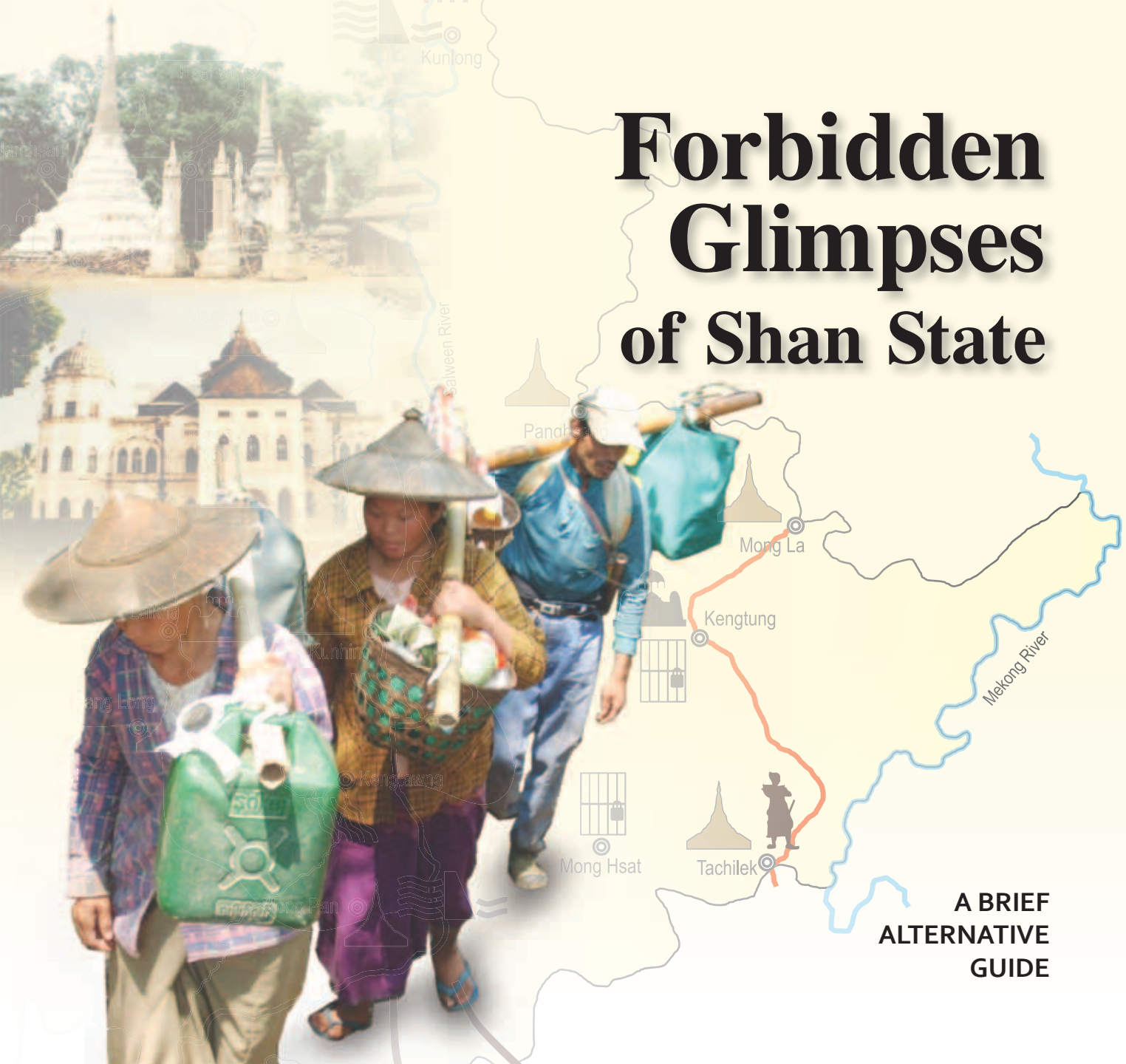


# Forbidden Glimpses of Shan State

**A BRIEF  
ALTERNATIVE  
GUIDE**



Published in November 2009

Black and white photos from Hsipaw courtesy of Inge Sargent

### **About SWAN**

SWAN is a network of Shan women active in Thailand and along the border with Shan State, set up in 1999. Its mission is to work on gender equality and justice for women in the struggle for social and political change in Burma through community based actions, research and advocacy. SWAN is a founding member of the umbrella organization the Women's League of Burma (WLB).

### **About the SWAN logo**

In the logo, the Kennari, a mythical half-bird half-woman, is dancing in a martial arts pose. This represents our desire to preserve our culture and protect our rights. The dance of the Kennari, or "bird dance," is uniquely Shan.

### **Contact**

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# **Forbidden Glimpses of Shan State**

**Shan Women's Action Network**

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## Message from SWAN

Debate continues to rage about whether or not tourists should visit Burma and risk giving money and legitimacy to the Burmese military regime. We have fed into this debate by exposing atrocities such as sexual violence, torture and murder by the regime's troops in areas of Shan State out of bounds for foreign visitors, and urging the denial of all forms of support for the regime while these abuses continue.

However, we realize that little attention has been given to more subtle forms of repression by the regime in Shan State, particularly related to culture. Given that experiencing local "culture" is a primary aim of tourists visiting Burma, we feel it is important to expose how Shan State culture, religion and history are being distorted and erased, and gradually replaced by the regime's own homogenized and artificially imposed "Myanmar culture."

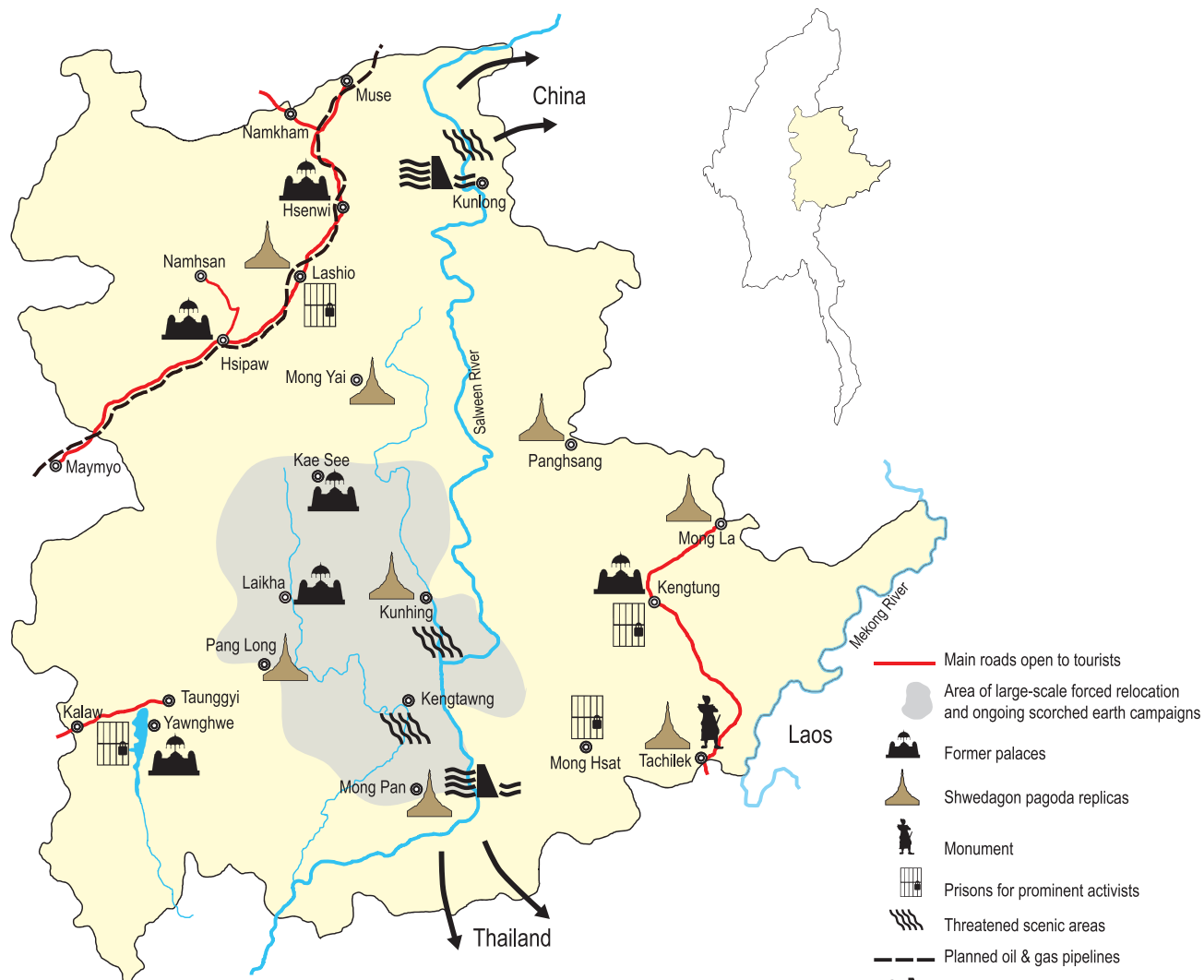
Most of this book deals with these aspects of culture which may be unknown to the average tourist. We have focused on Shan culture, but the process of repression is also happening to other ethnic cultures in Shan State and other parts of Burma.

We have also included photos of areas of great beauty in Shan State that are out of bounds to tourists, but which may soon be lost forever due to the regime's development plans, funded by Thai and Chinese investors. Finally, we have included information about some of the prominent political prisoners from Central Burma languishing in remote Shan State prisons – they will never be physically seen by tourists but their presence should be a constant reminder to us all of the cruel reality of repression in Shan State and the rest of Burma today.

We wish to thank the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma) and all our other friends inside and outside Burma who kindly provided photos and information to be used in this book.



# Map of places described in this book



## Where you can go

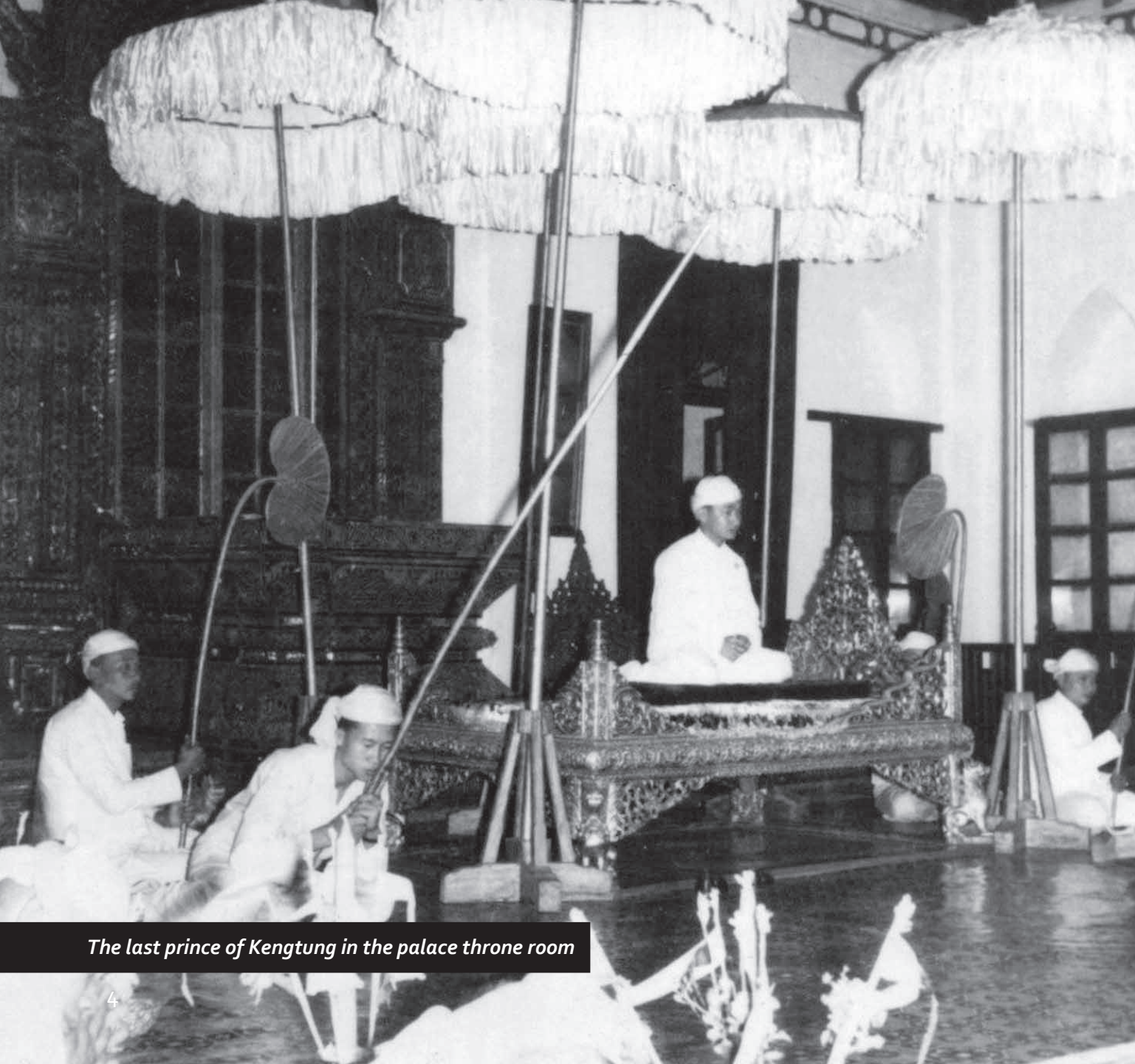
The vast majority of Shan State is off limits to foreigners. Tourists are only permitted to visit three areas: the Lashio road in the north, the Taunggyi-Inlay Lake area in the south-west, and the route from Tachilek to Kengtung and Mong La in the east.

## What the regime doesn't want you to see

- Over 150 Burmese infantry battalions are deployed in Shan State to pacify the people and exploit the area's rich natural resources.
- These troops are authorized to live off the land: confiscating farms, extorting and taxing villagers, and requisitioning free labour.
- Various ethnic groups continue to wage resistance against the regime in the hope of gaining justice and equal rights for their people; the regime has consistently refused to engage in meaningful political dialogue with these groups, instead carrying out massive anti-insurgency campaigns to try and crush them.
- During 1996-1998, over 300,000 villagers from southern and central Shan State were forced at gunpoint from their homes and lands in an anti-insurgency operation; most have since fled as refugees to Thailand. To this day, troops are licensed to arrest, torture, rape and kill villagers suspected of supporting the resistance.
- Shan State's beautiful forests, hills and rivers are fast being ravaged and polluted by unbridled resource exploitation by the regime and its cronies.
- While the regime claims to have succeeded in slashing drug production, it continues to promote and profit from the trade, and opium growing has spread to unprecedented levels throughout the state.







*The last prince of Kengtung in the palace throne room*



## The fate of the Shan Palaces

### *Erasing Shan history*

The area known today as Shan State was for centuries comprised of numerous Shan principalities, each with their own hereditary ruling prince or Saohpa, meaning “Lord of the Sky.” For much of their history, these principalities enjoyed self-rule, and even after becoming a British protectorate following Britain’s annexation of Burma in the 1880s, the princes were allowed to continue administering their own states.

Only in 1959, over ten years after joining Burma to gain independence from the British, did the 34 Shan princes, or chiefs, officially relinquish their hereditary powers to the elected Shan State government. However, some of them remained in government positions and were instrumental in pushing for constitutional reform towards a federal system of government that would put the ethnic states on a more equal footing with Burma Proper. They were not demanding secession, even though this provision had been written into the 1947 Constitution. Yet their push for constitutional reform was given as a main pretext for the military coup by General Ne Win in March 1962, who claimed that it was necessary to prevent the disintegration of the Union of Burma.

During their rule, many of the princes lived in grand, elaborately designed palaces, (called “haw” in Shan) with unique architectural features. Some of these historic buildings were bombed and destroyed in the Second World War, but some survived the war only to face neglect and demolition once the Burmese military seized power.





## Cultural Sabotage *Demolition of the Kengtung Palace*

The Kengtung Palace, built in 1903 by Prince Kawn Kiao Intaleng, was the grandest of the Shan palaces, befitting Kengtung's status as the largest of the Shan principalities, which spanned 12,000 square miles east of the Salween River. The huge brick Indian-styled structure served as the administrative hub of the vast province, as well as the residence of the prince, his six wives and 19 children. His grandson, Prince Sao Sai Long, was the last owner of the palace until 1959 when it was handed over to the Shan State government.

When the Burmese military seized power in 1962, they arrested Sao Sai Long and his brother, together with other Shan princes, imprisoning him in Rangoon's Insein Jail for six years. On his release he was banished from living in Kengtung. The local military authorities used the palace as an administrative office.

Demolition of the palace began on November 9, 1991, following an order directly from Rangoon. The destruction commenced in spite of appeals from local monks and protest leaflets distributed around town.

The stone rubble from the building was scattered on roads around the town of Kengtung. Putting pieces of this historical palace underfoot in a culture where feet are considered the lowest part of the body, both physically and spiritually, was a blatant debasement of the Shans' valued heritage.

In 1994, the Myanmar Ministry of Hotels and Tourism began construction of a modern hotel, the Kyaing Tong Hotel, on the site of the old palace. The building was completed in 1996, at a cost of 500 million kyat. Rumoured to be haunted, the hotel remains largely empty.



*The Kengtung Palace before it was destroyed  
and the "Kyaing Tong" Hotel today*





## Deliberate Neglect

### *Hsipaw's palaces*

Hsipaw was one of the most wealthy and influential of the Shan principalities. Its original Palace was renowned for its splendour, its throne room modeled on that of the Mandalay Palace. After it was destroyed during the Second World War, the ruling family lived in a British-style manor-house called the East Palace.



*Sao Kya Seng and his wife Inge*

This was where the last Prince of Hsipaw, Sao Kya Seng and his Austrian wife Inge, were living when the Burmese military seized power in 1962. Sao Kya Seng, a well-educated, progressive administrator, was arrested by the Burmese military and never seen alive again. The East Palace remained in the family, and until 2005, the last resident, Sao Kya Seng's nephew, Sao Oo Kya, would invite tourists to visit the building. However, in 2005, Sao Oo Kya was arrested and sentenced to 13 years in Mandalay Jail for illegally meeting tourists at the palace. He was recently released under an amnesty.

Today, the East Palace is off limits to tourists, while the Sakandar Summer Palace, built by Hsipaw prince Sir Sao Khe in the early 1900s in the hills near Kyaukme and used as a summer retreat by

the Hsipaw royal family, has fallen into disrepair. Although the left wing of the Palace had been burned down by the Japanese occupation forces, the rest of the building remained intact and the last prince of Hsipaw had plans to renovate the building. It was described by Sao Kya Seng's wife as follows: "The cream-coloured neoclassic building looked as though it belonged on a hill in northern Italy. The white marble of the staircase leading to the central section of the palace had actually come from the Mediterranean. Large windows, slim pillars, and ample terraces gave the building an appearance of lightness."

Today, however, the Sakandar Palace lies completely derelict, and is not advertised in tourist guide books, even though it lies just off the road used by tourists.



*The Sakandar Summer Palace, built by Hsipaw prince Sir Sao Khe in the early 1900s, now lies derelict and unnoticed just off the road used by tourists*





From Palace to “Buddha Museum”  
*The Yawnghwe Palace*



The Yawnghwe Palace, situated near Shan State's famous Inle Lake, is the grandest of the remaining Shan royal palaces. It is a large wood and stone structure, built in the late 1920s and styled after the Mandalay Palace. The last ruling prince was to live there Sao Shwe Thaik, the first President of the Union of Burma.



On March 2, 1962, when the Burmese military seized power, they surrounded the house of Sao Shwe Thaik in Rangoon, and opened fire, killing the former President's 17-year-old son Sao Mee. The elderly Sao Shwe Thaik was arrested and imprisoned in Insein Jail, where he died under suspicious circumstances in November of the same year.

About ten years ago, the palace was officially turned into a museum, called the Nyaung Shwe Cultural Museum (and also known as the Saw Bwa Gyi Myaa Museum or Museum of Shan Chiefs), which was open to tourists and stored the palace regalia. During this time, UNESCO allocated US\$30,000 to repair and refurbish the building, but the military authorities failed to implement any repairs. Then, abruptly in 2006, an order was received from the Ministry of Culture to send all the palace artefacts to the new capital at Nay Pyi Daw.

In September 2007, the palace was reopened to the public as a "Buddha Museum." The interior of the palace has been emptied, and huge pictures of pagodas, such as the Kyaikhtiyo, the Shwedagon and Maha Myatmuni were put on the wall in the former throne hall. None of the signs in the museum mention the history of the building as a palace.



***Above: the last ruling prince of Yawnghwe, Sao Shwe Thaik. Right: the former throne room***

## Hsenwi Palace

### *Decades of military occupation*

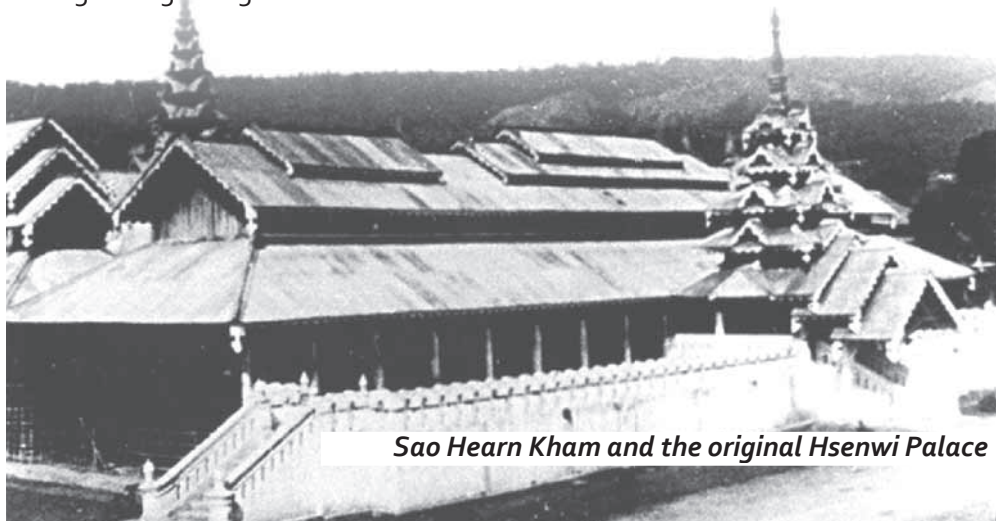
Hsenwi Palace, a grand teak structure on a hill in the centre of town, was the birthplace of Sao Hearn Kham, the wife of Sao Shwe Thaik of Yawnghwe, the first President of Burma. After his death in prison, she went into exile and chaired the Shan resistance movement during the mid-1960s.

The palace was destroyed by bombs in World War II. It was never rebuilt, and after the 1962 military coup, the Burma Army built a camp in the palace compound. This was greatly resented by the local community, particularly when the occupying troops committed atrocities against local civilians. In one well-known incident in the mid-60s a local commander nicknamed Bo Ho Hawk (Captain White Hair) beheaded a villager suspected of supporting the Shan resistance and stuck his head on a pole near the palace. Many locals were so outraged that they went underground to join the resistance.

The Burmese military have only recently moved out from the palace compound, and the palace ruins have been left unkempt and overgrown. Anxious to prevent further intrusion, the local Shan cultural association has erected a sign designating the area as a historical site.



*Ruins of the palace today*



*Sao Hearn Kham and the original Hsenwi Palace*



## Communities protecting their heritage

The towns of Laikha and Kae See in central Shan State remain strictly out of bounds for foreign tourists. Formerly thriving agricultural hubs, repeated scorched earth campaigns by the regime's military have depopulated and impoverished the surrounding rural areas.

### ***Kae See Palace***

After the 1962 coup, the Kae See Palace was taken over and occupied by the Burma Army. Ten years ago, it was finally returned to the original owners after repeated appeals to the authorities, but all its contents had been looted. To prevent further seizure or damage to the building the owners then donated it to the local community as a temple.



### ***Laikha Palace***

Following the destruction of the Kengtung Palace in 1991, Laikha residents began worrying that their own palace would also be demolished. Like the Kengtung Palace, the Laikha Palace had been taken over by the government, and was being used as a bank. Believing that the building would be less likely to be demolished if it was used for religious purposes, community leaders won an appeal to have the building turned into a temple.



***Today both temples bear the name Jong Hor (Palace Temple) as a reminder of their origins.***



## Resurrecting Burmese royalty

Shan resentment at the regime's failure to protect their cultural heritage has been heightened by the fact that the Burmese military rulers have invested great sums in renovating and even rebuilding from ruins the palaces of ancient Burmese kings .

At the same time as the Burmese military regime has been actively erasing remnants of recent Shan royal history, they have been rebuilding ancient Burmese palaces in Central Burma and erecting new monuments in strategic locations in honour of former Burmese monarchs.

### *King Bayinnaung Statue in Tachilek*

King Bayinnaung was the 16th Century Burmese monarch who conquered the Shan States in 1556, and then twice sacked the Thai kingdom of Ayudhaya, in 1564 and 1569.

The statue of King Bayinnaung in the eastern border town of Tachilek was first commissioned in March 1995, the same month that Shan resistance forces carried out a major military attack on Tachilek and seized part of the town before being driven out by the Burmese military.

The statue was built in Central Burma by Burmese artisans, then transported to eastern Shan State and inaugurated on May 6, 1996, at a ceremony attended by then Secretary 1 General Khin Nyunt. The life-size bronze statue stands with folded arms facing provocatively towards Thailand, only a few hundred metres from the Thai border.

In 2003, a bomb was thrown at the statue, damaging the legs and a hand. The image was quickly repaired and it has since been fenced off and guarded closely.



## ***Kengtung's One-Tree-Hill appropriated by King Alaungpaya***

In Kengtung, locals were bewildered when a signboard was erected about ten years ago declaring that their well-known landmark, a massive 218-foot tree on the One-Tree-Hill in the southern section of the town, had been planted in 1744 by King Alaungpaya, one of the most famous Burmese monarchs. In fact, King Alaungpaya had never visited Kengtung.



*The regime ordered the reconstruction of King Bayinnaung's palace in Bago (Central Burma) in 1990. It was completed in 2003.*



## Place Names

The Shan people call themselves “Tai” and their language is very similar to Thai, although written Shan looks similar to Burmese.

Written Shan was for centuries mainly taught in temples. Non-monastic schools were established under the British, but the lack of a simplified modern Shan script and proper Shan textbooks prevented the Shan language from being formally taught in these schools. Although a modern script was developed in the 1950s, and textbooks began being developed, efforts to have Shan intro-

duced as a formal subject in schools were thwarted by the military coup of 1962. Since then, Burmese has remained the compulsory language of instruction in all government schools in Shan State.

Today, the Shan written language is kept alive by monks and volunteer teachers who organize Shan literacy classes, mainly in summer months. However, these are regarded with suspicion by authorities, and teachers are subject to arrest.

Almost all public signboards in Shan State are written in Burmese. Due to the fundamental differences between the Shan and Burmese languages, Burmese transliteration of the names of Shan towns invariably leads to a corruption of the original pronunciation, and often a completely different meaning in Burmese. Official English translations of the names are also transliterations of the Burmanized names.

Hence, Shan place-names like Yawngghwe (valley with abundant paddy) become Nyaung Shwe in Burmese (golden banyan). Unfortunately not all transliterations are as poetic. For example, the Shan word for town is “Mong” transliterates to “Mine” in Burmese, which means a bomb. This has led to many of the Shan towns having very inauspicious names in Burmese.



*The gate at the entrance to Lashio bears the Burmese word “Lasho” meaning “donkey show.” In Shan, Lashio means “the town opposite the mountain with many eagles.” A few years ago the traditional Shan drums on the sides of the gate were replaced with images of rice plants*



*Shwedagon  
replica in Lashio*

## **Buddhist symbols of power**

The Shan have a long history of Theravadan Buddhism. Cultural events revolve around the Buddhist calendar, and countless historic local temples and pagodas exist throughout Shan State. Yet the regime has been building new pagodas, temples and Buddha images, and renovating old ones, in the major towns of Shan State. The style and manner in which these structures have been built or renovated reveals that they have little to do with the propagation of Buddhism, but rather with the flaunting of power, cultural assimilation and superstition.



## *Replicas of the Shwedagon Pagoda*

Over the past few decades the Burmese generals have been building numerous replicas of Rangoon's famous Shwedagon pagoda in Shan State. These towering golden stupas may appear attractive to the average tourist. However, dwarfing local edifices and built in strategically important locations, they are deeply resented by local residents.

In early 1995, the regime began construction of a Shwedagon replica at **Mong La**, on the Chinese border north of Kengtung. This area had been "pacified" under a ceasefire agreement in 1989. Burmese intelligence chief Khin Nyunt, who had brokered the ceasefire agreement, sponsored the building of the pagoda, which was consecrated in 1997. The regime had promised prosperity and development following the ceasefire, but gave little beyond the token pagoda. 20 years after the ceasefire, Mong La has become notorious as a Chinese gambling resort.

In November 1995, the Burmese military began construction of a Shwedagon replica just outside the eastern Shan town of **Tachilek**, which borders northern Thailand. This was the same year that the Burma Army had defended the town from a major attack by the Shan resistance, and the pagoda was seen to symbolize their domination of this border territory.

*Shwedagon replica  
in Tachilek*



The pagoda was built entirely by artisans and workers from Central Burma. Both at the ceremony to start construction, when sacred relics were placed in the base of the pagoda, and at the ceremony in 1998 to finalize construction, when relics were placed at the top of the pagoda and the "htee" or sacred umbrella was put on the spire, only Burmese military officers were present to perform the ritual. According to tradition, monks must perform this ritual, with the appropriate blessings. However, local monks were only invited after the main rituals were over.

In 1997, local military commanders began building a Shwedagon replica in **Kunhing**, one of the central Shan townships where the regime had just forcibly relocated 300,000 Shan civilians as part of a massive anti-insurgency campaign against the Shan resistance. The name of the pagoda was “Maha Kanbawza Pyi Nyein Aye Pagoda” (meaning “Peaceful Shanland” in Burmese). General Maung Aye presided over the ground-breaking ceremony, which was held at 9 am on the 9th day of the 9th month of the lunar calendar (9 is the auspicious number for the military leaders of the regime). According to local custom, monks and local villagers should bury valuables under a pagoda during the ground-breaking ceremony but they were all kept away and only military officers performed this task. After the ceremony, local villagers, including children, were forced to build the pagoda.

A further replica was completed in June 2000 in **Mong Yai**, almost directly in the centre of Shan State, near the state’s highest peak at Loi Leng.

In 2001, another Shwedagon replica was started in **Mong Pan**, the Burma Army’s strategic command centre in southern Shan State, overseeing military operations against the Shan resistance forces based along the Thai border. The pagoda was built on a hill west of the town, on the site of an old Shan temple, which was forced to move to another location. 300 acres of farmland were confiscated for the temple grounds. The 108-foot (1+8=9) tall “Maha Tejadhpati” Pagoda (meaning “Great Power”) was completed in 2003. Until today, military authorities force local villagers to take turns standing as security guards for the pagoda, and insist that the annual traditional Shan novice ordination festival is celebrated at this location.

In January 2003, a further replica was completed in **Panghsang**, the capital of the Wa ceasefire area in northern Shan State. Again, the ceasefire broker, General Khin Nyunt presided over the ceremony.



*Images of junta leader Senior General Than Shwe (directly above) and other leading Burmese military officers making merit at Buddhist temples are repeatedly shown on state television*



*The Shwedagon replica in Pang Long  
faces off with the monument to the  
historic Pang Long agreement*





In 2002, on the orders of Senior General Than Shwe, the regime began construction of a Shwedagon replica in **Pang Long**, where the historic agreement of the ethnic peoples to join the Union of Burma to gain independence from the British was signed in 1947. The name of the 135-foot ( $1+3+5 = 9$ ) tall pagoda is "Maha Rahtarbhithamaggi" (meaning "Great State Unity") and it is built directly in front of, and vastly overshadowing, the monument commemorating the site where the agreement was signed. An entire quarter of the town was forcibly relocated to make way for the new pagoda, which was completed in 2006.

In 2006, a 135-foot ( $1+3+5=9$ ) high Shwedagon replica called Yan Daing Aung Hsutaungbyi ("Fulfilment of the wish to defeat every enemy") was built at the entrance to the town of **Lashio**, where the regime's North East Command is based. It was sponsored by General Than Shwe himself. Although local Shan shun the pagoda, they are forced by the authorities to celebrate Shan New Year there.





## ***The Standing Buddha in Kengtung***

This towering Buddha image stands over 60 feet tall and was completed in 1998 on Loi Jom Sak hill, the highest spot in the town of Kengtung, just west of the lake. The image faces east, with the right arm extended and index finger pointing out over the town – an unusual authoritarian posture which local residents regard with suspicion.

The image was ordered built by then Triangle Region Commander Thein Sein (currently Prime Minister). Burmese artisans were brought in from Mandalay to oversee the construction, and instead of using local builders, Burma Army troops stationed in the town were hired to build the image. During the construction, the area was placed out of bounds to local residents.

According to Shan custom, when a Buddha image is built, a special ceremony is held when monks and villagers place sacred and precious items inside the “heart” of the Buddha. However, during the building of this Buddha, no locals were invited to this ceremony, leaving people suspicious at what had been inserted in the image. After the image was completed, two Burmese monks were called from Rangoon and put in charge of the new temple at the foot of the image.

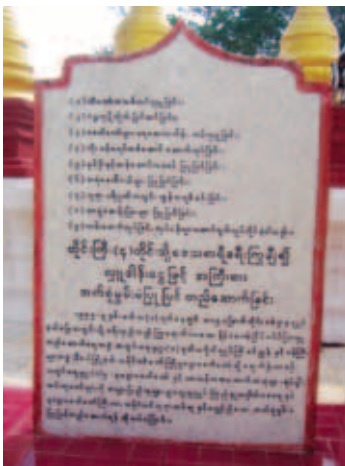
Local residents are convinced that the image is bringing them bad luck, and avoid paying obeisance there. Sellers say they can sell nothing if they walk past the image on their way to morning market. They therefore make long detours to avoid passing beneath the image. Locals also cite evidence of celestial displeasure at the image: only six months after it was built, the offending outstretched hand was hit by lightening, knocking off the pointing finger. One of the original Burmese builders was summoned to quickly restore it.

## ***The renovation of the Baw Gyo Pagoda near Hsipaw***

The Baw Gyo Pagoda is an ancient monument reputed to be over 2,000 years old. It was renovated significantly during 1995-1996 under the orders of General Khin Nyunt.

A committee of Burmese township officials was appointed to oversee the renovation, replacing the former pagoda committee of local elders.

The building has been elaborately gilded and painted, and traces of former Shan donors erased. Instead, stone plaques have been erected describing in Burmese how Burmese generals have renovated the temple.



***The Baw Gyo  
Pagoda THEN  
and NOW***





*As communities are forced to relocate, temples have become abandoned and derelict like this one*

*Altars and scriptures in temples have been pillaged*



*Burma Army soldiers unashamedly marked this desecrated temple with their battalion number*



*Buddha images like this one have been desecrated by Burma Army soldiers during the past decades of mass anti-insurgency campaigns*



## ***Desecration of local temples***

When the Burmese military leaders visit Shan State, they always pay their respects and make donations to Buddhist temples and monuments. However, the temples they choose to visit are invariably those that they have themselves sponsored, not the traditional places of worship of the local people. The state media always covers these visits, fostering the facade of piety and benevolence espoused by the regime's leaders.

In reality, the regime has shown scant respect for Buddhism in Shan State. During the mass anti-insurgency campaign during 1996-1998, over 1,400 villages were forcibly relocated, and temples in these villages abandoned. Structures that had been painstakingly maintained over centuries by local communities became derelict. Their contents, including priceless Buddha images and scriptures, were pillaged and desecrated. Many of the monks and novices from these temples disrobed, as their scattered and dispossessed communities became unable to support them.

Monks suspected of supporting the Shan resistance have been tortured and killed by the regime's troops.

*Site of the planned Kunlong dam on the upper Salween River  
Right: Kengtawng Falls*







## Threatened scenic areas

Several of Shan State's most beautiful scenic areas are completely off limits to tourists and are being threatened by the regime's hydropower developments, funded by Chinese and Thai investors. The Kengtawng Falls, an iconic landmark for the Shan, may be destroyed by an ongoing water diversion project. Two mega dams are planned on the Salween River, a main artery that cuts through the centre of Shan State. These will flood huge tracts of land upstream.

The construction of trans-Burma oil and gas pipelines to China began in late 2009. The pipelines will cut across northern Shan State, threatening both natural and cultural sights in this area.





**Min Zeya**  
88 Generation  
Sentence: 65 years  
Former political prisoner  
serving 6 years



**Lashio Jail**  
Lies in the north of the town  
17 political prisoners



**Min Ko Naing**  
88 Generation  
Sentence: 65 years & 6 months  
Former political prisoner  
serving 16 years



**Jimmy**  
88 Generation  
Sentence: 65 years  
Former political prisoner  
serving 15 years



**Kengtung Jail**  
Lies in the centre of the town,  
west of Nawng Tung Lake  
8 political prisoners



**Taunggyi Jail**  
Situated at Taung Lay Lone,  
on road from Mandalay to Taunggyi  
9 political prisoners



**Mong Hsat Jail**  
Lies just west of the town  
4 political prisoners



**Ko Ko Gyi**  
88 Generation  
Sentence: 65 years & 6 months  
Former political prisoner  
serving 13 years

## Prisons

*Some of Burma's most famous political dissidents are serving life sentences in prisons in Shan State, hundreds of miles from their homes. Several of these prisons lie along routes frequented by foreign tourists.*

Long notorious for torturing political prisoners, in the past few years the regime has been inflicting a new form of psychological torment on dissidents: consecutive prison sentences exceeding life terms, and incarceration in remote prisons.

In 2008, the regime sentenced the 88 Generation student leaders and others who had demonstrated in the 2007 Saffron Revolution to absurdly long sentences, to be served in prisons in remote areas of Burma far from Rangoon. Several of the most famous political prisoners have been sent to prisons in Shan State. The distance from their homes in Central Burma means it is costly and difficult for relatives to visit them. The much cooler mountain climate also makes them more vulnerable to illness.

This mirrored the regime's cruel treatment of eight Shan political leaders in 2005, who were sentenced to terms of up to 106 years in prisons far from Shan State. This included Hkun Htun Oo, leader of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy, which won the majority of seats in Shan State in the 1990 election. The detainees' "crime" had simply been to peacefully demand political reform. In 2006, one of the detainees, U Myint Than, died while serving a 79-year sentence in Sandoway Prison in Arakan State.

### ***Behind the gates of Kengtung Jail***

Leading democracy activist Min Ko Naing is being kept in solitary confinement in a small cell, forbidden to go out, even to take exercise. Prison food is such low quality that most prisoners rely on family visits to get proper food, but Min Ko Naing's family are rarely able to visit him because of the distance from his home in Rangoon. Already in poor health from repeated torture while in previous detention, he is suffering from a heart condition, weak nerves, deteriorating eyesight, and a painful growth on his foot, but has been denied proper medical treatment.



*The gate at Kengtung prison*

## What's in a name?

| Shan name                 | Shan meaning                  | Burmese transliteration   | Burmese meaning  |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------|
| Mong Pan<br>မိုင်းပန်,    | Town of the Revolving (Lotus) | Mine Pan<br>မိုင်းပန်     | Wearing a bomb   |
| Mong Kerng<br>မိုင်းကိုင် | Town producing horse saddlery | Mine Kaing<br>မိုင်းကိုင် | Holding a bomb   |
| Mong Nawng<br>မိုင်းဆွင်  | Town near a lake              | Mine Naung<br>မိုင်းနောင် | Big brother bomb |

See Place Names section on page 16



**For further information**

[www.aappb.org](http://www.aappb.org)

[www.burmariversnetwork.org](http://www.burmariversnetwork.org)

[www.salweenwatch.org](http://www.salweenwatch.org)

[www.shanland.org](http://www.shanland.org)

[www.shanhumanrights.org](http://www.shanhumanrights.org)

[www.shwe.org](http://www.shwe.org)



[www.shanwomen.org](http://www.shanwomen.org)