superior, Sayama Yi Yi felt safer, since if she followed them any unintentional foul would not be entirely her fault.

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<sup>189</sup> 3 participants reported this.

**Sayama Yi Yi:** Because they are children, they don't really understand anything, they don't understand politics. But sometimes, they like to ask questions like, 'something is going on in Yangon, what is going on in Yangon?' They are very interested about it. We cannot explain that to them. If we do, we will be accused of influencing<sup>190</sup> how children think. And we will be accused of recruiting. *In order not to do like that, we have to ask our headmaster about what to say. And the letter also came to the headmaster.*

...

**Brooke:** What did you say? Did you say 'I can't tell you' or what did you say?

**Sayama Yi Yi:** When they asked me that, I just answered them as appropriate. I also told them that if I tell you in detail, I could be fired. This recent September uprising, children understood that [my emphasis].

Similarly, Sayama Mar Lar recounts how a teacher colleague of hers defended herself using this penalty mitigation technique when she was caught for having fouled. The teacher had gone out of bounds during a visit by a government minister to her school. The local government officials from the nearby township office had helped plan the visit along with the school personnel. The visit was planned in a highly choreographed way, with certain teachers being authorized to speak to the minister and others forbidden to do so. The teacher in question had fouled because she responded to questions the minister posed to her, even though she hadn't been given permission to speak to him. She had disobeyed orders from the local government officials to remain silent. She was later called to the nearby government township office to be punished for going out of bounds in this way. To help vindicate herself, she explained that she didn't want to foul, nor did she intend to foul. However, because the minister had posed questions to her and because he was a high level government official, she didn't feel she could choose not to respond to him. The teacher explained to the local government officials that the minister had good reason to think he could ask her questions, as she was a competent-looking adult, dressed in the green and white teacher's uniform. Had she not responded, it would've appeared disrespectful to the minister, which would also have been out of bounds to a degree.

They made an arrangement that when the minister came, who can speak and who cannot speak. They made an arrangement. But that teacher is a senior, about 50 years old. She was there. So, the minister asked her a question. 'How many students do you

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<sup>190</sup> She used the Burmese word *aoG*; *aqmif*, pronounced 'thwe soun,' translated here as 'influence.' 'Thwe soun' literally means to seduce or lure someone's blood. It has a very negative connotation because it implies that you are convincing someone of something by telling a lie.

have? Is everything going well with school? Is your teaching going well?’ he asked. That teacher answered. Because the minister asked her, she answered. But the next day, the township<sup>191</sup> called her [to come see them]. ‘Come to the town.’ She had to go. She didn’t know what happened. She went. She arrived there. ‘Why did you talk without our permission? Who told you to talk?’ She explained, ‘I didn’t talk. He came to ask me. I am an adult. I am a teacher who is wearing green and white. So, as a teacher, an adult, he thought I would know, so he asked me. So I answered. I didn’t go tell him.’ ‘We want to punish you. You are not in the list of those who can speak. How could you speak?’ They called her and told her that. She talked back, ‘I didn’t do anything wrong. Because I was asked, I answered. I didn’t do anything wrong.’ She talked back like that and came back.

Although Sayama Mar Lar’s colleague had to endure this intense, uncomfortable questioning by local government officials, she did not incur more long-lasting punishments such as being fired. Using this penalty mitigation technique and showing how the blame for this boundary violation did not lie entirely with her, likely helped her evade more severe government retribution.

#### *Penalty mitigation techniques: How to foul*

Teachers also made use of a series of penalty mitigation techniques that concern *how* to foul in a way that makes one safer from government retribution. Each of these techniques are designed to enable one to go ‘out of bounds,’ then deny one has actually done so. This is made possible because using these techniques increases the field of one’s possible meanings when one makes an ‘out of bounds’ statement or engages in an ‘out of bounds’ activity. Therefore employing these penalty mitigation techniques as one fouls decreases the chance of being reported for a boundary violation, since those who witness it may not be entirely sure of one’s meaning. They may be uncertain of whether one actually fouled or unable to prove it. However, in the event that one is reported for a boundary violation, having used these mitigation techniques as the foul took place makes it easier to claim that one was simply misunderstood and that no foul actually occurred. They are all designed to give people the option to say, I wasn’t doing or saying what you thought I was doing. What I did and said was innocent, well meaning and fully ‘in bounds.’

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<sup>191</sup> By ‘township’ the teacher is likely referring to the local government township office.



#### (4) Use ambiguous terminology

One common penalty mitigation technique that allows one to foul more safely is to avoid using terminology that directly and specifically identifies 'out of bounds' subject matter. Instead, use terminology that introduces ambiguity into one's statements. This can be done by employing unattributed pronouns, epithets, euphemisms, symbolism and/or metaphor. Employing these linguistic tactics can partially obscure 'out of bounds' components of one's comments and activities. While each of these linguistic tactics could be considered separate mitigation techniques, I have grouped them together here because they share a great deal in common. They all involve making small adjustments to one's wording to refer to an incriminating topic in a safer way, by being indirect and introducing some ambiguity. In this way, anyone listening who lacks the requisite background knowledge, or a passerby who isn't aware of the full context in which the comment was made, is less likely to be able to decode the meaning of one's statement. Therefore they may fail to recognize it as 'out of bounds.' At the same time, one's statement can be understood by the people one is intending to converse with, as one can choose ambiguous wording that they have the background knowledge to decipher. As one is likely to be fouling in the presence of people they know and trust, there is usually a broad body of shared knowledge they can draw on and implicitly reference.

Most participants interviewed for this dissertation study recounted one or more instances when they or someone they know used unattributed pronouns, epithets, euphemism, symbolism and/or metaphor in a way that obscured or partially obscured an out of bounds comment or action.<sup>192</sup> For example, in Saya U Thiha Naing's description of an instance when he went out of bounds in front of his students, we find that he used this penalty mitigation technique. As he criticized the government during class he used a combination of symbolism, epithet and unattributed pronouns in a way that introduced ambiguity regarding where, exactly, his criticism was directed. He initiated his critique of the government using symbolic language from a Buddhist poem. He believes the poem's symbolic language conveys a veiled criticism of all powerful groups who seek to dominate and oppress weaker groups. He explains this interpretation of the poem to his students. However, he carefully avoids specifically naming the

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<sup>192</sup> 7 participants reported this.

Burmese government as an oppressor. Similarly, he does not name exactly who he believes is being oppressed. Instead, he uses the epithet ‘you know who’ to refer to the government, followed by the unattributed pronoun ‘they.’ While this same interview excerpt is included earlier in the chapter, I will include a shortened version of it here with Saya U Thiha Naing’s ambiguous terminology in italics. He only mentions specific names in this passage, such as ‘NLD’ and ‘SPDC,’ to explicate his meaning to me to facilitate my understanding. When he recounts what he said to his students, he uses only ambiguous terms.

**Saya U Thiha Naing:** Ah, the poem I said, ‘The Person of Compassion’... It also has, you know, one political sentence... The meaning is ah, how can we say? Don’t press. Don’t press the weaker group. Don’t press. If you are strong, you are a very strong group, you have power. So, don’t press the weak group... When I get to that sentence I talk, I talk... [chuckles] I talked ‘now *you know who*, who has taken power in Burma. Ah, are *they* fair?’ I said that. ‘Do *they* press?’ They said ‘Yes!’ They don’t know about the NLD. They know the people. They press the people. ‘Very different, education, army education and our people’s education.’ Something like that, they talk.

**Brooke:** That’s what the students said?

**Saya U Thiha Naing:** Yeah. [RN: chuckling, whispering] I told ‘shhhh’ I will tell. Ah, don’t talk a lot. It is dangerous for you. I’m a monk. Ah, I have no attachment. [RN: chuckles] I have no girlfriends. I have no—I just have my mother. If I go in the jail, in the prison please take, take care of my mother. Let me talk. You don’t talk. You have many work to do. [RN: chuckles]

If he was accused of fouling, Saya U Thiha Naing could claim that he wasn’t talking about the government oppressing the people. Since he didn’t explicitly say who he was talking about, Saya U Thiha Naing makes it more difficult for anyone to prove he was criticizing the government. For instance, Saya U Thiha Naing could claim that he was criticizing a group or political party that the government itself dislikes, such as the NLD. While it is somewhat out of bounds to even mention anti-government groups, criticizing them is likely considered a less severe foul than criticizing the government. Additionally, when his students name a specific issue that they disagree with—that education for military personnel and their families is better quality than schools for civilians—Saya U Thiha Naing immediately shushes them. As noted earlier in this chapter, this is due in part because he feels they are more vulnerable to government retribution than he was, as he was a monk at that time. However, they use such specific terms in their comment that it erodes the ambiguity that Saya U Thiha Naing had been cultivating. All of a

sudden his students had exposed that he was, indeed, criticizing the government, making everyone involved more vulnerable to punishment, including Saya U Thiha Naing. This was likely another reason that he shushed his students with such urgency after they made that comment.

In addition, teachers used this penalty mitigation technique during their interviews with me. For instance, Sayama Yi Yi used this mitigation technique multiple times when we met. This may have been because, as noted above, she felt she needed to be particularly vigilant about protecting herself from government retribution because her husband had been caught and imprisoned for engaging in 'out of bounds' activities. When speaking during our interview she used a combination of unattributed pronouns, euphemisms and metaphor to avoid directly mentioning controversial issues or past boundary violations that could get her in trouble with the government. I don't think that Sayama Yi Yi used this mitigation technique during our interview because she was particularly worried that I would reveal her identity along with what she had said to the Burmese government. Using this penalty mitigation technique had become second nature to her. It was how she normally spoke. While explaining why she voted in favor of Burma's new constitution in 2008, Sayama Yi Yi used this mitigation technique, employing a metaphor as well as a phrase with an unattributed pronoun, which I have italicized in the following quote.

*Because my husband is like that, the story is getting messier.* I just wanted it to be over with. So I just went there and voted as they [the government authorities] wanted. At the voting place, there's a small room that we get in and vote. All the teachers near the room told me and all the other people to just make a checkmark.<sup>193</sup>

She referred to her husband's controversial history of political involvement using the ambiguous phrase 'my husband is like that.' She provided no explicit explanation for the meaning of the pronoun 'that.' Discussing her husband's 'out of bounds' activities with me using specific terminology would've been riskier since it would likely have highlighted injustices committed by the authorities, implying criticism of the government. It could have revealed specific fouls her husband has committed, some of which may not be widely known and which he may not yet

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<sup>193</sup> Making a checkmark indicates that one votes 'yes,' as opposed to an X, which indicates a 'no' vote. In this case the teacher voted 'yes' to approve the government's new constitution, completed in 2008.

have been punished for. Simply stating that her husband was 'like that' was a safe and more convenient shorthand she could use with me because she knew I was aware that her husband had engaged in controversial political activities in the past. She then used a metaphor that slightly narrowed the field of possible meanings for her preceding comment. She said, "the story is getting messier." In saying this she seems to be equating her life to a story and equating her increasing likelihood of government retribution with mounting 'mess.'

Sayama Yi Yi also uses the term 'situation' as a euphemism for politically sensitive topics. She did this in her interview with me. For instance, she used the word 'situation' to refer broadly to her husband's 'out of bounds' activities, the pain and suffering she and her husband endured as a result of his imprisonment by the government and the ongoing sense of danger they felt after he had served his prison term.

Even though I am a citizen of the country with a different religion, I still love this country [Burma]. I cannot stand the separation. That is why I have lived there that long. I am here [in Thailand] just because of all of the situations.

Using the word 'situation' as a euphemism to refer to politically sensitive topics without going out of bounds was, in fact, relatively common among my interviewees. In addition to Sayama Yi Yi, five other interviewees used it as an ambiguous way to refer to various aspects of the political turmoil in Burma. Not only that, both myself and one of the translators that accompanied me to an interview also began using the word 'situation' in the same way. For instance, after Sayama Yi Yi made a comment about the pro-democracy protests that took place in Yangon in 2007, she refer to them as the 'recent September uprising.' However, when the translator translated her statement into English, he called this sensitive political event 'the September situation.'

**Sayama Yi Yi:** [in Burmese] When they ask me that I just answered them as appropriate. I also told them that if I tell you in detail, I could be fired. This recent September uprising, children understood that.

**Translator:** [in English] *The September situation*, students asked about that and she, um, answers as, as possible as she can. But no details. No details. No details.

I had also heard the word ‘situation’ used so frequently as a euphemism for politically sensitive issues in Burma that I began to use it. I incorporated it into one of my standard interview questions that I asked almost all my interviewees. I asked teachers what they taught their students about “the situation in their country,” and I asked students what they learned in school about “the situation in their country.” I used this ambiguous word to give the interviewees a lot of flexibility in how they answered my question. Since the word ‘situation’ is also often used in a non-euphemistic way, interviewees could choose to tell me about topics that were either in bounds or out of bounds. Sayama Thida and Sayama Nanda Aye were two of the teachers who interpreted my use of the term ‘situation’ as meaning politically sensitive topics that are supposed to be taboo.

**Brooke:** Sayama, in your experience teaching what did you teach your students about their country? About the situation in their country?

**Sayama Thida:** I didn’t teach anything. We only taught we they issued.

**Sayama Nanda Aye:** We only taught what they issued. We cannot talk about anything more than what is said in the book... If we want to talk about our country to the children, we can only talk about it as if it is a fairytale. One cannot tell the truth about what is happening.

**Sayama Thida:** The truth about what is happening cannot be told.

Another common euphemism multiple teachers used during their interviews with me is ‘the event.’ They used this term to refer to the largest pro-democracy protest in the nation’s history, which took place in 1988. These protests are highly politically sensitive as it was a time when hundreds of thousands of people throughout Burma openly criticized the government and questioned its legitimacy. The military also killed thousands of peaceful protesters, which has resulted in the Burmese government being strongly condemned, both domestically and internationally. Teachers seem to use the 1988 protests as a marker in time. For instance, Sayama Sandar Win mentioned it just briefly in passing, as she was telling me about her childhood and early adulthood.

And then, my uncle was the chair of the worker’s association. So, later he connected me with the education ministry. I worked as a clerk, education clerk, naw? It is a school clerk. I worked 5 years. After that, I started working as a teacher, after I graduated... I graduated after *the event*, in 1989, September [my emphasis].

Similarly, Sayama Mar Lar uses the 1988 protests to differentiate between eras in which different educational policies were put in place.

They [teachers] taught the 38 mingala. They taught about Buddha. They taught us when I was young. That is, at that time, we had to take an exam. We had to take a Buddhism exam. When we grew up, it disappeared. They no longer taught it. Now, after *the people's event*—*after the people's event*, 10 years after that, we were told to teach the 38 mingala at school [my emphasis].

While referring to the 1988 protests euphemistically as 'the event' does help the speaker avoid using the politically sensitive words 'protest' or 'uprising,' it doesn't introduce as much ambiguity as other vague terms, such as 'the situation.' This is because 'the event' has become such a commonly used euphemism for that tumultuous time in Burma's history that when one uses it, it is immediately clear what event one is talking about. Therefore, using this euphemism provides little to no additional protection from government retribution. However, it is likely that one of the reasons the use of this euphemism became popular was that it did provide a certain level of ambiguity and therefore, protection in the past.

#### (5) Provide an 'Assist'

Another penalty mitigation technique teachers model for their students is to structure one's comments in a way that 'out of bounds' statements can be left unsaid, while still being understood by those one is speaking to. Teachers described several instances when they used this mitigation technique to foul more safely in front of their students.<sup>194</sup> These include fouls such as criticizing the government or referencing a politically sensitive topic. To do this, teachers provide their students with key information needed to understand the 'out of bounds' comment the teacher is trying to imply. For instance, when a teacher seeks to implicitly criticize the government, this key information may include a description of a difficulty or injustice they believe many people in Burma face, such as poverty or low quality public education. While teachers believe the issue is the government's fault, they will leave out all references to who is to blame. If the teacher wants to implicitly refer to a particular topic that the government deems off limits, they will talk about topics widely recognized as safe to discuss, but which are

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<sup>194</sup> 6 participants reported this.

closely linked to the taboo topic they are trying to imply. The teacher then signals to the students that they have left an important piece of the conversation unsaid and encourages them to figure out using their own thinking skills. In other words, teachers provide their students with information that can be used as puzzle pieces to uncover the teachers' implied meaning. However, the teacher doesn't put all the pieces together for the students. The teachers encourage the students to use their own thinking skills to connect the information together, which will reveal the 'out of bounds' comment the teacher is trying to communicate, if they assemble the clues as the teacher intended. Because the teachers are leaving the critique of the government and/or the politically sensitive topic unspoken, this gives them the ability to deny they ever intended to imply such things. Therefore, it is a safer way to foul.

Keeping in line with the sports-themed metaphors used by the Burmese teachers, I have chosen to refer to this penalty mitigation technique as an 'assist' because it closely mirrors an 'assist' as it is carried out in basketball, soccer and many other sports. In the same way that a player passes a ball to his or her teammate in order for them to score, Burmese teachers pass their students key information they need to understand the 'out of bounds' comment the teacher is trying to convey. Just as the sports player providing an assist helps create the ideal conditions under which his or her team can score, teachers help create the conditions under which their students will be able to connect key facts together to understand the teacher's 'out of bounds' comment. However, just as the soccer player who is given the ball must step up and make the goal, the students must step up and connect the facts to arrive at the government critique.

While this penalty mitigation technique and the one described just above, 'using ambiguous terminology,' both make the meaning of the speaker's words more debatable, these mitigation techniques differ in that when providing an assist, one doesn't necessarily use linguistic tactics such as metaphors, euphemisms or unattributed pronouns. Instead of ambiguity being provided by a certain vague term, when one provides an assist, the ambiguity is created by leaving the most incriminating part of one's message implicit. So, while a teacher using the 'ambiguous terminology' mitigation technique would say "'you know who' is failing to provide the country with quality public education,' a teacher providing an assist would lament Burma's poor quality

education system without explicitly mentioning that there is blame to attribute to a certain person or group. In the interview excerpt below, Sayama Mar Lar provides an example of how she uses an 'assist' to make this very same 'out of bounds' point when speaking to her students.

**Brooke:** When they [students] finish studying with you, how are their ideas about Burma different?

**Sayama Mar Lar:** Over there, I am not in a situation where I can teach clearly like this to the children. When I taught them, they can't think. They only see that USDA are doing this for them. Swan-arr-shin<sup>195</sup> is doing this for us. They always see only this. Children don't really know that the government is not good. "Because our government is not good, we are this, naw? Had our government been good, referring to those kind of government matters—" This way, we didn't dare to say this. "If our education is good, if we can have fewer students with enough teachers, you will be more educated. Now that we got to teach in small rooms with a lot of students, you don't learn anything. It is because our country is insufficient in everything. You try to think, why is that the case?" In their mind, they just have a thought, and it was left there. Unlike children here, they cannot see clearly why this is the case.

Sayama Mar Lar notes that even though she believes the government to be at fault, she wouldn't 'dare' say that. The risk of government retribution is too high. Instead, she points out the problem without referring to the cause of the problem. She then explicitly encourages students to think carefully about why this difficulty exists, saying, 'You try to think, why is that the case?' In saying this, she is trying to point out to the students that there is something important that she is leaving unsaid and that they can discover what it is if they ponder this issue further. She hopes that the students will connect the dots, and identify, on their own, that the government's policies lie at the root of the problem.

Like Sayama Mar Lar, Tharamu Lily Paw provides an assist to her students while speaking in front of her whole class. However, instead of using it to encourage students to critique the government, Tharamu Lily Paw provides the assist to implicitly refer to 'out of bounds' topics. While she doesn't state exactly which 'out of bounds' topics she was alluding to, Tharamu Lily Paw's wording suggests that she is implicitly referring to General Aung San's support for democracy in Burma and/or his assassination, widely believed to have been orchestrated by

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<sup>195</sup> The Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) and Swan-arr-shin are government-affiliated groups.



other military generals who did not support a democratic path for the country. These are both considered highly politically sensitive issues that one should avoid discussing in order to stay safe from government retribution. In the following interview excerpt Tharamu Lily Paw describes using this penalty mitigation technique to me via a Burmese-English translator who is present to facilitate communication between Tharamu Lily Paw and me.

**Tharamu Lily Paw:** When people don't respect and cherish General Aung San, it's just because they don't know him. When they know him, they would just respect and value him as we do. All the headmasters also respect and value him. That's why they allow us to talk about him. So, we talk about the king who built the fourth Burma, oh not king, the person. In order to escape from colonial rule, the person who built the country through education, politics, military and other things was General Aung San...

Sometimes, by talking and talking the speed started to increase to the point where we almost crossed the line. Then we had to stop by saying, 'you all know, right?' [laughs]

**Translator** [in English]: [RN: in a teasing, jovial tone] Yeah, then she told them, when we were going to arrive at the political part and she said 'Okay! You all know right? Yes? Finished! [RN: laughs]

**Brooke:** Yeah? [RN: laughs] She said that to them? You want to know more but we can't go on?

**Translator** [in English]: We cannot go on. Yeah.

**Brooke:** [laughing] She really said that?

**Translator:** [in English] Yeah.

**Tharamu Lily Paw** [in Burmese]: They know.

**Translator** [in English]: But also the kids know. If she passed that part, you know, she will be in danger so then, 'okay all you know, right?' 'Yeah!' [RN: laughs]

Tharamu Lily Paw sets up this assist by giving students information that is safe to discuss, but which is related to the 'out of bounds' information she would like to share. She then abruptly stops and says to students in a knowing tone, 'You all know, right?' By this Tharamu Lily Paw means to imply that there are related issues they are not able to openly discuss, but if the students take a moment to consider the context, they should be able to figure out what the unspoken topics are. This involves using the information she had already given them like puzzle pieces and connecting them together in their own mind. In this way, Tharamu Lily Paw is able to bring these forbidden topics into the conversation without putting herself at excessive risk. If questioned by the authorities or a supervisor about what she meant, she could've claimed that her vague comment, 'you all know right' was in reference to something completely 'in bounds.'

#### (6) Frame foul as a joke

Framing one's 'out of bounds' comments as a joke is another penalty mitigation technique that came up repeatedly in interviews. Four teachers mentioned using this mitigation technique themselves and/or seeing others use it. In addition, one teacher used this mitigation technique while speaking to me during our interview. In some cases, interviewees couched a critique of the government within a joke. In other instances, interviewees used a joke to refer to a politically sensitive topic. Like using an 'assist' or employing ambiguous terminology, this penalty mitigation technique provides protection by increasing the ambiguity of one's meaning, making it harder to know if a foul occurred. Joking can also enable the speaker to appear light-hearted about the controversial topics he or she is broaching, making it seem less likely that the speaker feels deeply wronged to the extent that they will take action against the government due to the controversial issues they mention. This may mitigate potential government retribution.

For instance, Hla Hla described subtly broaching a number of politically sensitive topics by joking with a friend. Her joke, which she made in late 2007, pertained to a recent dramatic increase in the cost of riding the various public and privately run bus routes around Yangon, referred to as 'line cars.' The price increase was caused by a recent reduction in government fuel subsidies, which is widely acknowledged to be one of the sparks that led to the 2007 pro-democracy protests. Hla Hla gently teased her friend about whether he would still pay to ride the line cars if the price continued to rise exponentially.

**Brooke:** How did most students around you feel about [what happened in] September?

**Hla Hla:** [RN: long pause] Mm, one of my friends--when the car fare went up, I asked him, will you still pay if the car fare is 10,000 kyat? He said, 'I will still have to pay.'

**Translator** [in Burmese]: Car fares? What car? The school ferry?

**Hla Hla** [in Burmese]: Including the ferry fee and other things like rising oil prices. I asked him 'if the line car fee is 10,000 kyat, will you pay? Will you still ride the line car?' 'It still has to be paid.' [RN: chuckles]

**Translator** [in Burmese]: So you asked him like that?

**Hla Hla:** [RN: affirmative tone] Mm-hmm.

**Translator** [in English]: Oh. [RN: chuckles] She, doesn't actually know about one of her friends. Like, as a joke she asked her like, maybe because of the uprising, if the price went up, if you have to pay like, if you take a bus, if you have to pay like 10,000 kyats for

a time, would you pay for that? Would you just go with that car? 'Yes.'

**Brooke:** She said yes?

**Translator** [in English]: Yes. [chuckles] Just a joke. It just means like people cannot do anything. You just have to do that. Whatever the government, ah, whatever the government does, people just have to do that. Even like they raise the price, people just have to do it. They can't afford anything. [RN: chuckles]

Through joking with her friend, Hla Hla implicitly criticizes the government for putting much of Burma's population in a precarious financial situation, as the line car is the primary means of transportation to work and school for many people. She suggests that the effects of the government's policy change are highly unjust and her teasing highlights that they are at the government's mercy and have almost no other choice than to submit to the government's policies regardless of how unfair they may be. While teasing her friend, Hla Hla is also implicitly asking him if he will take any action against the government, such as boycott public transportation or even join the pro-democracy protesters who were marching through Yangon at that time. Her friend answered by confirming that he felt he had no recourse but to pay for public transportation, regardless of the cost. In this way, he stayed fully in bounds by noting that he would not take any action against the government. However, his answer also implicitly acknowledged that he feels forced to submit to government policies even when they are unjust and threaten his ability to support himself.

Had Hla Hla raised these politically sensitive topics in the form of a serious discussion, instead of alluding to them through light-hearted teasing, her foul would've appeared much more grave. Stoically asking her friend if he planned to continue submitting to the government's unfair policy would've made Hla Hla appear to feel more deeply wronged by the government and more likely to want to take action against the authorities. Therefore, she would be more vulnerable to punishment by government authorities.

Another example of this penalty mitigation technique in use was evident in Tharamu Lily Paw's story about her student who joked about his father having to 'feed' 3 other 'sons,' meaning he is required to support the three active armies living in the area with money, food and supplies. This joke was mentioned above, in the section of this chapter describing how teachers instruct their students not to critique the government. However, I mention it again here, as it provides a

clear example of a student criticizing the government in their classroom using a joke to provide some protection against government retribution. Tharamu Lily Paw contributed part of her salary to help buy books for him and other students whose families couldn't afford to buy them on their own. When she got upset and exclaimed "can't you even get a book for yourself?" her student responded with great timing and wit, "our father is not only working to feed us. He has 3 other sons." Tharamu Lily Paw found this incredibly funny and burst out laughing, but also told him to be quiet for his own safety. The humor in this comment gives it a light-heartedness that suggests that the student accepts this difficult situation for what it is and does not plan to take any action to try to change it. In this way the joke adds a certain protection from government retribution as it makes the student appear more resigned to the government's injustices than he would seem if he had referenced this issue in a more serious way. Note that the joke also incorporates a metaphor, referring to the armies as '3 sons,' which likely provides additional protection for the student.

#### (7) Legitimate foul through association with highly respected topic

When interviewees make comments or engage in activities that are 'out of bounds,' or teetering close to it, they often align their comments with something or someone that is highly respected. This could be anything from a work of literature to a historical figure, to a religion. Using this penalty mitigation technique bolsters the legitimacy of one's statement while simultaneously increasing one's protection from government retribution.<sup>196</sup> For instance, instead of criticizing the government and backing up one's statement with one's own beliefs about what is right and wrong, interviewees criticize the government noting that the government has violated Buddhist values and precepts, for example. In this way, the critique doesn't appear to be originating wholly with the speaker. The speaker is merely using beliefs that are widely held and greatly respected and comparing them to the government's actions. In a sense, using this mitigation technique distances the speaker from the critique. It cloaks one's foul in borrowed legitimacy.

Buddhism is one of the most common topics interviewees referred to when they made statements that the Burmese government may consider 'out of bounds.' Buddhist monks and

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<sup>196</sup> 4 participants reported using this mitigation technique themselves and/or seeing others use it.

Buddhism in general is so highly respected in Burma, that they are often considered beyond reproach. While the government has acted as if it is above all other forms of law and authority, the top military generals have gone to great pains to show themselves obtaining blessings from monks. Generals are often shown on government-run TV making donations to Buddhist monasteries and bowing at the monks' feet. Therefore, if a person aligns themselves and their comments with aspects of Buddhism, this could help shield their 'out of bounds' comments from government retribution.

Sayama Mar Lar was one of several interviewees that used Buddhism to protect herself in this way. While she wanted to tell her students that Burma's poor education system was the fault of the government, she knew it would be dangerous to say that to her class outright. So, instead, she provided her students with an assist while simultaneously invoking Buddhism. She focused her comments on describing the problem with the education system and omitted her thoughts about who is to blame. She also framed her criticisms of the school system as violations of Buddhist precepts.

**Sayama Mar Lar** [in Burmese]: They [the students] were told an example. 'For example, we graduated from 10th standard. We attended the university. The education that we got was real, real. Now, children take the 10th standard exam. Cheated. Government does not allow anything to be said. This is not because [they] love you. If they love you, they will have to teach you the real education.' The government does not allow us to say that. "You don't get real education. You cheated. You attended university. You graduated. You don't know how to do anything... When you are not educated, when you don't know anything, they will be able to rule you as long as they want. They are making our country poorer and incur more suffering.' Teachers explain that to children. They started to know a little.

**Translator** [in Burmese]: Teacher, so you said that?

**Sayama Mar Lar** [in Burmese]: No, it wasn't me that said that. It was the teacher who taught history—Mm—me, I have never said something like that. 'I don't like this education system. *In Buddhism, cheating is a bad thing.* Encouraging this thing, I don't like it. It shouldn't be this way.' I told them only this much. [my emphasis]

By using this penalty mitigation technique, Sayama Mar Lar positions herself as an observer who has noted the incongruence between Buddhist precepts and the government's education policies. This mitigates the danger of disagreeing with education policy, since if she was called out for being critical of the government, she could claim that the criticism did not come from

her. It was an issue between the government and Buddhist doctrine. She could also say that she was merely teaching her students about Buddhist principles and encouraging her students to study hard.

Similarly, Hla Hla used Buddhism to mitigate the danger of making an ‘out of bounds’ comment during her interview with me. When I asked what she thought about the 2007 ‘Saffron Revolution’ protests, she claimed to have no opinion. This was a very safe statement to make as it didn’t violate any of Burma’s unwritten citizenship rules. However, the Burmese-English translator who was present to facilitate communication between Hla Hla and I pressed her for a more substantive answer. She then made use of this mitigation technique in her response.

**Brooke** [in English]: How—what did you think about the September uprising?

**Translator** [in Burmese]: How do you see the September uprising?

**Hla Hla** [in Burmese]: I don’t see it in any particular way. Just like that. Ah, what should I say? [RN: long pause]

**Translator** [in Burmese]: Think slowly.

**Hla Hla** [in Burmese]: [RN: long pause] Watching them on TV, from the satellite, I saw police beating up monks. I felt bad. There’s nothing I can do.

When pressed for an opinion, she mentioned her discomfort seeing Buddhist monks being beaten during the protests. Her statement implicitly criticized the government, as it was the government’s top military generals who ordered soldiers to treat the monks in this way. However, any negative statement she could have made about the protests would’ve implicitly critiqued the government. She chose a statement that aligned herself with Buddhist monks. Because monks are so highly respected in Burma, it would be unthinkable for even the most ardent government supporters to agree that it is acceptable to treat monks in this highly disrespectful manner. In fact, shortly after the protests occurred, the government defended its actions claiming that those individuals were not real monks; they were simply masquerading as monks. While this is unlikely to be true, to prevent broader unrest in response to their treatment of the monks, it was important for the government to provide some explanation to exonerate itself from the accusation of having mistreated monks.

While it was the most common, Buddhism was not the only respected topic used to legitimate people's fouls. Teachers also used the official government school history curriculum as a cloak of legitimation when going 'out of bounds.' For instance, Sayama Mar Lar recounts how her colleague taught students about human rights and democracy, two topics that are considered highly politically sensitive. When the headmaster questioned her about this, she made the argument that these issues were related to 'the history subject.' Using this particular wording, she emphasizes that she is referring to the history class taught in schools. In this way, the teacher is using the official, government-endorsed, history curriculum to legitimate her foul.

Although scholars, ethnic minority leaders and others outside Burma have criticized Burma's official curriculum, it is uncommon for people living inside Burma to question the accuracy or legitimacy of government curricula. This also proved true among those interviewed for this study. Although interviewees critiqued many other aspects of the education system, such as widespread tolerance of cheating and bribery, high teacher-student ratios as well as shortages of materials, the content of textbooks seemed beyond reproach. They seemed to think of textbooks as canonical texts that have and should remain unchanged throughout the ages. Thus, when Sayama Mar Lar's colleague attempts to associate her 'out of bounds' comments with the official curriculum, this legitimates her comments to some degree.

**Brooke:** Do they [government authorities] let you teach any way you want?

**Sayama Mar Lar:** ...Teachers teach history. [One teacher said] 'Humans, in order to get human rights, have to try.' This teacher taught history. She is a history major. She taught thoroughly. The headmaster came to warn her. 'You, don't teach like this. The children's spirit will rise up.' The children will make noise. Don't teach like this.' The teacher replied 'I teach the history<sup>197</sup> that is related to the history subject.' The headmaster explained to her. The headmaster didn't like her. [They] had a problem. The teacher said, 'what is democracy, humans must have freedom.' She taught that. The headmaster knew that. All children listened to her, they agreed. They said, 'what teacher said is true.' They accepted it. But the headmaster didn't like it.

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<sup>197</sup> Two different words for 'history' are used in this sentence. 'The first is သမိုင်း, pronounced 'tha-mine,' meaning the real history that occurred. The second is သမိုင်းကျောင်း, pronounced 'tha-mine jown,' meaning the school history subject.

It is important to note that no government textbooks contain explicit references to democracy or human rights. So, the teacher's claim that these topics are related to the textbook content is stretching the truth somewhat. Nevertheless, that doesn't affect the fact that the teacher is attempting to borrow the legitimacy of the history curriculum to mitigate the danger of fouling.

### **Connecting findings to the civic education literature**

Certain examples used in this chapter reveal that some teachers in Burma seek to expand their students' **historical literacy** beyond what the textbook content provides in this area of citizenship education.<sup>198</sup> For instance, teachers expose their students to more than just the few historical figures and events in the Myanmar readers. While the historical figures in the Myanmar readers include only General Aung San, U Pho Sein and Sein Baedar, educators such as Saya Zaw Win and Tharamu Lily Paw describe discussing other historical figures with their students, including Aung San Suu Kyi and Saw Ba U Gyi. In this way, Burmese educators are teaching historical literacy as it is conceptualized by Gagnon (1996, p. 242), who stresses the importance of learning the history of one's nation, including major events, processes and individuals who have shaped what one's country looks like today.

However, in reflecting on how this 'protective coaching' form of citizenship education, as a whole, corresponds to the civic education components and approaches addressed in the academic literature, it is clear that the findings presented in this chapter stretch and expand common notions of what 'citizenship education' is. Of all the popular civic education components and approaches, these findings correspond most closely to **participatory citizenship education**. However, the participatory citizenship education described here is quite unlike any discussed in existing civic education research. This form of citizenship education is typically described as training that prepares students to put their civic knowledge and skills into action in ways that protect and improve their community and nation. Kymlicka (2003, p. 50), Walker (2002, p. 184) and others emphasize that it is not enough for people to merely learn how to be a good citizen in theory. Citizens need to be active within the civic landscape of their

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<sup>198</sup> 8 participants reported this.



communities by voicing their opinions on pressing political and social issues and actively addressing such issues by running for political office or volunteering for civil society groups (Lister, 1997, p. 33-34). The participatory citizenship education going on in Burmese classrooms stands in stark contrast with this existing understanding.

In a sense, through ‘protective coaching’ teachers train students in how *not* to participate in civic life. For instance, students are urged to avoid engaging in critique about political, social or other issues, as such discussion could invoke the ire of the government. Teachers also discourage students from participating in civic discourse on many current and historical events, as they are considered politically sensitive and therefore taboo. Government teachers in Burma do not suggest that students should seek to better their community through political participation or volunteer work. Instead, teachers equip students with the skills to participate in civic life as safely as possible when they find themselves in situations where they have no choice but to engage as active citizens. These skills serve as a suit of armor for students to wear as they seek to navigate the precarious landscape of Burma’s civic life.

Similarly, many aspects of ‘protective coaching’ seem to promote the antithesis of the **critical pedagogy** branch of civic education. Scholars of critical pedagogy, such as Paulo Freire (1990), Henry Giroux (1980), and Donaldo Macedo (1993) argue that critical thinking is essential to be a well-rounded citizen who can participate fully in civic life. However, for the most part, government teachers in Burma train students to avoid thinking critically, especially about the government, the military and their policies. They coach students not to question how things are done in their community or suggest improvements, as this could be interpreted as criticizing the government. In essence, much of the civic education curriculum content delivered in Burma’s schools promotes what Marciano (1997) has referred to as ‘civic illiteracy,’ which he describes as fostering blind patriotism and depriving youth of the skills they need to critically reflect on the actions of those in power.

In this way, bringing the case of Burma into conversation with the broader citizenship education literature introduces a completely new take on citizenship education. The overarching message from the scholarly research is that citizenship education aims to equip students with the values,

attitudes and skills to protect and improve one's community and nation. In contrast, the 'protective coaching' aspect of civic education in Burma aims to protect citizens *from* their community and nation as well as the individuals and institutions that control these territories.

## **Conclusion**

The findings presented in this chapter describe 'protective coaching,' a large component of civic education that all Burmese educators interviewed for this study identified as absolutely essential to successfully navigating civic life in Burma, yet is largely absent from the authorized civic education policy in the Myanmar readers. Teachers felt compelled to address this gap because they view protective coaching as central to their students' safety. This chapter looked at how Burmese educators filled this gap by integrating protective coaching into their teacher-student interactions.

The two main forms of protective coaching that emerged as prominent in interviews with participants were a set of three key rules of citizenship and a set of seven penalty mitigation techniques. Teachers sought to train their students to follow these key rules so they could constrain their actions to those the government generally considers acts of 'good' citizenship. These rules are: (1) do not criticize the government, (2) treat politically sensitive topics as taboo, and (3) obey the government even when their requests are unjust. Participants' descriptions suggested that Burmese teachers see themselves as coaches, vigilantly training students to abide by these rules to safely navigate Burma's civic environment. When describing the landscape of civic life in Burma, some teachers used language suggesting they view it like a sports field with lines and boundaries demarcating areas that are 'in bounds' and safe or 'out of bounds' and treacherous. According to the teachers, abiding by these three citizenship rules would help students stay safely 'in bounds' and avoid 'fouling' or going 'out of bounds' in a way that could bring about government retribution. In this way, teachers encourage their students to conform to the government's version of an 'ideal' citizen.

However, teachers also recognize that adhering to these rules at all times is very challenging. Therefore, thorough protective coaching also includes preparing students with defensive strategies, referred to throughout this chapter as ‘penalty mitigation techniques.’ These are steps people can take to foul in a way that makes it plausible to deny that they ever went ‘out of bounds.’ Therefore, they can use these penalty mitigation techniques to decrease the chances that they will be punished in the event that they are caught saying or doing something ‘out of bounds.’ The penalty mitigation techniques most advocated by teachers are: (1) allow the person most immune to government retribution to foul (2) foul in the presence of people you trust (3) foul when you can shift the blame onto someone else (4) use ambiguous terminology (5) provide an ‘assist’ (6) frame foul as a joke and (7) legitimate foul through association with a highly respected topic.

Building on the findings in chapters 3 and 4 by continuing to use Sutton and Levinson’s (2001) ‘policy as practice’ framework, it is clear that protective coaching is an additional way Burmese teachers “‘make’ policy through practice” (p. 4). Of the two main forms of protective coaching, the three key rules of citizenship are rooted more directly in authorized civic education policy. All three rules are implicitly advocated in the Myanmar readers. The textbooks portray a wide variety of citizens—from youth to elders, military to civilian—all of whom are shown faithfully following these citizenship rules at all times. In addition, as noted at various points throughout this chapter, each of these citizenship rules is explicitly present in other forms of written, authorized policy in Burma, such as in the penal code and other long-standing national laws. However, in many of these cases, the wording used in these laws is vague and imprecise.

Findings in this chapter show that as Burmese educators critically engaged with the civic education policy in the Myanmar readers during the policy appropriation process, they chose to render the implicit citizenship rules in the Myanmar readers into an explicit form in their teacher-student interactions. Teachers impart these civic lessons in a number of different ways, including role modeling them for their students. They also chose to add additional detail they felt was necessary for students to understand and follow these rules.

As such detail was absent from the Myanmar readers and other official policy documents, the teachers accomplished this by drawing on their knowledge of when and how these citizenship rules are typically enforced based on seeing or hearing of friends, family, coworkers or others who experienced government retribution as a result of violating one or more of these citizenship rules. In this way, teachers ‘made’ new policy by adjusting and adding to the authorized civic education policy in potentially unauthorized ways. It is ‘potentially unauthorized’ since it is not known whether the government bodies, officially tasked with developing civic education policy, would approve of the adjustments and additions the teachers made. However, teachers made these changes with the goal of teaching their students, as precisely and faithfully as possible, to become the kind of citizen they believed the government wanted.

In contrast with the key citizenship rules, the set of mitigation techniques teachers report providing their students are not present in the Myanmar readers in implicit or explicit forms, nor are they contained in any other authorized policy document produced by the Burmese government. Indeed, this is hardly surprising given that these mitigation techniques are essentially ways to avoid getting caught when violating the government-endorsed citizenship rules detailed above.

Therefore, teaching these penalty mitigation techniques is essentially a new, unauthorized civic education policy developed by Burmese teachers in response to a gap they perceive in the existing authorized policy. Unlike the teachers’ elaborations and additions to the citizenship rules, this ‘new’ civic education policy is not rooted in authorized policy in any way. Therefore, in teaching these techniques, Burmese educators are not remaining as faithful as possible to the original policymakers’ intent. Teachers’ motivation to implement this new civic education policy is their love for their students, their sense of responsibility to keep their students safe and teachers’ own fear of being held accountable if their students do venture ‘out of bounds.’ While, in most cases, teachers strive to implement civic education policy in a way that remains as faithful as possible to the original policymakers’ intent, teachers’ love and concern for their students’ well-being, as well as

concern for their own safety, can drive them to override this general orientation. This further confirms the findings evident in chapter 4 showing that Burmese teachers have the agency and willpower to alter authorized policy when they believe there is a pressing need to do so.

The teaching of penalty mitigation techniques to students stands apart from all of the other civic education policy teachers implement in that it is both unauthorized and extremely widespread. While chapter 4 detailed certain unauthorized civic education policies teachers implemented, a relatively small number of teachers actually put them into practice. In contrast, almost all Burmese educators teach one or more penalty mitigation techniques in their classroom.

Another distinction that can be drawn between the policy of teaching the 3 key citizenship rules and the policy of teaching mitigation techniques relates to Sutton and Levinson's (2001) concept of 'policy as a practice of power.' The policy of training students to conform to rules that encapsulate the government's version of a 'good' citizen originates from authorized government policy documents and is a clear example of a policy that extends and strengthens the interests of those who hold the most power in society. Teachers are essentially training students to become the type of citizen that the Burmese authorities wish them to become—relatively unengaged in public, civic life and hesitant to participate in critical discussion about topics ranging from existing social policies to Burma's political structure. In contrast, teachers' unauthorized policy of teaching mitigation techniques is quite different in this regard. It does not conform to Levinson et al.'s (2009) definition of 'policy as a practice of power,' as it does not "codif[y] and exten[d] the interests of those that disproportionately wield power" (p. 769). The policy was developed by the teachers themselves and not imposed on them by the authorities or authorized policy documents. Furthermore, this more grassroots-level policy gives students the tools to more safely act in ways that challenge the interests of society's most powerful members.

Lastly, it is important to note that in examining Burmese teachers' appropriation of authorized civic education policy, the 'protective coaching' that was revealed using Sutton

and Levinson's (2001) 'policy as practice' framework is, in many ways, a completely new arena of civic education. The concept of 'protective coaching' is absent from the academic literature and from most educators' conversations concerning civic education. Similarly, it is missing from the wide array of written civic education curricula that circulate among educators. Unique to the needs of those navigating Burma's civic environment, this type of civic education is unlike more commonly known forms in that it discourages critical thinking and dissuades citizens from completely open and public participation in civic life. While practices similar to Burmese educators' 'protective coaching' likely go on in many other areas of the world, particularly those with repressive governments, this form of civics typically goes unrecognized as 'civic education' to people from most international contexts. This is likely because the skills protective coaching is designed to teach are not essential in all parts of the world, particularly in democracies where most of the scholarly work on civic education has been focused. However, in Burma's authoritarian context it is clear that the skills students learn through protective coaching are crucial to ensure their future well being, as well as their safety and prosperity as they navigate the challenging and often treacherous civic terrain. Therefore, while it may stand in stark contrast to how it is known in democratic contexts, Burma's alternative content is no less deserving of the title 'citizenship education.'

## Chapter 6 Conclusion

I began this dissertation describing how watching footage of the Saffron Revolution in 2007 affected me so powerfully. It was an experience that was both personally moving and intellectually fascinating, and it ultimately led me to conduct this dissertation study, exploring the many meanings of citizenship and the nature of civic education in Burmese schools. I recall these scenes once again, to conclude this research, as they so fully capture the complexity of enacting citizenship in the Burmese context.

As the pro-democracy protests unfolded, the government soldiers displayed the utmost loyalty to their nation by following the government's commands and helping ensure the country remained strong and 'united.' By acting in this way, the soldiers were reflecting a view of 'good citizenship' communicated very prominently in Burma's government schools. Messages of obedience, respect for authority, discipline, and a commitment to maintaining the unity of the nation above all else, saturate the content of the Myanmar Readers and the majority of teacher-student interactions. Then there were the protesters risking their lives, in the face of the soldiers' threats and violent acts, by openly critiquing the government and asking for fundamental rights they believed would strengthen and bring greater justice to their communities and their nation. Just as the protesters made up a very small minority of Burma's population, the civic messages advocating critical thought and the importance of human rights are found in Burma's schools with great rarity. Then there were the hundreds of thousands of Burmese people watching the protests unfold from the sidelines, peeking out from behind the doors of shops and peering over their apartment balconies. These citizens, along with the millions more going about their daily life throughout Burma, were reflecting what is perhaps the strongest and most consistent civic message conveyed in Burma's government schools—protect yourself from government retribution. For their own safety, they were acting out what they had been taught was 'good citizenship' by withdrawing, as much as they could, from the most dangerous aspects of civic life in Burma.



Left image: (Agence France-Presse/Getty Images, 2011), Right image: (Burma Campaign UK, 2007)

With these multiple meanings of citizenship in mind, I present the contributions of this research along with an overview of my findings, suggestions for future research and recommendations for education reform in Burma, in the area of civic education.

### **Extending ‘citizenship’ and ‘civic education’ to non-democratic societies**

This dissertation study challenges two key dominant views expressed in much of the academic literature addressing civic education. The first is the notion that only those who live in democracies should be considered ‘citizens.’ Some scholars suggest that people living in non-democracies don’t qualify as ‘citizens,’ as they are not granted many of the rights commonly associated with democratic citizenship, such as the right to vote and the ability to critique the most powerful in society. For example, Kymlicka (2003) states that these “aspects of citizenship...are precisely what distinguishes ‘citizens’ within a democracy from the ‘subjects’ of an authoritarian regime” (p. 49). This dissertation disputes this narrow conception of ‘citizen’ on several counts. For one, findings presented in this dissertation show that people have the capacity to act in accordance with democratic values in their interactions with individuals despite Burma’s authoritarian political system. Furthermore, the term ‘citizen’ has not always been solely associated with democracy. For instance, the terms ‘citizen’ and ‘citizenship’ were used in ancient Greece and under the Roman Empire, both of which were non-democracies (Woodruff, 2005). In a similar vein, this dissertation has taken a broad view of the term ‘citizen’ and sought to discover the intricacies of its meaning in Burma’s authoritarian context. To



accommodate the broad range of meanings of ‘citizenship’ that this dissertation takes into account, I employed Levinson’s (2011) definition of this term.

Citizenship is constituted by the meanings, rights, and obligations of membership in publics, as well as the forms of agency and modalities of participation implicated by such membership (Levinson, 2011, p. 280)

Importantly, Levinson’s definition is broad enough to encompass national-level and other forms of citizenship in the context of Burma and elsewhere across the globe. In addition, while it gives a nod to the concept of citizenship as a status, as it is one of the possible ‘rights’ of citizenship, it emphasizes how people *practice* citizenship in their daily lives, which has been a focus of this dissertation study.

The concept that citizenship education and education for democracy are synonymous is the second common assertion in the civic education literature that this dissertation has countered. This common confluence in terms is evident in studies as large as the IEA Civic Education Study to much smaller scale research, such as that carried out by Craddock, who stresses that “for it to be effective, civic education must capture the principles of democracy” (Craddock, 2007, p. 127; Torney-Purta et al., 2001, p. 9). In this way, the scholarly literature often suggests that a civic education curriculum is incorrect, incomplete and in need of adjustment if it doesn’t aim to cultivate the values or skills students need to participate in the civic life of a democracy. This view is ethnocentric in the sense that it holds democratic values as a standard that all civic education must meet, as if Western democracies have claimed civic education for themselves, defining it as only that which aligns with their political system.

In contrast, this dissertation has asserted that democratic civic education is only one form of civic education. This study has been conducted on the premise that all people are constantly receiving messages about what a good citizen does, what values they hold and what actions they take. Furthermore, these messages can align with a variety of different political contexts and value systems. While the content of the messages may differ, civic education is just as prevalent under an authoritarian regime as it is under a democratic government. Moreover, findings in this dissertation have shown that while many of the civic messages we are exposed

to may align with the national-level political context of one's society, it is likely that we are also exposed to other civic messages that align with different political and value systems. This is due, in large part, to the fact that civic education occurs at multiple levels within a society and comes from a plethora of different sources including, not only national governments, but individual teachers, peers and other local community members. I developed the following definition of 'civic education', to encompass the many, often divergent, civic education practices and traditions that take place in Burma and across the globe.

**Civic education and citizenship education** — all forms of education, formal and non-formal, intended and unintended, that develop values, knowledge and/or skills necessary to engage in society.

This study has demonstrated that civic education is a crucial part of schooling in Burma, a society ruled by an authoritarian government, and that much of the civic values, skills and attitudes cultivated by the content of the Burmese textbooks and in teacher-student interactions are geared towards equipping students to be 'good citizens' under an authoritarian regime, as opposed to a democracy. In this way, the present study expands our notion of civic education beyond the much narrower definition that dominates in the civic education literature and refutes the idea that democratic societies hold a monopoly on what should be defined as 'civic education.'

While some scholars, such as Sim and Print (2005), have mentioned the existence of non-democratic forms of civic education, they do not accompany their brief comments with any detailed description of what such civic education might look like. Therefore, this dissertation is the very first, in-depth study of civic education under an authoritarian regime that brings its empirical findings into conversation with the broader civic education literature.

### **Contributions to the field of Burma Studies**

This dissertation also makes several contributions to the field of Burma Studies. Firstly, it is one of very few academic studies that examine the contemporary Burmese education system. Also, as the first academic study to take into account the Burmese government's authorized education policy, as well as how teachers make and remake that policy as they put it into

practice, this dissertation explores the education policymaking process in Burma in a much fuller and more complete way than has been done previously. Moreover, since the Myanmar readers are the primary policy documents this dissertation analyzes, this study provides our first in depth look at how teachers in Burma interact with and implement the textbooks they are tasked to teach. This has yielded the first evidence from scholarly research that Burmese teachers exercise a great amount of their own agency in deciding how to convey the textbooks' content to their students. Furthermore, this study is one of the first in the field of Burma Studies to employ in-depth, ethnographic interviews or critical qualitative methodology. While ethnographic methods have been used in a limited number of academic studies exploring other issues in Burma, this is the first time they have been used to examine the Burmese education system. Therefore, an important contribution of this research is providing rich qualitative data that reveals aspects of Burmese teachers' implicit beliefs and worldviews.

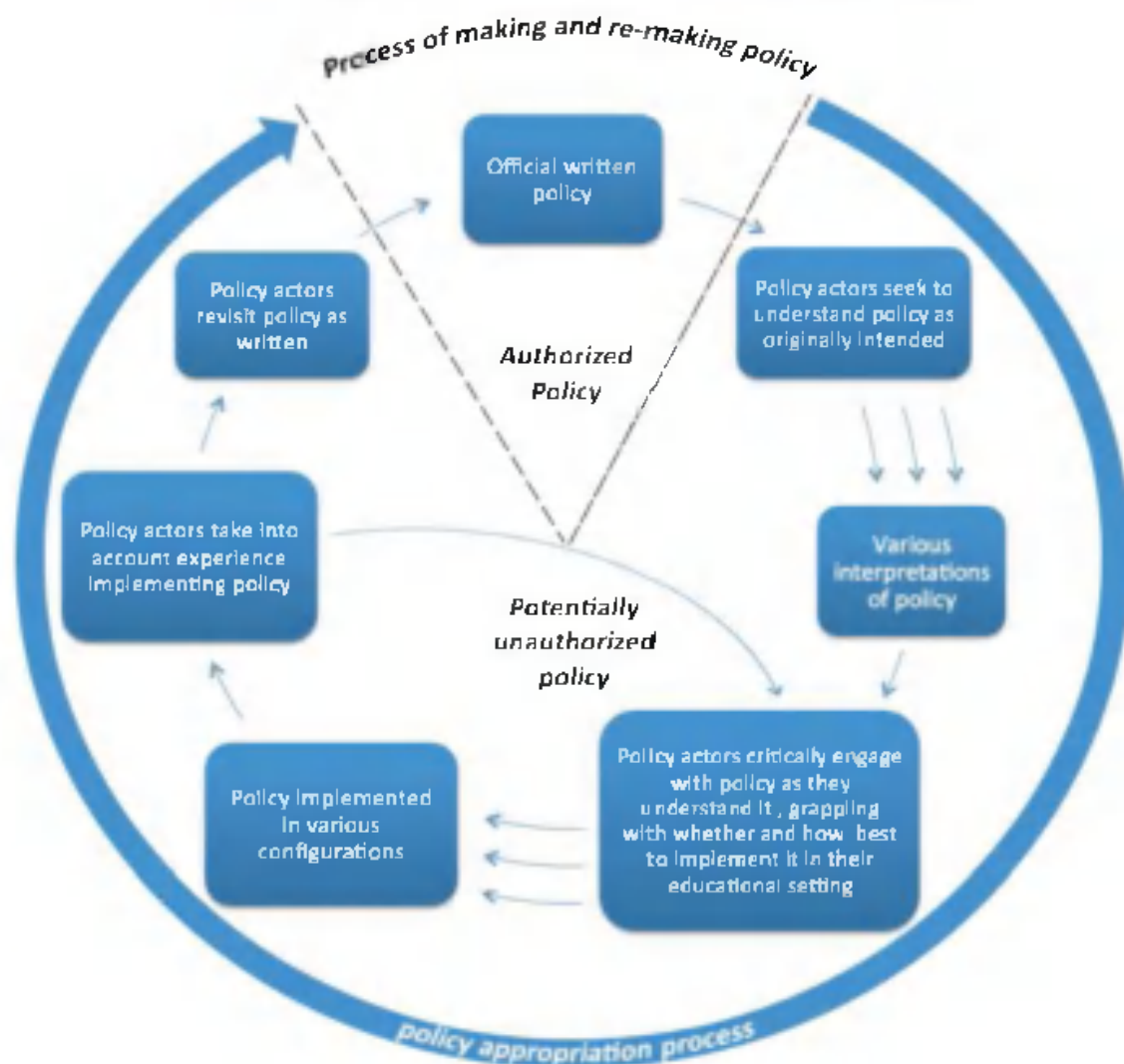
#### **Examining civic education policy using the 'Policy as Practice' framework**

Another important contribution of this study is its use of Sutton and Levinson's (2001) 'policy as practice' concept as the overarching theoretical framework guiding this dissertation. While this framework has been used to examine other types of policy within the field of education and beyond (de Jong, 2008; Diko, 2009; Koyama, 2013), it has not yet been used to analyze civic education policy. Furthermore, it has not been used to examine any form of education policy in the Burma context.

Using the 'policy as practice' framework, this dissertation has examined policymaking in the fullest, broadest sense. Instead of conceptualizing civic education policy solely as static, written text, the 'policy as practice' framework made it possible to explore the policymaking process in a more democratized form by taking into account the original 'authorized' policy as well as how it has been appropriated and, in some cases, altered into potentially 'unauthorized' policy by the Burmese educators charged with implementing it. Therefore, using this perspective, this study has been able to recognize and take into account the agency of Burmese teachers, focusing on how they have shaped Burma's civic education policy by reinforcing it, reinterpreting it, struggling against it and so on.

As the 'policy as practice' graphic below illustrates, written, authorized policy is only one component of the policy process. Therefore, if we had solely examined this one element of Burma's civic education policy, it would have provided only a partial picture of the policy. We would be missing information about how the policy actors interpreted and critically engaged with the policy based on their own perspective and worldview. Furthermore, we would not have taken into account how educators and others add, take away and/or alter the policy in other ways as a result of their interpretations.

## Policy as Practice Framework



Not only has Sutton and Levinson's (2001) 'policy as practice' concept enabled this study to focus on the policy appropriation process, it also provided the tools to examine policy as a 'practice of power.' This is the idea that policy can be used to exercise power over others by conditioning their actions and controlling them to various extents. Levinson et al. (2009) posit that policy can serve to exacerbate and entrench inequality and power imbalances since "policy, even in the most apparently democratic polity or institution, codifies and extends the interests of those who disproportionately wield power" (p. 769). These characteristics of policy are highly relevant to the Burma context where many government schoolteachers expressed that they felt their choices and actions were strictly controlled and confined by government policies.

### **Overview of findings**

Here I will summarize the key findings presented in this dissertation, linking them to Sutton and Levinson's (2001) 'policy as practice' framework as well as to the research questions this study set out to answer, which I provide here again, for reference:

- What practices of good citizenship are conveyed to students in Burmese primary schools?
  - What is the authorized civic education policy in the Myanmar readers?
  - How do teacher-student interactions reinforce authorized civic education policy?
  - How do teachers modify authorized civic education policy as they apply it in teacher-student interactions?

#### *Authorized civic education policy in the Myanmar readers*

The findings presented in chapter 3 detailed all of the authorized civic education policy embedded in the Myanmar readers, providing the foundation for analyzing Burma's civic education policy using Sutton and Levinson's (2001) 'policy as practice' framework. This made it possible, in the later chapters of this dissertation, to analyze the relationship between the authorized policy and how teachers bring it to life, as they interpret it and put it into practice in their own classrooms. The analysis of the authorized policy described in this chapter set a

crucial reference point to better understand how teachers reinforce, reinterpret and recreate civic education policy as they appropriate it throughout the implementation process.

Findings from the textbook analysis reveal that the government's civic education policy prioritizes the teaching of moral education and teaches values related to discipline, obedience and loyalty. It conveys the importance of these values through mottos, lists of specific practices and stories that center on three themes: (1) respect elders, (2) fulfill your duties and (3) live and act in unity. The textbooks also advocate these values through pedagogical policies embedded in the textbooks. For instance, the textbook content encourages teachers to establish a hierarchical mentor/mentee relationship between themselves and their students. Educators are also urged to teach students to memorize and accept the legitimacy of these moral concepts without question.

While moral education is the clear focus, the textbooks also touch on other common components of civic education such as multicultural education and historical literacy, but they do so only briefly. Many other topics that are prominent in civic education curricula across the globe are almost entirely absent from the Myanmar readers, such as political literacy and critical pedagogy.

#### *How teacher-student interactions reinforce authorized civic education policy*

Originating from an analysis of a set of in depth, ethnographic interviews I conducted with teachers and students from Burma, the findings presented in chapter 4 enable us to get at the core of Sutton and Levinson's (2001) 'policy as practice' concept. The findings revealed how authorized civic education policy is brought to life in potentially unauthorized forms in teacher-student interactions in Burmese government schools. Conceptualizing the policy-making process in this more democratized form, as Levinson et al. (2009) suggest (p. 769-770), this chapter examined the process of ongoing policymaking by Burmese teachers long after the official, authorized policy had been set down in writing. This chapter explored the various ways Burmese teachers have taken authorized policy in the Myanmar readers, interpreted it, critically engaged with it and put it into practice in their own classrooms. These findings have

shown how teachers have elaborated on the authorized policy, adding additional details and adaptations they consider important for their particular students and their educational environment. This has given us a window into the dynamic process of policy appropriation where Burmese educators engage in the ‘creative interpretive practice’ of operationalizing policy (p. 768).

The analysis described in detail in chapter 4 revealed that, in the majority of cases, teachers seek to implement the official civic education policy from the Myanmar readers as faithfully as possible. This is because they whole-heartedly agree with the moral messages it advocates and they believe it is in the best interests of their students to learn and adhere to them. As a result, the textbooks’ civic content is largely mirrored in teacher-student interactions. The moral concepts they describe emphasizing most ardently are the very same as those that appear most prominently in the Myanmar readers: (1) respect elders, (2) fulfill your duties and (3) live and act in unity. Furthermore, teachers often convey these moral themes using the same three forms common in the textbooks: mottos, specific practices and stories. In addition, like the textbooks, educators often teach these concepts to students as moral absolutes that they must adhere to at all times, under all circumstances.

Findings in chapter 4 also demonstrated how Levinson et al.’s (2009) concept of ‘policy as a practice of power’ affects how Burmese teachers choose to appropriate the authorized civic education they encounter in the Myanmar readers. The military and government officials are responsible for setting the authorized policy in the textbooks and according to the teachers, these authorities don’t welcome open debate on changes to the policy. Therefore, as Levinson et al. (2009) describe, the written policy does “codif[y] and exten[d] the interests of those that disproportionately wield power” (p. 769). There were occasions when teachers wanted to deviate from the authorized policy, but they didn’t because they felt compelled to implement it exactly as it was intended. However, this was relatively rare. Findings indicate that the majority of the time, teachers genuinely wanted to implement the policy as they believed it was intended. Teachers wanted their students to learn to respect elders, fulfill duties, and live & act in unity.

*Teachers' modification of authorized civic education policy in teacher-student interactions*

However, the findings in chapter 4 also clearly demonstrated that despite the many constraints, including the threat of government retribution, teachers have the will and the agency to implement policy in unauthorized forms when they have a strong desire to do so. In the instances when teachers disagreed with a particular component of the authorized civic education policy, they demonstrated their agency by implementing the policy in an altered form that better fit their views. When teachers did this, it was often to add nuance to students' understanding of when to adhere to certain morals and when not to. In several cases teachers' policy modification involved teaching a moral from the Myanmar readers, such as 'respect elders,' but doing so in a way that discouraged students from following it in a blind, absolute fashion. Teachers wanted their students to think more carefully about when and where to employ this moral and when not to.

Findings also revealed that teachers modify Burma's authorized civic education policy by expanding the range of civic education topics addressed. While the textbooks cover moral education and touch briefly on multicultural education and historical literacy, some Burmese educators reported teaching their students civics topics that are almost completely absent from the Myanmar readers, such as critical thinking, participatory civic education and human rights education. In a sense, as teachers did this, they created and implemented completely new branches of civic education policy, unauthorized by the government.

Teachers tended to alter the policy in this way when they felt others may take advantage of their students if they taught the authorized civic education exactly as it is conveyed in the Myanmar readers. Teachers made adjustments to lessen their students' likelihood of being treated unjustly. In some cases these were small adjustments, while in others they were more substantial changes. In most instances of policy alteration, teachers carefully chose the modifications with the government's watchful eye in mind. They sought to alter the policy in ways that were not obvious, so the government authorities would not rebuke them for straying from the textbook content. Thus, at least within the confines of their own classrooms, teachers have tweaked and adjusted the government's civic education policies in accordance with their



own convictions, in some cases creating completely new policy that stands in opposition to that condoned by the government.

The entirety of chapter 5 is dedicated to describing ‘protective coaching,’ another civics topic Burmese teachers convey to their students, which is largely absent from the Myanmar readers. Building on the findings in chapters 3 and 4 by continuing to use Sutton and Levinson’s (2001) ‘policy as practice’ framework, it is clear that protective coaching is an additional way Burmese teachers “‘make’ policy through practice” (p. 4). Protective coaching involves teaching students how to participate in civic life without provoking the ire of the Burmese government, so as to remain ‘safe’ from government retribution. It stands apart from the other unauthorized civics topics educators teach, such as critical thinking and human rights education, for a number of reasons. For one, while a relatively small number of teachers reported teaching the other unauthorized civics topics to their students, almost every participant interviewed for this study described protective coaching as a prominent part of what took place in their classroom.

In addition, unlike the other unauthorized topics, ‘protective coaching’ is not commonly found in civic education curricula around the globe. Instead of hearing about this topic from other sources, Burmese teachers seem to have developed and taught protective coaching instinctively, in response to their intense desire to keep their students safe from government retribution. In Burma, the government does not allow the population to engage in many activities that are internationally recognized as fundamental freedoms and basic human rights. However, exactly what activities are allowed and which actions a person could be punished for is not always entirely clear. Teachers see themselves as responsible for protecting their students from harm. Therefore, protective coaching involves training students to adhere to the citizenship rules the teachers believe the government enforces most ardently: (1) Do not criticize the government, (2) Treat politically sensitive topics as taboo and (3) Obey the government, even if the order is unjust.

Teachers’ descriptions of their role suggest that it is coach-like in the sense that teachers not only provide their students with information and skills to stay safe from the government, they also observe their students’ ability to put this into practice in their own lives, over an extended

period of time. When they err, teachers provide students with personally-tailored guidance, just as a sports coach would provide specific assistance to sports players based on their ongoing performance. Teachers also use some sports terms to describe their role as a protective coach. For instance, they urge students to ‘stay in bounds’ much like a sports coach would advise the players he or she is coaching. Similarly, teachers describe students who went ‘out of bounds’ as having ‘fouled.’

In addition to teaching the three prominent citizenship rules, teachers recognize that staying within these ‘safe’ boundaries is difficult and not always possible. So, they also equip their students with techniques they can use to mitigate the chances that they will be punished in the event that they do cross into unsafe territory. The ‘penalty mitigation techniques’ that educators role-model and explicitly teach their students most prominently are (1) Allow the person most immune to government retribution to foul (2) Foul in the presence of people you trust (3) Foul when you can shift the blame onto someone else (4) Use ambiguous terminology (5) Provide an ‘Assist’ (6) Frame foul as a joke and (7) legitimate foul through association with highly respected topic.

In sum, viewing the findings in this dissertation through the lense of Sutton and Levinson’s (2001) ‘policy as practice’ concept has enabled us to see and understand the civic education policymaking process far beyond what is written in static, official documents. Using this more democratic perspective on policy has revealed how teachers in Burma make and remake policy through engaging in classroom practice iteratively over time. We’ve seen how, through continuous policy implementation, patterns of practice have emerged and teachers’ new and altered policies have taken shape. In this way, the findings presented in this dissertation have been able to document the civic education policymaking process in Burma, in its fullest, most complete form.

#### *Authoritarian civic education in Burma?*

As for whether civic education in Burma is truly effective ‘authoritarian civic education,’ that remains unclear. This dissertation study focused on the civic education messages conveyed in Burma’s classrooms and it was beyond the scope of this research to explore the many ways

students were affected by these messages and how they shaped how youth chose to live their lives. So it remains uncertain to what extent these civic education messages actually encouraged or discouraged youth to act in ways that were supportive of Burma's authoritarian government.

On the surface, much of the civic education being taught in Burmese government schools, at first glance, appears to be supportive of an authoritarian political system. This is particularly true of the teachers' protective coaching, described in chapter 5, since it involves insisting that their students avoid critiquing the government, discussing politically sensitive topics and encouraging them to obey all of the government's requests. The content of the Myanmar readers, described in chapter 3, also seems to support authoritarianism by advocating obedience, respect for elders and the importance of not questioning authority.

While this study doesn't provide the necessary information to reach a conclusion on this matter, it would not be surprising to find that these components of civic education encourage youth to tolerate the status quo and leave the government to rule the country as it wishes, even when its rule is harmful or unjust to Burma's population. If this is indeed the case, it would indicate that the civic messages conveyed in Burmese government primary schools are effective 'authoritarian civic education.'

However, it is important to note that Burmese teachers do not convey these messages to students uncritically. They actively wrestle with whether teaching these attitudes and values is in students' best interests. Across all teachers interviewed for this study, there was consensus that the Burmese government ruled the country in a way that was harmful and often unfair to many people. The teachers certainly didn't want to make their students more vulnerable to the government's unfair practices, nor did they want to train students to be passive in order to perpetuate the government's rule. As noted in chapter 4, the teachers see the many civic messages in the textbooks as good and right, including those that may at first appear highly supportive of authoritarianism such as the emphasis on obedience and respect for authority. According to the teachers, these values are rooted in Buddhism and traditional Burmese culture, and they form the foundation for enabling youth to learn good behavior.

However, several of the teachers voiced concern that teaching students to adhere to certain values without question would ultimately be a disservice to the students. For instance, Sayama Mar Lar and Saya U Pone Myint worried that teaching students to respect authority without question would make them more vulnerable to government officials' abuses of power. To address their concern, these teachers attempted to subtly encourage their students to think critically about when and how to abide by this civic value of respecting elders. Neither teacher thought this was a bad or improper moral value. They merely felt it should be used judiciously. In every instance that a teacher voiced a similar concern about a civic value, that teacher made some attempt to teach it to students in a way that alleviated their concern. Therefore, teachers appear to act as a filter, serving to prevent students from absorbing civic values in a way that the teacher fears will support the authoritarian government. However, while this may reduce the effectiveness of this apparent 'authoritarian civic education,' there may well be other civic values that Burmese educators enthusiastically teach their students, unaware of the degree to which they support the government.

### **Personal resonance of dissertation findings**

Of all of the findings presented in this dissertation, the protective coaching that teachers provide their students resonated with me particularly strongly. While living within the Burmese refugee and migrant communities on the Thai-Burma border, long before my graduate studies, my Burmese colleagues and friends provided me with protective coaching very similar to what the teachers interviewed for this study describe providing their students. I was told to avoid criticising the Burmese government in public places such as teashops, since Burmese government spies could be present. Likewise, I was warned against discussing politically sensitive topics with those I didn't trust. I was coached back 'into bounds' in cases where I mistakenly violated these pieces of advice. I was warned that disregarding these guidelines could put me on the Burmese government's 'black list' and I would not be allowed to enter the country. When I began planning a sightseeing trip inside Burma, which would make me even more vulnerable to potential government retribution, my friends' and colleagues' protective coaching intensified and became more detailed. They began suggesting penalty mitigation

techniques I could use in case the authorities did suspect me of violating any of their unwritten rules. I am certain that the protective coaching I received has facilitated my ability to travel in and out of Burma without incident over the past years.

Reflecting back, I was hardly aware of the protective coaching I was receiving while it was going on, as it was peppered in with other topics of conversation and just seemed to be part of the pattern of daily life. The lessons I learned had simply become 'common sense' ways to interact with Burmese communities. It was only when I felt a deep sense of panic watching another foreigner flagrantly violate these unwritten rules inside Burma that I realized how deeply ingrained the protective coaching lessons had become. I certainly had not thought of what I was learning as a series of concise rules and mitigation techniques designed to protect me from possible retribution from the Burmese government. Then, as I engaged in the analysis for this dissertation, what had been implicit in my own experience began to reveal itself as a consistent pattern evident across interviewees who had lived in communities throughout Burma. As I rendered these patterns explicit in the findings sections of this dissertation, they rang true to my own experience in a very profound way.

### **Recommendations for education reform**

Making recommendations for any aspect of education reform in Burma is complicated by the significant uncertainty about what direction governance in Burma will take over the next several decades. Will the government lead Burma towards a more democratic future, as it has promised? Even if the desire to democratize is genuine among Burma's top civilian leaders, will the Burmese military stage a coup and fully reinstate authoritarian military rule as they have so many times in the past? However, in the spirit of cautious optimism, let us put these uncertainties aside and assume that Burma's recent turn towards a more democratic future will continue and that the government would like to equip their youth with the skills they need to function in this democratizing civic landscape.

It is of foremost importance that the Burmese government resists picking a civic education curriculum from abroad and attempting to impose it on the Burmese government school

system. Not only would it likely feel alien and inauthentic to the Burmese context, it would also be incredibly difficult to implement. Instead, any reform of civic education in Burma should start with a thorough analysis of the civic education currently occurring in Burmese schools and build on the strengths that exist in current civic education curricula. A national conversation should be initiated about what should constitute citizenship education in government schools. This conversation should involve Burmese leaders at the national, state and local levels, as well as educators, parents and other community members. The government should create opportunities for these stakeholders to meet and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of civic education in Burma's schools. I would also recommend involving civil society organizations, especially those that have been conducting civic education trainings in Burmese communities over the last decades.

Based on the findings in this study, teachers have already identified areas of the civic education curriculum they believe are strong. They have also made suggestions for areas they think could be strengthened. For example, several teachers advocated incorporating more critical thinking into the curriculum to help students avoid applying moral values in an uncritical, absolute fashion. Equipped with a stronger ability to think critically, students will better understand the nuance of when to adhere to certain civic virtues and when not to, so that they put them into practice in a way that is beneficial, and not detrimental to themselves or to society. The results of the stakeholder meetings should be gathered together and based on the findings, appropriate adjustments should be made to the government textbooks and to pre-service and in-service teacher training curricula.

However, a key potential roadblock to making any changes to civic education in Burma is that educators, parents and students will likely be hesitant to believe the Burmese government will tolerate changes such as a greater focus on critical thinking, as this could lead students and teachers to critique societal institutions, including the government. Because the authorities have retaliated with severe consequences against people who've openly critiqued the government so many times in the past, it could prove exceedingly difficult for teachers and

others to abandon the protective strategies they have developed and adhered to over so many years.

To facilitate this transition, it would be beneficial for the government to make some very public gestures that back up their claims of becoming more open and tolerant of critique and deliberative debate. It would be important to begin with the unconditional release of all political prisoners and the initiation of a reliable and transparent judicial system. The existing laws forbidding practices that are commonplace in a democracy would need to be repealed or amended. However, these changes at the national level should be accompanied by gestures specifically geared towards schools and educators. This could include sending a government teacher-trainer to district-level hub schools where he or she could conduct a series of trainings for all teachers in that region about how to foster critical thinking in youth. Ideally, this should involve explicitly encouraging teachers to engage in critique of societal institutions, including the government as well as demonstration classes with actual students in which the teachers and students engaged in this type of critical discussion together. While this would not lead to overnight trust between the educators and the government, it would help make the government's stated desire to move towards a more democratic system appear more genuine.

### **Directions for future research**

An important next step in gaining a fuller understanding of civic education in Burmese government schools would be to conduct a fully fledged ethnographic study focused on one or two schools. Being present at the school itself, to see and experience the civic messages being conveyed between teachers and students first hand, over an extended period of time, would create an even richer understanding of the civic education occurring in this context. Conducting research under these conditions would address a limitation of the present study, which is that I did not conduct research inside Burma. I made this choice in the interests of my research participants' safety, as I would not have been granted official permission for my research and therefore would be involving any potential research participants in a violation of government policy.

In addition, as the present study explored civic education in Burmese schools primarily through the eyes of teachers, conducting a future study from the student perspective would address some important questions left unanswered by this research, such as the following. To what extent are students receiving the civic messages being conveyed by the textbooks and teacher-student interactions and to what degree are students understanding them as they were intended? What additional civic education messages are students internalizing that did not emerge as prominent in the present research? How are students' choices about how to enact their citizenship in their daily life affected by the civic education they learn in schools? Such a study would provide another important angle from which to understand the civic education going on in Burmese government schools.

Furthermore, as the selection of research participants for this study was largely a convenience sample, its findings do not provide a clear picture of differences in how educators from different ethnic groups interact with and implement the government's civic education policy. Tensions between the predominantly Burman central government and the smaller ethnic groups run strong. Therefore, it would be interesting to find out how these tensions are reflected in the degree of teachers' acceptance of the government's civic education policy. Moreover, since the findings from the present research show that ethnic minorities are portrayed in highly prescribed roles, almost in caricature, throughout the Myanmar readers, this raises additional questions about how minority teachers and students respond to this component of the civic education curriculum. If such a study is carried out, another important aspect to take into account would be the region of Burma where these different educators reside. Ethnic minority educators teaching in predominantly Burman areas may interact with the civic education curriculum differently than those living in areas populated predominantly by their own ethnic group.

Additionally, Burma's recently-initiated political transition from authoritarianism towards democracy presents a rare opportunity to conduct a longitudinal study examining how civic education policy evolves over this period and how educators grapple with the implementation of the new policy. If the government remains highly restrictive of research within the country,



these longer-term changes could be analyzed by conducting studies similar to the present research at 5- or 10-year intervals. In this case, recent civic education textbooks and other policy documents could be analyzed alongside interviews with teachers and students with recent experience in Burmese government schools, but who are not currently living in Burma. Alternatively, if the Burmese government begins to allow for more research to be conducted within the country, a longitudinal study that follows the very same participants over many years would offer even greater insight into how the civic messages in textbooks and teacher-student interactions change as Burma's process of democratization progresses.

As the academic community moves forward with future civic education research, it is important that we bring an end to equating civic and citizenship education with 'education for democracy.' Research conducted on this particular form of civic education should recognize that it is democratic civic education that is their focus. For instance, if another round of the IEA civic education study is carried out, it should either adjust its data collection and analysis tools to take into account democratic and non-democratic forms of education, or it should specify that it is primarily a study of democratic civic education.

Furthermore, while there is, of course, great merit and importance to conducting further research into democratic civic education, researchers should also examine civic education in its non-democratic forms. Not only would this yield insights into the formation of citizens in non-democratic settings, it would also provide fruitful counterpoints to what we know about civic education in its democratic forms. Providing opportunities for insightful comparative research between studies of democratic and non-democratic citizen formation would greatly enrich this field of study.

### **Concluding thoughts**

When I began this dissertation process only a few short years ago, there did not seem to be any hope that Burma would experience any positive political change in the near future. Today, there are significant indications that Burma may, indeed, democratize, if given enough time and support. As the government and the everyday citizens endeavor to push towards greater

democracy, it is my hope that Burma surprises me once again and initiates education reform that strengthens the existing civic education curricula, molding it into a form that provides youth with the attitudes, values and skills in line with the democratic society they are striving to establish.

## Appendix 1 – Table of interviewee information

Map code	Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Religion	Education	School type	School Location	Interview date(s)
<b>FORMER TEACHERS</b>								
T1	Tharamu Lily Paw	Female	Karen/Burman	Buddhist	University graduate	Government School	Kayin State	5/31/2008
T2	Sayama Mar Lar	Female	Burman	Buddhist	High school graduate, PAT, <sup>1</sup> JAT <sup>2</sup>	Government School	Yangon Division	5/31/2008 8/11/2008 8/14/2008
T3	Saya Zaw Win	Male	Burman	Buddhist	University graduate	Private tutoring school	Yangon Division	6/7/2008
T4	Tharamu Say Say	Female	Karen	Christian	High school graduate	Government school	Kayan State, Bago Division	6/21/2008 7/13/2008
T5	Sayama Yi Yi	Female	Muslim	Muslim	High school graduate	Government school	Shan State, Mon State	6/28/2008
T6	Sayama Nanda Aye	Female	Burman	Buddhist	High school graduate	Government school	Ayeyawaddy Division	7/5/2008, 8/9/2008
T7	Saya Sai Tai Leng	Male	Shan	Buddhist	University graduate	Government school	Shan State	7/11/2008
T8	Saya U Min Aung	Male	Burman	Christian	University graduate	Private religious school	Kachin State, Yangon Division	8/6/2008
T9	Sayama Sandar Win	Female	Burman	Buddhist	University graduate	Government school	Mon State	8/8/2008
T10	Saya U Pone Myint	Male	Burman	Buddhist	High school graduate	Government school & Private tutor	Kayin State, Yangon Division	8/10/2008
T11	Saya U Thiha Naing	Male	Burman	Buddhist (monk)	University graduate	Community monastic school	Mon State	8/12/2008
T12	Saya U Aung Htoo	Male	Burman	Buddhist	High school graduate, PAT, JAT	Government school & private tutor	Yangon Division	8/12/2008
T13	Sayama Hla Aye	Male	Burman	Buddhist	University Graduate	Government school & private tutor	Tanintharyi Division, Yangon Division	8/10/2008

T14	Saya U Pyay Sone	Male	Burman	Buddhist	High school graduate	Government school	Tanintharyi Division, Yangon Division	8/10/2008
T15	Sayama Thida	Female	Burman	Buddhist	High school graduate	Government school	Mon State	7/5/2008
<b>FORMER STUDENTS</b>								
S1	Kyaw Kyaw	Male	Muslim	Muslim	University graduate	Government School	Bago Division	5/31/2008
S2	Cho Cho	Female	Burman	Buddhist	University graduate	Government School	Yangon Division	6/5/2008
S3	Hla Hla	Female	Burman	Buddhist	University graduate	Government school	Yangon Division	6/5/2008
S4	Saw Lah Eh	Male	Karen	Buddhist	High school graduate	Government School	Kayin State	6/22/2008
S5	Hla Cho	Female	Burman	Buddhist	High school graduate	Government School	Yangon Division	7/8/2008

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<sup>1</sup>'Primary assistant teacher training,' the government training program for primary school teachers

<sup>2</sup>'Junior assistant training' which is the government training program for middle school teachers

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<sup>199</sup> While sources by non-Burmese authors are listed alphabetically by last name, sources by Burmese authors are included in this list with their first names listed first. This is because most Burmese names do not have separate first and last names. Instead, they are made up of consecutive syllables that form a coherent unit. In addition, for Burmese authors who publish in English under names that include titles, I have included their title in parenthesis after the authors' name.

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## EDUCATION

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- 2006 – 2013      **Indiana University**, Bloomington, IN, USA  
*Ph.D., Education Policy Studies, Minor in Non-Profit Management (December, 2013)*  
*M.S., International and Comparative Education (May, 2009)*
- Dissertation: Teaching citizenship under an authoritarian regime: A case-study of Burma/Myanmar
- 1998 – 2001      **McGill University**, Montreal, Canada  
*B.A., Major in International Development Studies – Awarded with Distinction*  
*Minors in Economic Development and French Translation*

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

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- Aug. 2010-Dec. 2011      **Cultural Immersion Projects**, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, USA  
*Associate Instructor*
- Mentored and evaluated 40+ participants in overseas student-teaching program
  - Taught 3 university courses about teaching effectively in multi-cultural settings
- Jun. 2011-Aug. 2011      **Australian National University**, Canberra, Australia  
*Visiting Scholar*
- Conducted archival research on Burmese education system, presented research findings, guest-lectured
- Jun. 2009-Aug. 2010      **Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Program**, Indiana Univ., Bloomington, IN  
*Researcher*
- Analyzed the effectiveness of alternative teaching methods to facilitate access to the sciences for traditionally under-represented groups
  - Designed and implemented academic studies, published findings in peer-reviewed journals and presented at academic conferences
- Aug. 2006-May 2009      **Office for Women's Affairs**, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, USA  
*Coordinator, Women in Science Program (WISP)*
- Designed and implemented initiatives that facilitated more equitable access to the math and science fields for elementary, secondary, undergraduate and graduate women and girls

- Nov. 2002-Mar. 2006 **World Education Inc.**, Mae Sot, Thailand  
*Program Officer (04/05 - 03/06)*  
*Trainer (11/02 - 4/05)*
- Specialized in project design and implementation of education initiatives for SHIELD, a USAID-funded health & education project assisting refugees and migrants from Burma
  - Designed qualitative and quantitative monitoring & evaluation (M&E) tools, including surveys, cost-benefit analyses, performance indicators, log frames and detailed workplans
  - Conducted nation-wide assessment of migrant schools, establishing base-line data for SHIELD
  - Analyzed program effectiveness; delivered presentations and wrote quarterly progress reports for donors based on findings
  - Conducted strategic planning and capacity development workshops for World Ed staff and partner organizations
  - Wrote numerous project proposals, including successful \$23 million SHIELD proposal to USAID
- Jul. 2002 - Nov. 2002 **Open Society Institute**, Mae Sot, Thailand  
*Trainer*
- Trained staff of community-based organizations, including the Burma Lawyers' Council and the National League for Democracy (NLD), in English as a Second Language
- Oct. 2001 - Jul. 2002 **English Conversation for the Young (ECY) School**, Icheon, South Korea  
*English Teacher*
- Taught English as a Second Language to children and adults, using creative, learner-centered teaching methods

## TEACHING

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|-------------|--|
| 2010 – 2012 | Cultural/Community Forces & the Schools (graduate course)<br>Practicum: Ethnic & Cultural Studies (graduate course)<br>Professional Development Workshop: Student Teaching Overseas (graduate) |
| 2009 – 2010 | Social Movements in Education: Schools as Sites for Social, Political & Cultural Contention (undergraduate course)   |

## AWARDS, FELLOWSHIPS & GRANTS

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|-------------|---|
| 2011        | Graduate Exchange Fellowship, Indiana University-Australian National University Pan Asia Institute  |
| 2009 – 2010 | Women in Science Fellowship, Indiana Univ., Office for Women's Affairs  |
| 2008        | Pre-Dissertation Travel Grant, Indiana University, Office of the Vice President of International Affairs & the University Graduate School |

2008	Pre-Dissertation Research Grant, Indiana University, School of Education
2007 – 2011	Various grants for conference travel

## PUBLICATIONS & PRESENTATIONS

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- Treadwell, B. (2014). Downplaying Difference: The selective representation of diversity in contemporary Burmese schools and the effect on educational equity. In C. Joseph & J. Matthews (Eds.), *Equity, Opportunity and Education in Postcolonial Southeast Asia*. New York: Routledge.
- Zhu, C., Rehrey, G., Treadwell, B. & Johnson, C. (2012). Looking back to move ahead: How students learn geological time by predicting future environmental impacts. *Journal of College Science Teaching*.
- Treadwell, B. (2011). *Molding citizens for a 'disciplined democracy': The politics of education in contemporary Burma/Myanmar*. Paper presented at the Pan Asia Institute & Australian National University, College of Asia and the Pacific Lecture Series, Canberra, Australia.
- Treadwell, B. (2011). *A path to liberation or subjugation? The multifaceted role of Buddhism in civic education in contemporary Burma/Myanmar*. Paper presented at the Comparative & International Education Society Conference, Montreal, QC.
- Treadwell, B. (2010). Science and Progress *Majority Report* (Vol. 24, pp. 8-9). Bloomington, IN, USA: Indiana University.
- Treadwell, B. (2010). *Pockets of resistance: Teachers' Appropriation of Education Policy in Contemporary Burma*. Paper presented at the Burma Studies Conference, Marseilles, France.
- Bucher, K., Cantrell, D., Harger, B., Pizmony-Levy, O., Ross, K., & Treadwell, B. A. (2010). *Between change and stability: Conceptualizing social movements in education*. Paper presented at the Comparative & International Education Society Conference, Chicago, IL.
- Treadwell, B. (2009). *Teachers' negotiation of civic education in Burma 1988-2008*. Paper presented at the Comparative & International Education Society Conference, Charleston, SC.
- Treadwell, B. (2008). *Teachers' Negotiation of Civic Education in Burma 1988-2008*. Paper presented at the Burma Studies Conference, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL.
- Treadwell, B. (2004). Internally Displaced People and Forced Relocation. In U Thein Oo (Ed.), *Burma Human Rights Yearbook 2003-4*. Bangkok, Thailand: Human Rights Documentation Unit (HRDU), National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma.

## SERVICE

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Jun. 2011-Aug. 2011	<b>Australian National University, Asia Pacific Week</b> , Canberra, Australia <i>Organizing Committee Member</i>
Oct. 2009	<b>International Scholarship of Teaching &amp; Learning Conference Committee</b> , Indiana University, Bloomington, IN <i>Assistant</i>
2007 – 2009	<b>Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)</b> , Mae Sot, Thailand <i>Writer &amp; Editor</i>

Jun. 2008-Aug. 2008    **CDC Migrant School**, Mae Sot, Thailand  
*Proposal Writing Trainer*

Dec. 2004-Aug. 2005    **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)**,  
Thailand  
*Resettlement Trainer*

Mar. 2004-Oct. 2004    **National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB)**,  
Thailand  
*Writer & Researcher, Human Rights Documentation Unit*

#### ADDITIONAL SKILLS

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**Languages:** Fluent in English and French. Intermediate Burmese.

**Software:** All Microsoft Office applications, Scrivener, SPSS, Endnote, Adobe Photoshop,  
qualitative data analysis software: AtlasTi, N\*Vivo