Introduction

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This issue of Asian Review is the outcome of the international conference on Shan Studies organized by the Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, with financial assistance from the Euro-Burma office. It was held at Chulalongkorn University on 15–17 October 2009. The three-day conference, which included academic panels as well as performing arts and exhibitions, was primarily an arena for specialists, academics, students, and those interested in Shan Studies to present their research on various aspects of Shan Studies, and exchange their research findings with others. Secondly, it was a meeting ground for participants to create and strengthen collaboration, at national and international levels, in their studies and research on Shan Studies. Several features made the conference a unique contribution to understanding an ethnic group which played a very important role in forming Southeast Asian civilization and which has maintained a cultural identity up to the present.

The conference involved academics and participants from different parts of the world, including those originally from Shan State in Myanmar but now living abroad. Presentations and panel discussions helped enhance and deepen our understanding of the rich cultural heritage of the Shan, their unique beliefs and values, and their socioeconomic and political history. My sincere and most heartfelt thanks go to Shan communities in Thailand for their great contributions to informative cultural and culinary exhibitions and performances. They contributed and dedicated their time, expertise, and efforts to making the conference a success.

A selection of the papers presented at the conference is included in this issue of Asian Review. Nicola Tannenbaum’s article explains how the terms “Thai Yai,” “Shan,” and “Tai Long” are used to refer to the same group of people, and how the interactions with the British colonial state, Burmese state, and Thai state have shaped

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Shan political identity. Sao Noan Oo explores the Sao Hpa administration in Shan states and the role of Sao Hpa through different periods of time. The role of Saophas (or referred to in Sao Noan Oo’s article as Sao Hpa) appears again in the struggle for political negotiation for cooperation between Shan and Burma from 1946 to 1962 as shown in Samara Yawnghwe’s informative article. Her work not only provides the account of the process of negotiation after the Panglong Conference from a Shan angle, but also gives an interesting speculation on the roots of conflict between ethnic groups in Burma today.

Jotika Khur-Yearn and Kate Crosby study how lik luong manuscripts are preserved in northern Thailand. Paphatsaun Thianpanya surveys Shan printing and publication in Thailand. This issue ends with Jiraporn Achariyaprasit’s analysis of Shan royal ladies’ roles in the household and political spheres as shown in three life narratives.

These works present Shan society from different disciplinary perspectives and methodologies. The contributors include western, Thai, and Shan authors, both established and from a new generation of researchers, each of whom presents the past and present Shan in different ways.

In this issue, Asian Review reaffirms its commitment to understand and appreciate the rich ethnical diversity in Asia and especially the Southeast Asian region. More specifically, this issue endeavors to enhance our awareness and knowledge of the Shan, their political and social history, arts, language, literature, and religion. It is hoped that this issue of Asian Review will help strengthen the study of the Shan.

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Guest editor