



## SEMINAR

### “Constructive Engagement’ as Assertion of Soft Power by Burma’s Military Junta.”

The oft-used term, ‘soft power,’ is typically reserved for indirect forces of control and co-optation wielded by more developed countries and aimed at influencing their less developed international counterparts. Thus, academics and journalists describe Japan, China, and the United States as attempting to exercise soft power on Burma through strategic employment of trade sanctions, humanitarian and development aid, private and public diplomacy, as well as campaigns to win “hearts and minds.” In this talk, I overturn this dominant paradigm, whereby soft power is conceptualized only as flowing to Burma from developed countries. Instead, I describe a scenario where a form of soft power has

flowed out from Burma to the rest of the world. I describe how, going into both the 2015 and 2020 elections, Burma’s military junta sought to build up an intellectual and research infrastructure aimed at producing academics and policy analysts to advocate on their behalf. I also document how they sought to employ what Michel-Rolf Trouillot would have described as “formulas of erasure and banalization” to draw attention away from political atrocities and human rights violations they committed between 1988 and the present-day. I conclude the talk by describing the forms of “soft power” and “counter-control” which have been asserted by democracy activists, who oppose military rule in Burma.



**Dr. Seinenu M. Thein-Lemelson**

Dept. of Anthropology, University of California

She has been conducting long-term ethnographic and psycho-cultural research in Burma (Myanmar) since 2008. She received her PhD in Psychology from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in 2013. From 2015 to 2016, she was a postdoctoral researcher at the Institute of Personality and Social Research (IPSR) at the University of California, Berkeley. From 2016 to 2019, she was a Visiting Scholar in the Department of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley. Dr. Thein-Lemelson has worked with former political prisoners and democracy activists in Burma since 2013 and is currently finishing a book-length ethnography on the Burmese Democracy Movement to be published by Stanford University Press. Dr. Thein-Lemelson is currently a Lecturer in the Department of Anthropology, University of California, Los Angeles.

**Tuesday, 28 March 2023**

**10.00 - 11.30**

**East Zone, 2<sup>nd</sup> Building**

**Room E-105**

Hosted by:

Kyushu University, Q-AOS, Mega Region Module