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# [BD]From *Weikzahood* to Mediumship: How to Master the World in Contemporary Burma

Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière\*

Centre Asie du Sud-Est (CNRS/EHESS)

## Abstract

In this paper, I bring into focus the biography of a Burmese ritual specialist who combines in her practice different spiritual resources in order to master her changing world. By analysing the way in which she positions herself between different fields of practice, namely the *weikza* path and the spirit possession cult, I aim to show that beliefs and practices considered normatively distinct according to their relative distance from the core of Buddhism actually converge in her personal history. By bringing to light the evolution of such a specialist in terms of a “spiritual career,” I seek to illuminate changes in the religious landscape that reflect those of the overall social context. Finally, this case demonstrates that magic, as a field of practice, is fully constitutive of the way the Burmese Buddhists of today think about and manage their lives, even if it has often been regarded as deviant from normative Buddhism.

## *The Ambiguity of the Weikza Path*

When Buddhists from Burma want to act upon their world or deal with affliction, they may go to ritual specialists who are linked to spiritual figures known as *weikza*: these healers are the representatives of the *weikza* in this world. Although often labelled “wizards” in literature,<sup>1</sup> in reality they attain their qualification through Buddhist practices, such as the strict observance of the moral precepts and intensive-concentration meditation, as well as through the mastery of specific knowledge, such as alchemy, exorcism and the arts of potent diagrams and formulae.<sup>2</sup> These various practices are classified by the Burmese according to the main normative dichotomy prevalent in the Theravadin world, between renouncement of and involvement in this world (Pâli *lokuttara/lokiya*).

Actually, *weikza* followers combine both kinds of practices with the twofold aim of acting upon the world and of attaining spiritual perfection. Some of them are supposed to have reached such spiritual accomplishment that some Burmese think they have gone out of the rebirth cycle while remaining available in this world to rescue people. They are the *weikza* beings characterized by this extraordinary ontological status. Roughly speaking, they are soteriological figures emerging from the Burmese field of occult practices, and they are devoted a cult by the practitioners of this field, identified as the “*weikza* path” (*weikza lan*). The ritual specialists pertaining to the *weikza* path are usually initiated in cult groups linked to one or more of these spiritual beings, whose potency is crucial to their own efficiency and legitimacy.

One has to admit that the field of practice linked to the *weikza* does not easily fit into the normative categories prevalent in Burmese Buddhism. Not only the practices of the ritual specialists, but also the ontological status of the *weikza* as spiritual figures, cannot be classified as exclusively in-worldly or out-worldly. Moreover, the *weikza* path practitioners –religious virtuosi, yet not withdrawn from the world into the religious order

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(*sangha*) – do not fit into either category of the main statutory distinction prevalent in Burmese society, which posits a radical difference between monks and laity.

*The Weikza Path in Burma Studies on the Religious Field*

This impossibility of classifying the *weikza* path according to Burmese normative categories calls into question analyses made in line with emic dichotomies without asking what they are made for. The opposition common to the Theravadin world between what is in-worldly and what is out-worldly found a particularly eloquent expression, in the Burmese context, in the writings of Melford Spiro. The best known of the anthropologists of Burma, Spiro conducted his field research in villages surrounding Mandalay, at the turn of the 1960s, in the heyday of American cultural anthropology in Southeast Asian rural societies. He produced an ambitious analysis of religious phenomena in Burma, known through its critics, particularly Stanley Tambiah, as the “two religions theory” (Tambiah 1984, p. 345). While Tambiah was attempting to produce a comprehensive scheme linking together all the religious facts pertaining to a local community of Northeast Thailand (Tambiah 1970), Spiro insisted that “supernaturalism” (as he called it) and Theravada Buddhism constituted two distinctive religions. He dealt with each of them in two separate books, *Burmese Supernaturalism* (1967) and *Buddhism and Society* (1970), and responded to his critics, arguing that Burmese themselves saw both categories of facts as pertaining to two different religions. While Spiro did not include the *weikza* path in *Burmese Supernaturalism*, he categorized it as “apotropaic,” compared to “nibbannic” and “kammatic” oriented practices and beliefs of Buddhism that he found in Burma, further subdividing the field of religious practices and beliefs according to their relative distance from the core of doctrinal Buddhism (Spiro 1982).

Indeed, by elaborating on this conception of the religious field in Burma, Spiro was doing nothing but reinforcing Burmese views on the matter – not just any views, but the dominant views through which Burmese hegemony is asserted (Brac de la Perrière 2009). However, other lesser known, though by no means less important, works, published during and after Spiro’s time, allow us to draw a somewhat more balanced picture of the religious field in Burmese studies. For instance, Manning Nash takes a more encompassing stance on religion, stating that “the interplay of these oppositions (between this world and the other world) makes up the religious system rather than their opposition” (1966, pp. 112–3).

Among scholars, the compatibility of the *weikza* field of practice with the Theravadin brand of Buddhism has been repeatedly debated. The question of its affinities with the Mahayanist figure of bodhisattva has surfaced as well. Some works, particularly those of Michael Mendelson (1961), John Ferguson and Michael Mendelson (1981) and Juliane Schober (1989), have dealt specifically with the practices and beliefs linked to the Burmese figure of *weikza* without relegating it to the margins of mainstream Buddhism. More recently, Keiko Tosa, Patrik Pranke, Niklas Foxeus and Guillaume Rozenberg have contributed to the discussion with reflections on how to locate the *weikza* figure in Burmese Buddhism, still puzzled by its hybridity.<sup>3</sup>

John Ferguson and Michael Mendelson hypothesized that the *weikza* figure developed its soteriological dimensions during the 19th century in the context of the confrontation with modernity and colonial rule (1981, p. 74). At the time, practices linked to this figure would have coalesced into the articulation of the monastic and the lay domains as a distinctive field in the process of the rationalizing reconfiguration of the religious landscape. Whatever the case may be, the result has been that modernity has made these practices

1 ~~pertain~~ing to magic more apparent and more in contrast with Buddhism than they used to  
2 be, rather than to cause their fading away according to Weber's theory of a disenchanted  
3 world.

4 Thus, the question is not only whether the *weikza* field of practice belongs to the Ther-  
5 avadin brand of Buddhism, historically and normatively; it is also one of its place in the  
6 broader context of the Burmese religious landscape. Actually, to evaluate the place of the  
7 *weikza* in Burmese culture and society, one needs to distinguish this field of practice from  
8 other contiguous ones. It is necessary to consider, for instance, how the practitioners of  
9 the *weikza* path build their position and their legitimacy against those of other ritual spe-  
10 cialists, such as Buddhist monks or spirit mediums. This kind of approach reveals that  
11 ~~these positions~~, so well identified and generally contrasted in Burmese ideas and practices,  
12 actually emerge from the interplay between seemingly heterogeneous fields of practice.  
13 Far from being isolated, the latter must be described in their constant interactions.

#### 14 *The Changes in the Religious Landscape*

15  
16 Spiro's works on Burma have been the best known outside the close circle of specialists,  
17 and have thus contributed to a deep bias which, along with the difficulty of access to the  
18 field, has led, in the decades ~~since~~, to the ignorance of a range of facts concerning religion  
19 in Burma. Thus, practices linked to spirits by the Burmese, particularly the cult to  
20 the 37 Lords, did not benefit from much research. When I began my own enquiries into  
21 this cult in the 1980s, nothing substantial had been published on the matter since Spiro's  
22 *Burmese Supernaturalism* (1967). The cult in its pervasiveness and its complexity was deeply  
23 ingrained in different levels of social organization. However, at the time, it still needed  
24 systematic field research. In the process of describing it as a field of practice of its own,  
25 I discovered that this cult, devoted to the tutelary spirits by the Burmese Buddhists, was  
26 established as separate from Buddhist institutions only in order to assert hierarchical differ-  
27 entiation. This normative separation could not conceal that both fields of ideas and prac-  
28 tices belonged to the same conceptual and ritual world. A close examination of the  
29 conceptual world linked to spirit worship did not demonstrate its isolation from Bud-  
30 dhism. On the contrary, the spirit cult dynamics ~~were~~ best understood as responses to the  
31 evolution of the overall religious field. Indeed, 25 years of enquiries into the rituals of  
32 the spirit cult and into the circles of the spirit mediums have taught me that this field of  
33 practice, far from being merely "traditional" and forever fixed as separate from the Bud-  
34 dhist establishment, was in fact ever-changing and dynamic. Although perfectly identified  
35 as the cult of the 37 Lords, with its own ritual specialists (the spirit mediums, known as  
36 *natkadaw*, being deemed to have control over spirit possession), its boundaries were not at  
37 all static. On the contrary, they were constantly evolving according to context, both  
38 religious and societal.

39  
40 In the past decade, in particular, I have gradually become aware of the progressive  
41 entry among spirits embodied by *natkadaw* into spirit possession séances of a different  
42 ~~brand~~ of entities. I would categorize them roughly as guardian spirits of pagoda entering  
43 the relatively closed circle of the tutelary spirits of the local communities belonging to  
44 the ~~bounded~~ 37 Lords. Significantly, their entry into the spirit possession pantheon fol-  
45 lowed the dramatic development of their iconography in the pagodas, which was the hint  
46 of other socio-religious changes, namely those affecting the relationships between agents  
47 from the economic, political and religious spheres. The move of the spirit mediums  
48 towards figures not belonging to their recognized pantheon was linked with transforma-  
49 tions in the overall socio- economic conditions, particularly of the urban population,

1 from which the bulk of those operating in Yangon used to draw their clientele. Needless  
 2 to say, the displacement of the central administration to Naypyidaw, the brand new capi-  
 3 tal,<sup>4</sup> following the move of large segments of the Burmese population from downtown  
 4 Yangon to new satellite towns and their replacement by a newly emerging middle class  
 5 of a more complex origin,<sup>5</sup> all had a broad range of consequences on religious practices.  
 6 Investigating the evolution of the practices of the spirit mediums, I came across a hybrid  
 7 form of ritual, organized jointly by *natkadaw* and ritual specialists linked to the figure of  
 8 *weikza*. Although not new *per se*, this kind of spirit possession séance was starting to  
 9 involve the embodiment of figures linked to the *weikza* beings by the *weikza* followers.  
 10 The *natkadaw* began commenting upon this new element as a break with their tradition.  
 11 The *natkadaw* field of practice was seemingly in competition with that of the *weikza* in  
 12 the context of these spirit possession séances, in which the interplay between the two  
 13 fields of practice was ritually acted out.<sup>6</sup> The boundaries between the different fields of  
 14 practice were not only porous and delineated through such interplay, they were also  
 15 changing.

#### 16 17 *A Biography in the Shape of Spiritual Encounters*

18  
19 I met with Ma Tin Tin U at the occasion of such a hybrid ceremony in 2007. A pretty  
 20 woman in her 40s, she lives with her husband in a rather comfortable house in a quiet  
 21 suburb of Yangon where service men of General Ne Win settled in the 60s.<sup>7</sup> I came to  
 22 her place ~~for the first time~~, together with the spirit medium who helped her organize a  
 23 spirit possession ceremony. For my spirit medium friend, she was not an ordinary client,  
 24 not being his devotee but merely needing him to set up the ritual setting for spirit posses-  
 25 sion. The ritual setting was more complex than usual: the pavilion erected in front of the  
 26 house to host the possession dances to the 37 Lords, for 3 days, was actually shared by  
 27 two groups of specialists, the mediums of the 37 Lords staying conspicuously in the half  
 28 part beside the street, and a group of practitioners of the *weikza* path staying in the other  
 29 half, beside the house. The difference between them was also manifested in their con-  
 30 trasted clothes and behaviour. Spirit mediums, mainly homosexuals men in this case, were  
 31 colourfully dressed and behaved almost as lively as usual, while the *weikza* practitioners,  
 32 mainly women, were dressed in brown, signalling their pious self-restraint. The pavilion  
 33 shrines were linked by a thread to the domestic ones, upstairs, which happened to be  
 34 rather elaborate, with a variety of ritual objects linked to the *weikza* cult. A woman was  
 35 to stay there praying for the duration of the ceremony, so that spiritual manifestations  
 36 would be limited to expected ones. Under the ritual pavilion, possession dances were  
 37 alternately performed by mediums of the *weikza* path and mediums of the 37 Lords,  
 38 according to a regulated time schedule. Ma Tin Tin U, the hostess and principal donator,  
 39 also played the main part, dressed as a princess to embody the Kyaikkami Lady, the  
 40 guardian spirit of a pagoda located on the seaside, south of Moulmein.

41 When I was introduced to her husband, a retired military man, like so many of the  
 42 neighbours, he immediately distanced himself from the event, stating that he was not  
 43 involved in the spirit cult and that, rather than follow the *weikza* path, he practiced  
 44 insight meditation (*wipathana*). The reason he had to comply with his wife's wish to cele-  
 45 brate this ceremony in honour of the Kyaikkami Lady, he explained, was that when the  
 46 Lady was channelled through his wife, he had to admit that she was transfigured and truly  
 47 become the Lady.

48 As for me, I noted that the *weikza* path followers, although higher on the spiritual  
 49 scale, seemed to need spirit mediums if they wanted to propitiate their own spirits

1 through possession dances. I decided to come back to interview Ma Tin Tin U and try  
2 to understand how she, although belonging to a *weikza* group, came to relate to a per-  
3 sonal guardian who did not belong to the pantheon of traditional guardian spirits. She  
4 welcomed me and said she had been waiting for me, a common way ~~to assert~~ clairvoy-  
5 ance ability. She received me upstairs in the bounded limits of her shrines. Apparently,  
6 she was acting as a *weikza* consultant for people of her surroundings to offer predictions,  
7 and, more specifically, to suggest lottery numbers and to cure disease and distress.

8 Ma Tin Tin U claimed that she had been a medium of Bomingaung, currently the  
9 most popular *weikza* being, through whom she had received oracles since 1985. Talking  
10 about her exchanges with the *weikza*, she used the expression *dat si-* (to circulate energy),  
11 while spirit mediums would rather say *nat pu-* (spirit is heating) or *nat win-* (spirit is  
12 entering) to qualify possession by the spirit. This is revealing of the fact that contact with  
13 spiritual beings is not perceived in the same way by both kinds of specialists and accord-  
14 ing to the nature of the entities involved. Ma Tin Tin U maintained, moreover, that she  
15 did not charge for her services, being content ~~to organize~~ ceremonies financed by her cli-  
16 ents, a way ~~to~~ further differentiate herself from the spirit mediums known to extort  
17 money from their clients (although their procedure is ~~the same~~).

18 As soon as Ma Tin Tin U understood my request, she started to tell her life story in  
19 unrestrained and lavish detail, connecting all its turning points with spiritual encounters.  
20 Born in a small town in the delta, she came to Mingaladon, a satellite city to the North  
21 of Yangon, to work in a confectionary workshop, during the 1990s.<sup>8</sup> At that time she  
22 was taken to Ma Po So, a woman follower of a *weikza* group known as the Nagani, or  
23 the Red Dragon. The Nagani group devotes a cult to U Kowinda, a *weikza* being whose  
24 dim and slightly disturbing picture has become common among the representations  
25 adorning ~~the~~ domestic shrines in Yangon. ~~It~~ shows a skinny monk whose head is  
26 wrapped in his brown robe. As for Ma Po So, she is a medium of the *weikza* U Kowinda  
27 and of an “ogre” (*bilu*) who is the guardian spirit of Daddhu Kan, a pagoda situated in  
28 the outskirts of Yangon. During this first consultation, Ma Po So made the diagnosis that  
29 Ma Tin Tin U was linked with the Kyaikkami Lady, and told her that if she wanted to  
30 receive a promotion she should have a dress prepared as an offer of thanks to the Lady.  
31 Consequently, Ma Tin Tin U began to be involved in a cult to this Lady, ~~requiring~~ her  
32 to wear the dress and to be possessed by the spirit in the context of spirit possession cere-  
33 monies. Indeed, this practice is similar to that of the spirit mediums for their main spirit.  
34 However, the Kyaikkami Lady is not a tutelary spirit but the guardian spirit of the Kyaik-  
35 kami pagoda. She does not belong to the spirit possession pantheon of tutelary spirits.  
36 Like other Ladies in charge of pagodas, she is rather known as *thaik* and related to the  
37 serpentine *naga*.

38 It was through her belonging to Ma Po So’s group that Ma Tin Tin U met her hus-  
39 band. He had been previously in contact with Ma Po So to treat the fertility problem he  
40 had with his first wife, in the early 1990s. They ultimately had a daughter, now a teen-  
41 ager, thanks, they believe, ~~to~~ their devotion to *thaik* Ladies: Shin Saw Bu, the Shan  
42 queen of Anawratha, who has become the prototype of *thaik* figures, and Ma Nwè Nan,  
43 the Lady of Bottataung pagoda, whose rising fame in the 1990s translated into the gradual  
44 increase of her shrine, eventually discarded from the pagoda platform and now standing,  
45 as a rival, on the other side of the access road to the pagoda. Later on, after his first wife  
46 died of heart disease and ~~their~~ daughter became ill, ~~the husband~~ returned to Ma Po So.  
47 She advised him to organize a spirit possession ceremony dedicated to the *thaik* Ladies,  
48 and asked Ma Tin Tin U to dance at the ceremony and to embody the *thaik* Ladies. At  
49 this occasion, they met and married in 2002, making Ma Tin Tin U, at the turn of her

40s, a second wife to a widowed man. From this union a son was born, who is treated as a miracle son.

From Ma Tin Tin U's story, it is difficult to say if she was already a *weikza* follower at the time she met Ma Po So. She did explain, however, that she had not yet "met" U Kowinda. This happened during a stay at the hospital where she was treated for an illness. Then the *weikza* gave her a vision of him ("he came in her mental space [*mano*]," as she says, according to the *weikza* idiom). He told her to go see his place in the hospital. She discovered a small pond where *naga* could have taken refuge and thought that a guardian Lady (*thaik*) must be dwelling there. This indicates how devotion to the *weikza* figure is intermingled with that of the pagoda-treasure guardian Ladies in her mind.

Ma Tin Tin U also described "encountering" the *weikza* U Kowinda at Popa, where Ma Po So goes every Lent to present him with offerings. Mount Popa, a volcano overlooking the Burmese central plain, was once the sacred Mountain of Pagan's kingdom and remains a famous destination for pilgrims and all sorts of spiritual practitioners. Above all, it is the place where Bomingaung, the most popular of today's *weikza*, "went out" of the rebirth cycle and thus attained the ambiguous state that pertains to *weikza* beings. Ma Tin Tin U apparently went to Mount Popa once, together with Ma Po So, having vowed to meet U Kowinda. She undertook to meditate (concentration meditation, *thamatha*), and saw him riding a horse. She followed him despite sore feet, and climbed up "alone" to the top of the mountain along a difficult path. Then she started to meditate again and saw the guardian spirit of Popa, a beautiful Lady of fair complexion, with her two teenage sons. The three of them belong to the 37 Lords pantheon. Eventually, U Kowinda "~~came~~", but he did not let her recognize him and, ~~afraid~~, she fled. The elusive ~~character~~ of her encounter with U Kowinda ~~speaks to~~ an indirect link to this *weikza*. Actually, Ma Tin Tin U has never really managed to get in touch with him: uncertain visions are all that she has achieved through painful efforts.

Together with Ma Po So, she ~~has also been to~~ Kyaikkami, south of Moulmein, home to the *thaik* Lady she is linked to. This seaside pagoda ~~presents the particularity of having~~ a separate pavilion for women now adorned with a *thaik* Lady image made according to the model of the more recent statue of Mya Nan Nwè at the Bottataung pagoda. Thus, like so many pagoda-treasure guardians, both Ladies have benefited from the development of *thaik* iconography in the 1990s. Ma Tin Tin U went to Kyaikkami before her wedding, and her would-be husband joined the party to ask the Lady's permission to marry her. She went on her own to the women's pavilion at a time when the sea level was rising, and had to stay ~~the night~~, as flood water had separated the pavilion from the main pagoda. She undertook a standard, 45-minute meditation session, during which she saw an old man dressed in white (as some *weikza* are represented), and a young couple dressed as princes ~~were in~~ the Pagan kingdom's time. The old man told her that he would allow her to "spread religion" (*thathana pyu-*), to propagate Buddhism, meaning that he would give her a son to ordinate as a monk, the best way for a woman to progress on the karmic path. When she left the room, she saw a man running and shouting that he could not go away. Her dream ended just when the meditation session was over.

Since their marriage in 2002, the couple had no longer been able to go to Kyaikkami, which, Ma Tin Tin U maintained, had brought on economic difficulties for their family. That is why she organized the spirit possession ceremony I attended in 2007. A client of hers promised that, if her wish to obtain a licence to import a car ~~were~~ fulfilled, she would sponsor her pilgrimage to Kyaikkami. As Ma Tin Tin U was not yet in a position to go to Kyaikkami, she began, ~~instead~~, to attend Mya Nan Nwè's anniversary in her sanctuary of Bottataung, in Yangon. She sees this *thaik* figure as being very close to that

1 of the Kyaikkami Lady, and speaks of how, discovering the most recent statue of Mya  
 2 Nan Nwè, dressed as a life-size nun, she received from the Kyaikkami Lady a request to  
 3 ~~be dressed~~ in the same fashion. She does not know how this statue offering to the Kyaik-  
 4 kami Lady was made. As for Mya Nan Nwè's anniversary celebration, it has recently  
 5 developed and is now performed ~~around~~ the end of December: monastic robes and a full  
 6 meal are offered to monks in the name of the Lady, and food suited for naga (milk and  
 7 sweets) is sent along the river. Ma Tin Tin U's own birthday being on December 29, she  
 8 has been there on this date since 2005, offering a birthday cake to any devotee showing  
 9 up, on the "advice" of the Lady.

### 11 *The Hybridity of a Spiritual Career*

13 Ma Tin Tin U turned to the *weikza* path as a single woman, migrating from a rural set-  
 14 ting to the suburban world of Yangon, as a factory worker, at a time when ~~these sur-~~  
 15 ~~roundings were~~ undergoing drastic changes due to the new urban policy of the junta.  
 16 Such a tale of radical displacement recalls those found in similar rapidly urbanizing socie-  
 17 ties of Southeast Asia in the 1990s (Morris 2000 and Taylor 2004). From this ~~situation~~,  
 18 she managed to reach a relatively honourable status, as wife to a retired military man,  
 19 mother to their son, and *weikza* consultant in lower-middle-class ~~surroundings~~. Although  
 20 modest, this position has to be understood as a real achievement, which seems to have  
 21 been possible thanks to her belonging to a *weikza* group. Incidentally, Ma Tin Tin U, so  
 22 prolix about her spiritual encounters, never gave any precise account of the circumstances  
 23 that led her to consult Ma Po So – whether it was her job difficulties, her illness, or even  
 24 her late wedding, which prompted her initial visit, remains unknown – as if the discovery  
 25 of her link to the *thaik* Ladies had cleanly erased her whole previous life, and her own  
 26 life story had disappeared in her spiritual biography.

27 On her way to building her position as a specialist of a "spiritual path", her life story  
 28 sounds like an argument for legitimacy. This is not ~~peculiar~~ to her being a follower of  
 29 the *weikza* path; on the contrary, it is common to nearly all spiritual biographies. Her  
 30 story is also, in a sense, such a standard one that it seems to cross ~~boundaries~~ of differenti-  
 31 ated fields of practice. Indeed, Ma Tin Tin U's experience is not foreign to the young,  
 32 good-looking ~~women whose difficulties~~ in a conventional marital life ~~were~~ traditionally  
 33 settled through ~~their~~ becoming the medium of one of ~~those~~ 37 spirits ~~who entice young~~  
 34 ~~Ladies, such as Ma HnèLé or Popa Lady, to whom they could turn for a womanly~~  
 35 ~~model~~.

36 No doubt more noteworthy is Ma Tin Tin U's position as a woman in the *weikza*  
 37 field of practice, since the role of women in the *weikza* cult, particularly as practitioners,  
 38 is far from self-evident. If women are present among *weikza* devotees, leaders of cult  
 39 groups are usually men. Indeed, the spiritual accomplishment allowing the outstanding  
 40 ontological status of the recognized *weikza* beings, along with some of the practices lead-  
 41 ing to this accomplishment (such as alchemy), seem to be barred to women. Women's  
 42 ability to manifest the *weikza* beings' potency (*dat*) is open to debate: in some contexts,  
 43 they are mediums of the *weikza* beings, while in others, this role is deemed exclusively  
 44 masculine, on the grounds that such perfected beings may not be in contact with a female  
 45 body.

46 In the *weikza* group led by Ma Po So, a woman devoted to the *weikza* U Kowinda,  
 47 Ma Tin Tin U acts as a medium of *thaik* Ladies; she does not claim to be a medium of  
 48 U Kowinda. Far from the ascetic figures of the *weikza* beings associated with esoteric  
 49 practices, *thaik* Ladies are spirits linked to pagodas, most of them young and attractive



models of femininity. Moreover, these spirits require possession dances performed by a cult, as do the spirits belonging to the 37 Lords pantheon. Propitiating them in a ritual way entails organizing a full-fledged spirit possession ceremony, in a setting whose specialists are spirit mediums (*natkadaw*). Nonetheless, *thaik* Ladies do not belong to the pantheon of traditional tutelary spirits; they are clearly differentiated, and belong to a distinct and higher sphere of spiritual beings.

Ma Tin Tin U's discourse makes clear that it is her link to the *thaik* Ladies which marks her belonging to the *weikza* path. Significant in this regard is her insistence on describing how she connects with these beings through the systematic practice of *thamatha* meditation, and the fact that the words she uses to describe her experience fully pertain to the *weikza* field of practice. Though she may not be as accomplished in her mastery of the *weikza* or esoteric arts as is often expected, her practice is indisputably identified as a *weikza* consultancy. This could partly explain why she needs to demonstrate her link with the spiritual world through possession of lesser beings than the *weikza*. But her spirits, the *thaik* Ladies, are still higher than the possession spirits, because they are, as a rule, located in the pagoda, and are therefore directly related to the Buddhist establishment.

This also has to be related to Ma Tin Tin U's inscribing herself in her time and place. *Thaik* Ladies became popular in the 1990s, in the wake of urban expansion and pagoda refurbishment impelled by the junta in its attempt to reshape society and to assert its legitimacy. Private donators called upon to sponsor religious donations were ~~prompt~~ to rediscover imaginary figures linked to the pagoda foundation legends and ordered new images of them, which led to a complete renewal of the pagoda side iconography. At the time, when Ma Tin Tin U was trying to find her way in suburban society, she took on the mood, following her master Ma Po So, and identified herself with the new images created by her generation. In this time of urban migration, it is significant that spiritual connections are redirected from local communities' traditional tutelary spirits, bounded to their domains, toward figures less community-rooted but more acceptable to Buddhist ethics.

Indeed, to identify with pagoda guardians such as *thaik* Ladies or "ogre" (*bilu*) is also to identify with figures ~~credited to propagate~~ Buddhism (*thathena pyu*), a highly valued role that is also shared by the *weikza* followers. But while the *weikza* role may also be assumed by women, it is ~~in~~ general reserved ~~for~~ men. For a woman, participating in the propagation of the religion typically means having a son in the Sangha. And, as Ma Tin Tin U ~~explicitly expressed~~, it was through her mediation of the Kyaikkami Lady that she eventually married and had the son that allowed her, as a woman, to fully participate in the Buddhist community.

Finally, the spiritual biography of Ma Tin Tin U, with all its commonplaceness, bears witness to the social life and history of contemporary Burma. The spiritual resources she taps into ~~express~~ new developments in religious beliefs and practices. That said, the articulation of such beliefs and practices, which resort to conceptually distinct spheres of religious life, may not be so new. Ultimately, Ma Tin Tin U identifies with the *weikza* field of practice because it offers a religious idiom socially acceptable in her lower-middle-class ~~surroundings~~. By doing so, she marks a distance from the spirit mediums, while still engaging with them for ritual purposes. This may be a new way of disclosing the actual dialectics that characterize the interplay between both levels of practice.

### Short Biography

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## Notes

\* Correspondence address: Benedicte Brac de la Perriere, 190 av France, 75013 Paris, France. E-mail: brac@vjf.cnrs.fr

<sup>1</sup> See Shway Yoe, *The Burman. His Life and Notions*, Ch. 44, for an instance of an early description of these specialists. See also Htin Aung, "The Cult of the Magus", in *Folk Elements in Burmese Buddhism* (1962), for a description of the *weikza* followers by a Burmese scholar.

<sup>2</sup> About the importance of alchemy in practices linked to the *weikza*, see Guillaume Rozenberg (*Les Immortels*, 2010), and about potent diagrams and formulae, see Thomas Patton, in Brac de la Perrière and Rozenberg (forthcoming).

<sup>3</sup> A panel was convened by Guillaume Rozenberg and myself on this very topic at the conference of Burma Studies held in Marseille in July 2010. Papers from this panel have been collected in Brac de la Perrière and Rozenberg (forthcoming).

<sup>4</sup> The seat of administration and government was moved from Yangon to Naypyitaw, some 500 km towards the north, in November 2004, almost suddenly, a dramatic move reminiscent of those of the royal cities when a new king ascended to the throne.

<sup>5</sup> When the new junta came to power after the events of 1988, it started an ambitious urban policy to open huge satellite towns in the outskirts of the old cities, first of all in the periphery of Yangon, to relocate people living in crowded downtown areas.

<sup>6</sup> I have identified these processes in the three forthcoming papers referred to in the bibliography.

<sup>7</sup> The General Ne Win came to power in 1962 and led the junta as head of state until the revolt movement of 1988.

<sup>8</sup> The opening of the market economy under the SLORC rule, at the beginning of the 1990s, attracted investors and created job opportunities in the suburbs, particularly in the garment industry. This came to an end due to the combined difficulties of the financial crisis (1997) and of the policy of sanctions against the junta.

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# Author Query Form

Journal: REC3

Article: 329

Dear Author,

During the copy-editing of your paper, the following queries arose. Please respond to these by marking up your proofs with the necessary changes/additions. Please write your answers on the query sheet if there is insufficient space on the page proofs. Please write clearly and follow the conventions shown on the attached corrections sheet. If returning the proof by fax do not write too close to the paper's edge. Please remember that illegible mark-ups may delay publication.

Many thanks for your assistance.

Query reference	Query	Remarks
Q1	<b>AUTHOR: Please check the running head.</b>	
Q2	<b>AUTHOR: please provide the short author biography.</b>	
Q3	<b>AUTHOR: Please provide the city location of publisher for reference Aung (1962).</b>	
Q4	<b>AUTHOR: Please provide the city location of publisher, page range for reference Brac de la Perrière (forthcoming a).</b>	
Q5	<b>AUTHOR: Please provide the name of the publisher, city location of publisher, page range for reference Brac de la Perrière (forthcoming b).</b>	
Q6	<b>AUTHOR: Please provide the name of the publisher, city location of publisher, page range for reference Brac de la Perrière (forthcoming c).</b>	
Q7	<b>AUTHOR: Please provide the forenames/initials for the editor Ferguson for reference Ferguson &amp; Michael (1981).</b>	
Q8	<b>AUTHOR: Please provide the name of the publisher, city location of publisher, page range for reference Foxeus (forthcoming).</b>	
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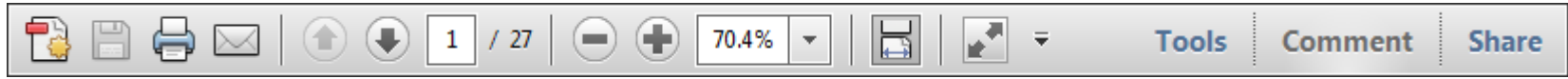
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Q16	<b>AUTHOR:</b> The reference citation 'Tom Patton' has been changed to 'Thomas Patton' to match the reference list, please check.	
Q17	<b>AUTHOR:</b> Please provide department for author correspondence.	

USING e-ANNOTATION TOOLS FOR ELECTRONIC PROOF CORRECTION

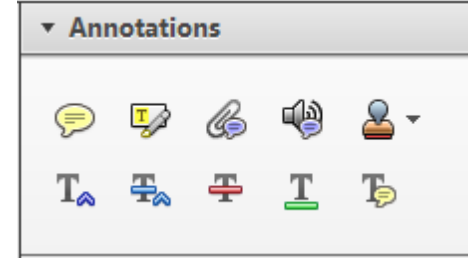
Required software to e-annotate PDFs: Adobe Acrobat Professional or Adobe Reader (version 8.0 or above). (Note that this document uses screenshots from Adobe Reader X)

The latest version of Acrobat Reader can be downloaded for free at: <http://get.adobe.com/reader/>

Once you have Acrobat Reader open on your computer, click on the [Comment](#) tab at the right of the toolbar:



This will open up a panel down the right side of the document. The majority of tools you will use for annotating your proof will be in the [Annotations](#) section, pictured opposite. We've picked out some of these tools below:



**1. Replace (Ins) Tool – for replacing text.**

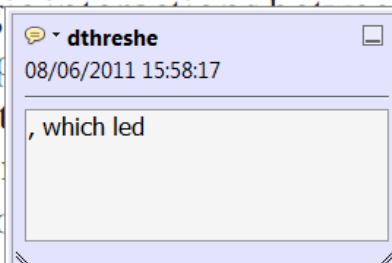


Strikes a line through text and opens up a text box where replacement text can be entered.

**How to use it**

- Highlight a word or sentence.
- Click on the [Replace \(Ins\)](#) icon in the Annotations section.
- Type the replacement text into the blue box that appears.

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**2. Strikethrough (Del) Tool – for deleting text.**



Strikes a red line through text that is to be deleted.

**How to use it**

- Highlight a word or sentence.
- Click on the [Strikethrough \(Del\)](#) icon in the Annotations section.

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**3. Add note to text Tool – for highlighting a section to be changed to bold or italic.**



Highlights text in yellow and opens up a text box where comments can be entered.

**How to use it**

- Highlight the relevant section of text.
- Click on the [Add note to text](#) icon in the Annotations section.
- Type instruction on what should be changed regarding the text into the yellow box that appears.

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**4. Add sticky note Tool – for making notes at specific points in the text.**



Marks a point in the proof where a comment needs to be highlighted.

**How to use it**

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- Click at the point in the proof where the comment should be inserted.
- Type the comment into the yellow box that appears.

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USING e-ANNOTATION TOOLS FOR ELECTRONIC PROOF CORRECTION

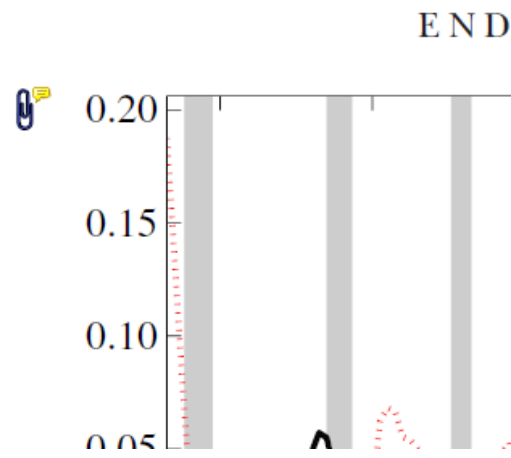
**5. Attach File Tool – for inserting large amounts of text or replacement figures.**



Inserts an icon linking to the attached file in the appropriate place in the text.

**How to use it**

- Click on the [Attach File](#) icon in the Annotations section.
- Click on the proof to where you'd like the attached file to be linked.
- Select the file to be attached from your computer or network.
- Select the colour and type of icon that will appear in the proof. Click OK.



**6. Add stamp Tool – for approving a proof if no corrections are required.**

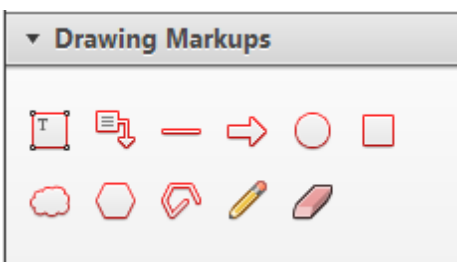


Inserts a selected stamp onto an appropriate place in the proof.

**How to use it**

- Click on the [Add stamp](#) icon in the Annotations section.
- Select the stamp you want to use. (The [Approved](#) stamp is usually available directly in the menu that appears).
- Click on the proof where you'd like the stamp to appear. (Where a proof is to be approved as it is, this would normally be on the first page).

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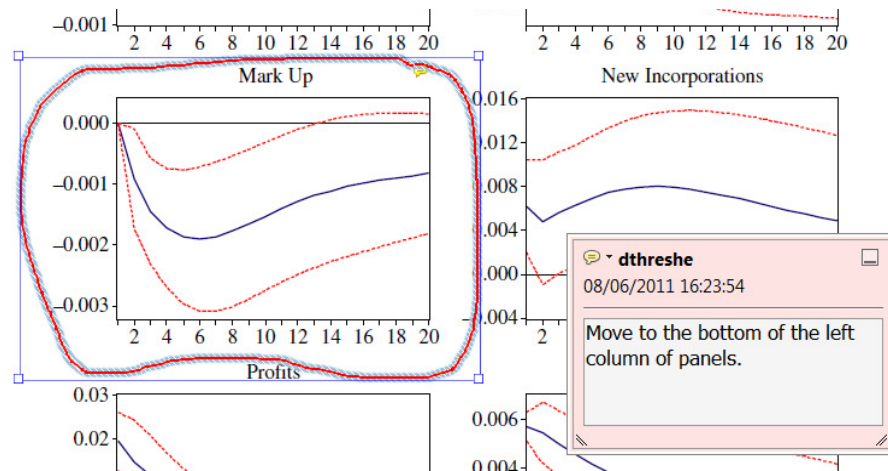


**7. Drawing Markups Tools – for drawing shapes, lines and freeform annotations on proofs and commenting on these marks.**

Allows shapes, lines and freeform annotations to be drawn on proofs and for comment to be made on these marks..

**How to use it**

- Click on one of the shapes in the [Drawing Markups](#) section.
- Click on the proof at the relevant point and draw the selected shape with the cursor.
- To add a comment to the drawn shape, move the cursor over the shape until an arrowhead appears.
- Double click on the shape and type any text in the red box that appears.



For further information on how to annotate proofs, click on the [Help](#) menu to reveal a list of further options:

