

Responsible Elites as 'change agents'?

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Why does Myanmar need change?

- Decades of military rule
- Economic, political, social decline
- Political and economic transition has begun, social transition?

Elites: Approximation to a definition

- Elite = eligere : to choose, to select, to elect
- Types of elites: birth, social position, education, achievement, military, political, functional
- The critique: are elites suitable for our times?

Elites of responsibility: what would be their task?

- Gramscis ,organic intellectuals‘:
- Legitimation of the existing condition?
- Change of any kind?
- Model?
- Leadership?
- Control of developments? Checks and balances?

Which are the crucial elites in Myanmar?

- Military
- Religious
- Academic (students and/or teachers?)
- Economic
- Social?
- Ethnic?

Is the sangha an elite of responsibility

- Monks: meant to withdraw from the world and meditate, but:
- As advisers and critiques of the rulers they can legitimate and deligitimate wordly rule (laukika)
- *Ana* and *Awza*

Change Agents in Myanmar

- Students
- Other academics
- Religious and ethnic minorities

Examples

- Metta Development Foundation: humanitarian work at the local level, rehabilitation of communities after ceasefires, education, agricultural model projects
- Shalom (Nyein) Foundation: Train the trainers, democratic and political education at the basis, dialogue with the military government
- Emergence of both: after the KIA ceasefire 1994
- Egress: Local educational NGO to improve knowledge of English and general education in Myanmar, founded by Myanmar academics abroad

Elites of responsibility: undergirded by strong individual personalities

- Lahpai Daw Seng Raw, Founder and First Director of Metta
- Daughter of Zau June, highly decorated Major in WWII and first District Commissioner Myitkyina
- Related to all important leaders of KIO/KIA
- Secretary of Brang Seng from 1989 until his death 1994
- Revd. Saboi Jum: President Kachin Baptist Convention
- Mediator and track-2 negotiator during the ceasefire negotiations 1994
- Founder and first director of Shalom
- Initiator of the protests against the building of Myitsone dam

Change agents: are they/should they be visible or under the Radar?

- Criticism of early local NGOs: too close to the ruling powers to which they have to defer, but:
- Metta and Shalom: inconspicuous, local, without political ambitions, maintained the dialogue with the ruling powers in order to be able to function
- Since they were local and flexible able to react to emergencies and catastrophes quickly and adequately: Nargis, ethnic military conflict especially since 2011
- But since 2012: visible, politically engaged and firmly involved in the peace process
- Seng Raw: Member of the Technical Advisory Team
- Ja Nan (Director of Shalom): Involved in the discussions about education reform with an agenda for mother tongue education in the ethnic areas

Change agents and the 21st century Panglong conference

- First Panglong conference 1947: foresaw autonomy for the ethnic minorities, but:
- Never implemented due to the assassination of Aung San, became a myth
- 21st Century Panglong since 2016 intended to deal with unfinished business and to implement the intentions of the first conference, but:
- No results yet, the NPA not accepted by all groups
- Seng Raw and Ja Nan as experts and advisors for the conference, took this engagement because basic humanitarian work is no longer sufficient

Conclusions and questions:

- Can elites of responsibility in Myanmar further change and have they done so? If yes, in what way? >
- N.B. The change began before 2012, but:
- What kind of change? >
- Economic, political, social?
- Did it lead to social justice and participation?
- Given that change on the local level did occur:
- Did change agents further the peace process or not?