From their beginning in Southwestern China to the Shan Plateau of Northeastern Myanmar: Examining the Tai Ethnic People’s Way of Thinking and the Chinese Influence

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The purpose of this project

Originally, my proposed project was “From their beginning in Southwestern China to the Shan Plateau of Northeastern Myanmar: Examining the Tai Ethnic People’s Way of Thinking and the Chinese Influence.” This project was intended to be a preparation for my honors project in the upcoming academic year. By the end of July, I have finalized questions/areas which I will focus on my honors project as planned.

Method

This project was started on the first week of June, I gathered 10 books about the Shan state and its culture and met biweekly with Professor Zuo.

By the second week of June I finished the books: History of the Shan State, the Palaung in northern Thailand, Twilight over Burma, and The Pa-O : Rebels and Refugees and found out that it was really hard to find translated sources for my original project. I had discussed with Professor Zuo and we decided to change our topic to focus on China-Burma relationship.

I started looking at Burma’s relationship with other countries, especially China, and Burma’s neutralist policy after World War II. What I’m interested is that after General Ne Win took power from elected PM U Nu and changed Burma’s political system from democracy to socialism in 1962, he claimed it was ‘the Burmese way to socialism’ and denied its connection to Chinese Communism’s influence, despite previous Burma-China relationships. This policy resulted in Burma’s isolation policy, and the country stayed neutral in the international scene. I find it interesting how General Ne Win used the word ‘socialism’ to describe his military activity in Burma without mentioning China’s political influence in the region.

Results Found

After a discussion with Professor Zuo, I have come up with a new, tentative project title ‘On Isolation: The Burmese Way of Socialism and Neutralism under China’s Shadow?’ and final questions which I will work on my honors thesis.

1. Comparison on the definition of socialism and its history in China and Burma, For example;
   a. Is socialism practicality for military regime in Burma?
   b. The definition of socialism – how to make a claim without mentioning China?
2. Influence of communism over Southeast Asian countries: Burma, Thailand etc.
3. China’s foreign policy during the Cultural Revolution and Burma’s neutralist policy

These three questions will be my primary focus on my honors thesis. The issues cover the communist-socialist ideology topics and the China-Southeast Asia regions. This project will help me gain more knowledge in this area since I’m planning to continue my graduate studies in the history of Southeast Asia.

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