This thesis explores the marginally studied topic of Burmese photography from the colonial period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. With a large emphasis on the oeuvres of the foreign photographers Felice Beato (1832 – 1909), Philipp Adolphe Klier (1845 – 1911), and D.A. Ahuja (? – ?), this study analyzes how visual representations of Burma’s people were fabricated, mass-produced, and contextualized by foreign audiences to provide additional justification for the colonial mission.

By combining Edward Said’s concept of orientalism with Laura Mulvey’s concept of the gaze, this study considers how the British empire looked upon and created a visual corpus of Burmese women and men as “the Other”. This study argues that the creation and treatment of Burma’s visual milieu was fully informed by an orientalizing gaze that simultaneously commodified and fetishized the native population.

Further, this study applies Roland Barthes’s concept of the myth and his semiological system to analyze and contextualize contemporary use of colonial images in “pop culture” merchandise created by foreign-owned businesses established in Myanmar in recent years. Additionally, this study contributes new findings based on archival and art historical research that helps clarify and establish a clearer biographical timeline for the photographers studied.
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CAPTURING BURMA:
REACTIVATING COLONIAL PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGES
THROUGH THE BRITISH RAJ’S GAZE

BY
CARMIN BERCHIOLLY
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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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DEDICATION

In memory of my grandmother, with love.
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INTRODUCTION

The earliest known photographic images of the Southeast Asian country of Burma are from 1852. The photographs, taken by Dr. John McCosh (1805 – 85) who visited Burma during his service with the British forces, coincide with the second Anglo-Burmese war of 1852-53 and take place thirteen years after the advent of the daguerreotype. From the arrival of the technology into the country, a paradox was created. Images were produced by foreigners for foreigners to faithfully represent the land and its peoples under new colonial rule.

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1 The term Burma is employed throughout this study to refer to the period before 1989, when the country’s name was changed to Myanmar by the military. The term Burmese, in reference to the people of Burma/Myanmar and its language, is used continuously to refer to past and present contexts, based on the author’s preference. In some circumstances, the term Burmah is used in accordance with other authors references. Additionally, the spelling of city names is based on the historical period referenced. In this context, Rangoon refers to the city before 1989, and Yangon to contemporary times.


3 For a thorough reading of key dates on Burma’s colonial wars, read: Michael W. Charney, A History of Modern Burma (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010); and Myint-U Thant, The River of Lost Footsteps: A Personal History of Burma (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008). Burma’s colonial history is marked by three Anglo-Burmese wars that led to full annexation by 1886. The first known English presence in Burma is from 1586 when Ralph Fitch was sent armed with a charter from Elizabeth I to trade in the East Indies. From this early date, interest in a Burma-China trade route via the Irrawaddy river, as well as the abundance of teak and rubies in Upper Burma, informed succeeding missions. The first war started in 1824 lasted one year and led to the “Treaty of Yandabo”, which strengthened India’s frontiers by ceding Arakan, Tenasserim and Assam territories to the British East India Company. The treaty also allowed a British resident at the court of Ava. The second war took place in 1852 after conflict due to the capture of two British vessels by the Burmese. This war also lasted one year and ended with the British occupation of Pegu. The following thirty years were marked by mistrust, cultural incomprehension, and commercial pressure. In 1862 and 1867 commercial treaties were signed, leading to the creation of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company. After the death of the semi pro-West King Mindon in 1878, he was succeeded by Thibaw, who was unable to maintain peace. During the new reign, the country increasingly fractioned and conflict between warlords and dacoits led to concern from the British, who sent a mission in 1885 to annex the rest of the country. This decision was based on a conflict with the Burmese ruling council (the
photographers exerted control on the production of Burma’s visual history for over six decades, until the early twentieth century when Burmese-owned studios such as London Art Studio, established by U Ohn Maung, began to appear and explore the potential of both photography and film. The purpose of this study is to unpack this paradox, to understand how the colonial visual culture that has come to represent the country’s history is often accepted as unproblematic, and to reveal through art historical analysis the encoded messages that these images carry. The study will consider the photographers Felice Beato (1832 – 1909), Philipp Adolphe Klier (1845 – 1911), D.A. Ahuja (? – ?), and their oeuvres while contextualizing and chronicling their presence in Burma through the use of primary sources. The history of photography in Burma has not been fully integrated into the photographic discourse and has only been marginally discussed by a small group of collectors, curators, and historians who narrowly focused on specific collections that privileged specific photographers. Thus, this study will bring together archival sources to establish a clearer chronology for the history of these three photographers while considering their work as preserved in multiple public and private collections. While problematizing the use of these images, the study will also contribute new findings on the relationships and conflicts between the photographers and previously unpublished archival findings on their timelines, which in turn allow for more precise or in some cases, fully revised dating of both events and photographs.

In addition to photographic production, views about Burma and its history have been largely controlled by Western scholarship. Contemporary scholars voice concerns regarding the

_Hlutdaw_ who refused to reconsider a fine that was given to the Bombay Burmah trading company over claims of unpaid export duties.
ways in which Burma’s agency lacks presence in the academic discourse. In his 2015 essay “Myanmar and the Outside World”, Jacques Leider argues that histories written from an outside-in view tend to perpetuate the idea of a Burma that lacks its “own historical destiny”. Additionally, he echoes what early scholars such as George Cœdès and John S. Furnivall once argued before. That Burma, though understood to have been influenced by India and China, did not lack its own independent developments. Further, though colonialism and three wars within a sixty-year period succeeded in disrupting Burmese ways of life, Leider posits that art and architecture continued to uninterruptedly flourish throughout the nineteenth century. By accepting Burma as a dynamically complex region capable of independent thought and action, Western colonizing missions could not easily justify their actions. Thus, such attitudes flourished throughout written records of that time.

Interest in Myanmar’s visual history is growing considerably, with multiple museums, scholars, and curators from around the world taking interest in the topic. Examples of this include the 2007 Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York exhibition and catalogue Impressed by Light: British Photographs from Paper Negatives, 1840-1860; the 2017 publication Photography in Southeast Asia: A Survey by Wubin Zhuang, which attempts to compile the first comprehensive account of the medium’s presence across the region; the 2017-18 Musée national des arts asiatiques-Guimet (National Museum of Asian Arts) exhibition and catalogue Burmese Images: Photographic Treasures of MNAAG; and the 2018 currently ongoing exhibition and upcoming catalogue Burmese Photographers curated by artist Lukas Birk at the historic Yangon.

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5 Leider, 42.
Secretariat building on the occasion of the 10th annual Yangon Photo Festival. Moreover, Contemporary companies are beginning to take note of this interest and have begun exploring the economic potential that these images hold. Public knowledge of these images is thus increasing and the historical past of cities like Yangon and Mandalay, which were largely represented in the corpus of these visual sources, are largely understood through these constructed narratives.

Contemporary audiences receive and observe historical photographic sources passively, accepting the images’ perceived ability to safely guard the memory of times before our own, and from which we do not belong. Thus, images are treated as representative sources and granted an authority that allows them to silently transmit one-way messages to us, the submissive receptors of historical truth. On the other hand, this study contends that Western audiences who lived during the time of the images’ production took an active role in the consumption and commodification of the cultures which they represented. Thus, as active agents, their interaction with the visual was dialogical, and permitted for a two-way message to be sent between the image and the viewer, allowing for an inquiry-based metaphorical conversation. For the Western observer, the images acted as conduits for possession, allowing the viewer to employ their voyeuristic gaze to fetishize and commodify.

We must question the epistemological treatment that these visual documents have received in modern scholarship, as bodies of knowledge that represent a true and linear history that is representative of the past and communicate reality to us, the passive viewers, in a direct and non-dialogical form of communication. I problematize this approach, in line with other diverse scholars such as Susan Sontag, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Michel Foucault, Edward Said, John Tagg, Mallek Alloula, Homi K. Bhabha, Ronald Barthes, and Laura Mulvey all who
have questioned, through different methodological approaches, how historical narratives are created and presented from a dominant metanarrative that prevailed in the modern period in most academic fields. Thus, this study takes side with these postmodern and postcolonial scholars and their theories that expose the problem of a universal approach to knowledge and by implication – power. Further, this study will treat the visual culture of Burma’s colonial past as a body of text that can be known through a constructivist approach, which accepts that knowledge is obtained subjectively and does not exist outside of individuals, but rather, is constructed through social experience.\(^6\) Through this approach, I seek to reactivate these sources as when they were created, to allow them to speak again while scrutinizing those messages in order to annihilate the previous conceptions that have allowed these images to be written into history as bearers of a universal truth.

**Theoretical Framework**

The field of postcolonial studies has gained momentum since the 1980s and 1990s and continues to grow today as scholars make relevant questions about the nature of meaning construction from the colonial past, and the implications that the process of colonization has on human history. Studies on postcolonialism consider the effects on cultures that have been part of the colonial and independence processes at the social, political, economic, and cultural levels. The term postcolonial is accepted as encompassing the whole of a country’s colonial history, from the moment of the arrival of the colonizing powers. In this context, the term does not refer

to the date of a country’s independence from its colonizers, as it is widely accepted that this only implies political independence and thus not encompassing of the social, economic, and cultural aspects. Further, the postcolonial discourse accepts that the effects of colonialism are significant on both cultures, and that paradigm shifts occur not only to the metropolis (the colonizer), but also to the colonies (the colonized).7

Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1979), Homi K. Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture* (1994), and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1985) have become foundations of postcolonial studies and allowed for scholars to question and build on their important work. The goal of postcolonial scholarship is thus to dismantle the Eurocentric world view that has largely dominated the major academic discourses until recently by giving a voice to the subaltern. In postcolonial studies, the subaltern are hierarchically inferior groups who are in oppositional relation to the hegemonic powers (the elite) and who have been subjugated and forbidden from having political power, agency and voice.

Saidian Orientalist theory contends that the “Orient”, or the non-European “Other” exists as a justification to create binary opposing terms in which the colonized can be understood and controlled.8 Said postulated “Orientalism” as:

A distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts; it is an elaboration not only of a basic geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident) but also of a whole series of “interests” which, by such means as scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description, it not only creates but also maintains;... it is, above all, a discourse that is by no means in direct,

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7 For an introduction to the historiography of postcolonial studies, refer to Eleanor M. Hight and Gary D. Sampson, "Photography, "Race," and Post-Colonial Theory," introduction to *Colonialist Photography Imag(in)ing Race and Place* (Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2013). This publication also considers the field in relation to image production and the history of photography with a postcolonial approach.

corresponding relationship with political power in the raw, but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power.\textsuperscript{9}

Said applies the Foucauldian notion of the interconnectedness between power and knowledge specifically to the Orient, a place which he describes as an imaginative Western construct rather than an actual region with topographic and political boundaries.

Said traces Orientalism as originating with an ideology that eventually was transformed into actual academic discourse and that ultimately was institutionalized to propagate these binary notions. This process, which is described in three main stages, begins with the ideological aspect. This way of thinking by the West (or Occident) about the East (or Orient), was constructed as a mutually exclusive conceptual binary. Through this narrative, the West came to be self-defined with positive aspects such as active, advanced, masculine, civilized, etc. Thus, by default, the East earned the opposing and negative aspects of this ideology, such as passive, underdeveloped, feminine, and barbaric. As an ideology, the dualisms of Orientalism became more than just a way for defining the Orient. Rather, they became a process by which to define the European construct of Self and thus, everything outside these boundaries became the Other.

Once these ideological constructs took root in the late eighteenth century, Orientalism found its way as an European academic discourse. With more opportunities to study the Other as British powers began their colonizing missions and developed teams of military armies alongside academic scholars who simultaneously entered unknown territories, the West made these cultures objects of study. Over time, these events led to the creation of a scholarship corpus that claimed to possess all that could be known about the East. By the end of the nineteenth century,

\textsuperscript{9} Said, \textit{Orientalism}, 12.
Oriental studies had fully integrated into academia, leading to the last part of the processes discussed by Said.

Through this Orientalist discourse, which was created by the group in power, the new basis for knowledge was accepted as truth, and led to the full institutionalization of this body of work. These institutions, as established authorities, connected colonial knowledge with colonial power. Once this structure was in place, colonial justification was possible. Thus, through this institutionalized discourse, colonialism was no longer an aggressive act that took resources for the metropole, but rather a civilizing and moral mission.

Though Said’s polemic work has been scrutinized by other postcolonial scholars for “failing to take into account the nuances of the relationship between colonizer and colonized and the systems responsible for its reinforcement,” his work continues to hold importance for providing a framework for new ways of understanding the relationships between East and West.10

Expanding on Said’s work, Homi K. Bhabha applies the concepts of cultural hybridity and mimicry in his influential book The Location of Culture (1994). Bhabha takes a theoretical position that questions and expands on Said’s binary by unveiling the connotations that the use of these terms carry, as they imply a sense of solid distinctive-ness and essence-ness.11 According to Bhabha, the binary approach reinforces the idea that a type of purity exists in cultures before they were colonized, and that it is possible to revert back to this original state. Rather, Bhabha proposes the concept of cultural hybridity, which understands culture as


11 Homi K. Bhabha, Location of Culture (London: Routledge, 1994), 35.
constantly in flux and thus not capable of being pinned down and conceptualized to a specific type of essence-ness. In this context, ideas such as pure British-ness, American-ness, Burmese-ness, etc., are not useful as they ignore that all cultures are hybrid. Similarly exploring these ideas of hybridity, the problems and instabilities of the concept of the native, and the invention of the creole, Benedict Anderson wrote in “Exodus” (1994), “for the native is, like colonial and creole, a white-on-black negative. The nativeness of natives is always unmoored, its real significance hybrid and oxymoronic”. For Anderson, capitalism allowed these “imagined worlds” to be created, along with all of their instabilities.

Understanding culture through this lens allows for a better questioning of colonizing missions. This understanding includes the anthropologists and their narratives that highlighted the natives “pure” state of existence, and the attempts to record their culture through writings and visual depictions before it seemingly vanished. These claims become invalid when the anthropologist’s positionality is revealed, and by understanding that in order for the anthropologist to have had access to the culture of study in the first place, a form of connection to the outside world was necessary. Thus, the notions of distant cultures as unconnected and uninfluenced by the world are revealed as constructions rather than truths. For this reason, the binary oppositions that colonial discourse depended on, between the colonizer and the colonized, do not apply, though they do acquire power as political archetypes. This is evident since their respective cultures are not fixed in time and space, but rather constantly influencing and

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12 Bhabha, Location of Culture, 185.
transforming each other. These notions formed an integral part of postcolonial studies because they helped expose colonialism as what it is – an aggressive form of oppression.

Bhabha expanded on hybridity by proposing the concept of mimicry as an attempt from the colonizer to balance and stabilize the process of cultural flux. Because a goal of colonial civilizing missions was to impose the transformation of the natives to become like the colonizer, who was the holder of civilized nature, the native had to be normalized. Paradoxically, the success of the project of mimicry was not actually desired by the colonizer, as its achievement would actually undermine the real colonizing mission. Thus, according to Bhabha, the colonizer wanted the colonized to mimic him but never actually obtain full transformation, always remaining “not quite/not white”. Perhaps most important in Bhabha’s work is his exploration of mimicry as a process that allows for a transformation into mockery. This process allows the colonized to exert agency, as they are capable of reversing the process, successfully questioning colonial authority and even terrorizing it.

In the case of Burma’s photographs, which will be discussed at length in the following chapters, European elements and signs of this mimicry exist and mix with the subjugated Burmese models, although always remaining as external and superficial elements of European lifeways (Figure 1).

Also adding to the foundational discourse of postcolonial studies, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", which first appeared in 1994 in the magazine Wedge, considers the ethical ramifications of postcolonial studies. Her essay elaborates on the

14 Bhabha, 86.
15 Bhabha, Location of Culture, 92.
16 Bhabha, 115.
term subaltern, which had previously been used to refer to a group of people who are hierarchically inferior to the hegemonic powers. The hegemony is understood in this context as a group that gains acceptance through non-violent means and influences those outside of it (the non-elite), to believe that their interests are a benefit to everyone in society, including the subaltern groups.

Spivak’s contribution added to the understanding of the subaltern classes by questioning if the group held any political or economic agency. She further adds a defining characteristic of the subaltern – they cannot speak. Through this approach, we can take the term subaltern to refer to any group who is not generating any discourse, or, if they do, is not accepted because they do not hold a position of power, and thus their voices are not heard, or are “historically muted”.\footnote{Gayatri Chakravorty. Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” in Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 91.}

Through these theoretical approaches, we can understand the colonial Burmese as a subaltern class who was visually represented in ways that mirrored the hegemonic discourse (that is, not only encompassing the British colonials but also all who were working under their rule, including Indian military officials, businessmen, etc.) as passive subjects who accepted the supremacy of the metropolis, as they allowed themselves to be photographed. Further, this framework allows for an understanding of image-making of the Other as having parallel civilizing missions in the same line as colonialism. It is through this understanding of colonialism that this study will treat photographic activities and the resulting images as a form of metaphorical aggression. As explained by Eleanor M. Hight and Gary D. Sampson, “representations of the subject in a photograph can then function as a fetish of the imagined
stereotype. At the same time, the image of the colonial Other becomes a trope of desire for the
Western viewer.\textsuperscript{18}

This study will use the work of the previously mentioned scholars as a theoretical
framework. Further, this foundation will be expanded with additional varied discourses that
pertain to the creation and interpretation of images of the Other. Scholars such as Laura Mulvey,
Mallek Alloula, Roland Barthes, and Susan Sontag will be introduced to link both
postcolonialism and colonial photography to gain a nuanced understanding of the visual history
that was produced during the early colonial period in Burma.

Mallek Alloula’s \textit{The Colonial Harem} (1986) joins Saidian Orientalism and colonial
photography through a polemic case study of Algerian women as they were depicted in highly
eroticized postcards at the turn of the century by their French colonizers.\textsuperscript{19} His examinations,
which will be discussed at length in the chapter dealing with D.A. Ahuja, “reflect the empowered
male colonialist view of the eroticized, feminized Other in the Middle East”, through a semiotic
reading that allows the images to reveal their coded messages.\textsuperscript{20} This study will approach
photographic images of Burma through this same perspective, while opening up room for
understanding the ways in which Burmese culture was commodified and gazed upon through the
products of photography.

The use of the term \textit{gaze} to signify the subjugation of the female body and her image by
her oppressor, the male, was first used in 1975 by Laura Mulvey in her important essay “Visual
Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”. Mulvey’s contentions, and her analysis of the female/passive

\textsuperscript{18} Hight and Sampson, "Photography, "Race," and Post-Colonial Theory", 7.
\textsuperscript{19} Malek Alloula, \textit{The Colonial Harem} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).
\textsuperscript{20} Hight and Sampson, 9.
and male/active power dichotomy can be understood in Orientalist terms through the work of Said and Alloula, both who position a theoretical framework that allows us to understand the East as the passive receptor and the West as the active imposer. In the case of photographic representations of Burmese women living in the colonial period, both approaches are pertinent, the active/passive mechanisms are at once representing the dominated peoples of the East, and the inferior female bodies which will be subjected to the male gaze.

Due to the importance of the concept of the gaze in the following chapters, additional considerations to Mulvey’s work must be given before they can be applied directly to photography and the scholars who specifically looked at the medium.

Mulvey’s work triangulates film theory, psychoanalysis, and feminism to consider how Hollywood films from the 1960s and 1970s put the spectator in the male position of power, and the woman on screen as the object of desire. Mulvey considers two types of looks, the voyeuristic and the fetishistic. The former being related to woman as an image “to be looked at”, and the latter constituting woman as a substitute for the “lack” and underlying the fear of castration. Additionally, the fetishization of woman turns her from dangerous (as she represents castration anxiety), to reassuring and satisfying. Thus, Mulvey reveals that cinema has treated woman as bearer, not maker, of meaning. She further describes the desire for satisfying the act of pleasurable looking as a primordial wish, and questions the function of cinema as allowing scopophilia to develop in its “narcissistic aspect”, based on the obsession of the human form.


Additionally, Mulvey explores the immersive effects of cinema, which transplants the viewer to a place where he is not aware of his ego, while also being able to simultaneously reinforce it. The photograph, before cinema, must have had this power, especially in the early manifestations of the image. Mulvey’s framing of cinema as allowing the viewer to forget who they are and where they are can also apply to photography, even if ever so briefly.

Mulvey describes the moments in film when the previously eroticized woman becomes stricken by love and devotion for the male protagonist. She writes:

Losing her outward glamorous characteristics, her generalised sexuality, her show girl connotations; her eroticism is subjected to the male star alone. By means of identification with him, through participation in his power, the spectator can indirectly possess her too.23

In the case of Burmese women’s representation, there is a prevalent lack of male and female interactions, with only a handful of depictions of heterosexual couples from the work of Klier. This absence of the male denotes that he has also been consumed by the colonial power. Thus, both male and female are inferior in the Burmese context, with the female being doubly subjected to both types of gaze: fetishistic and voyeuristic. In comparison to film, the photograph and the postcard, as objects that can be possessed (touched, physically carried around, etc.), have a stronger potential for being fetishistic. In this colonial context, the Western man does not need to become or associate with a male protagonist, because he already owns and controls the land and its local governments. This approach can elucidate on the absence of equal male representation in the photographic milieu of colonial Burma. Man is not relevant in this form of

23 Mulvey, 840.
fetishization. He is literally, out of the picture. Moreover, the absence of the male in these images can be interpreted as assuming a male viewer.

This study will employ Barthes’ concept of the *myth* and his semiotic approach to the image, which he explored at length in his *Mythologies* (1957), and which will be applied in the concluding chapter to elucidate on the seemingly benign aspects of every-day visual and material culture, while problematizing their neutralization and absorption into mainstream society.24 Barthes continued his analysis of the image in additional essays throughout his career, providing an entry point to our understanding of popular culture and the politics that imbue it.

As with *Mythologies*, “The Photographic Message” (1961) and “Rhetoric of the Image” (1964) take inspiration from Ferdinand de Saussure’s semiology to consider the image as a *sign*, and its paradoxical relationship between the *signifier* and the *signified*.25 For Barthes, the relationship between the signifier and the signified, which forms a sign, is not a normal occurrence but rather a sociohistorical construct. Thus, the myth is a second-order sign, a form of metalanguage, a type of speech that enters into the subconscious of contemporary society. The contradiction of the relationship exists because as viewers of images, we begin to naturalize the links between the signifier and signified, and their sign, accepting that their connotations are universal, when in reality they are prescribed by the contexts that created them. These seminal texts explore the dangerous aspect of the myth, described as a type “turnstile” that oscillates between the sign and second-order sign (the myth) to conceal itself when it is brought up for questioning.26 In other words, when images are analyzed, and their myth (second-order sign) is

revealed, they may be described as simply a sign, without its myth. For example, and as will be explored in the conclusion, colonial images of Burma, which were already imbued with myth when originated, are passed as artistic reappropriations in contemporary contexts and defended as representative of “heritage”. However, when put through art historical analysis using semiotics, their myth is revealed. In order for the mythology to function, a producer will create the myth, a mythologist will reveal it, and a consumer will respond, often passively.27 In the study of Burmese images, the producers take shape in the photographers and their businesses, and in the postcard producers. In the contemporary context, the producers are the new companies that reuse these images. The consumers take the role of the models in studio-photographs, the senders of postcards, and the buyers of contemporary merchandise.

In “The Photographic Message”, Barthes considers the press photograph. This study will borrow Barthes’ understanding of the photograph and its accompanying text and captions as different kinds of messages that cooperate with each other to provide various kinds of signification.28 Because of the directness and immediacy of language, Barthes describes how it is often the captions and texts that are given more authority, rather than the image itself. This notion will be applied throughout this study, as nearly all of the photographs that will be discussed were created with a caption embedded directly on them, and often provided authoritative descriptions, even if at times contradicting the photograph itself. In both “The Photographic Message” and “Rhetoric of the Image” Barthes considers the paradoxical nature of the photograph. This paradox is described as the photograph is, according to Barthes, originally

27 Barthes, 128.
being devoid of meaning and even resisting any form of connotation (the interpretative message), especially because attempts to describe content often lead to exclusions.\textsuperscript{29} The paradox lies in the fact that images are often accepted as having more descriptive power than language, or as transporting us to a vivid reality. He further considers the relationship of text and image and explains that the chosen text provides a type of anchor that guides us and tells us “the correct level of perception.”\textsuperscript{30} Using this type of anchoring, this study will consider how the chosen texts that accompanied photographs of Burma and the Burmese were not arbitrary and helped to solidify the moral justification of the colonizing mission. Even if the image producers were not working directly for the British army, their belonging to this colonial milieu and accepting of the process of colonization (by settling in the country and opening businesses to profit from the new colony), they simultaneously acted as supporters and influencers. In other words, the image producers were not only informed by colonialism, but also served to inform it. It is also in this essay that Barthes explores the idea of a photograph’s quality of “having-been-there”, or its sense of authenticity because the objects depicted actually existed in time and space, that allows for the connotative message of the image to be accepted as fact.\textsuperscript{31} These assertions will be used along with Susan Sontag’s treatment of the photograph to understand why photographic images of colonial Burma have been allowed such authority.

Susan Sontag’s seminal work \textit{On Photography} (1973) describes photographs as accomplices that encourage, empower, incriminate, justify, impose, and possess while also creating a new ethics of \textit{seeing} that was adopted as a means to certify experience. For Sontag,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{29} Barthes, 17-20,
  \item \textsuperscript{30} Barthes, 39.
  \item \textsuperscript{31} Barthes, \textit{Image, Music, Text}, 44.
\end{itemize}
photographs are non-intervening, predatory, desensitizing, and voyeuristic. They certify and refuse while they also immortalize.\textsuperscript{32} She also considers photography as a new type of visual grammar, as the most realistic of mimetic which aims at “conserving a vanishing past”.\textsuperscript{33} Further, she considers of the possibility of “colonization through photography”. She uses this idea about tourists coming for a “good shot” of Native American Indian life.\textsuperscript{34} Through this approach to the photograph as a passive observer that aggrandizes ideas of the picturesque and the beautiful, we can find a means to approach foreign photographs of Burma as the ultimate representation of the Other.

Before presenting a historiography on the scholarship that engages directly with colonial Burmese photography and applying the theories so far discussed to interpretation of the works of Beato, Klier, and Ahuja, a discussion of how photographic portraiture was perceived and conceptualized in nineteenth century Europe will help to provide historical context and to frame the discussions that will follow.

**Photographic Portraiture in Nineteenth Century Europe**

Elizabeth Anne McCauley’s historical research on portraiture provides considerable evidence which shows the photographers working in Burma were highly influenced by the naturalistic style taught in places like Britain and France. She remarks that British photographers, including the known photographer Felice Beato who worked extensively in Burma during this


\textsuperscript{33} Sontag, *On Photography*, 57.

\textsuperscript{34} Sontag, 64.
period, traveled to places in the Far East such as China and Japan to record views that included the landscape and the peoples. These traveling photographers introduced interior studio photography, which had developed around the mid-1880s in Western Europe. They created albums which were sold to the West and which included photos of individuals and families from various socioeconomic levels.35

During this time, photography was as self-training endeavor. However, photographic societies were soon formed and had much to say about the proper ways in which an image should be captured. Due to this influence, it can be said that the decisions made by the photographers working in Burma were not arbitrary and in fact signified a number of encoded messages to the Western audiences that consumed the visual materials.

It is known that photographers had created body posture conventions early on and favored certain body placements for portraiture. The three-quarter position was dominant, as demonstrated by McCauley through a survey of various countries and periods.36 If a full-length position was chosen over this preferred three-quarter view, it was to tell a story or to be used in “exotic” settings to identify the model’s nationality and race.37 This type of setting, along with profile views of the model’s face, became widely used for anthropological purposes rather than for individualistic portraits.

John Tagg further testifies to this convention by stating that among the European tradition of representation frontal portraits, even before photography, came to be understood by

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37 McCauley, Likenesses, 3.
the Western eye as a signifier for “the bluntness and ‘naturalness’ of a culturally unsophisticated class”.

38 Perhaps most significant for this study is Tagg’s explanation of the use of such images. He states that “the head-on view had become the accepted format of the popular amateur snapshot, but also of photographic documents like prison records and social surveys in which this code of social inferiority framed the meaning of representations of the objects of supervision or reform.”

39 These photographic conventions frame the representations of Burmese subjects through the photograph as a possible means to maintain a panoptic eye on the colonized. We can take this assertion further by considering the connotations that come with the photographic process. The idea of *capturing* an image/subject is not far removed from the effects felt by the colonized through the aggression of his colonizer and is also found in the context of colonial displays such as world’s fairs, curio cabinets, museums, and zoos. These displays present objects as spectacle by using scientific ideas of “study” as a way to justify the dominance.

Particular photographic schools preferred an atmospheric set up instead of a materialistic portrait. That is, they focused more on the individual’s facial characteristics and individuality than in the scene and props which accompanied them. This type of atmospheric model is very rare in Burmese portraits from this period. In fact, the most condemned portrait practice in the photographic canon became widely used in Burma – the elaboration of what was deemed a dramatic posture.

40 A dramatic portrait visually opposed a relaxed posture. Any muscular tension or tilted axis in the body were deemed dramatic. Additionally, furniture and costumes were part

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of this criticism.\textsuperscript{41} Examples of this style are evident in the works of photographers that will be discussed in this study (\textit{Figure 2}).

Regarding facial expressions, the photographs did adhere to the preferred calm and proper expression.\textsuperscript{42} Similarly, the preferred modes of lighting were closely followed. The atmospheric schools preferred lighting scenarios which created a stronger contrast between lights and shadows. While this was not followed in most cases in photos of the Burmese, frontal or more diffused lighting was not completely shunned as a practice. This mixing of elements that both exoticized and normalized the Burmese subject is an example of the type of mimicry previously discussed in this introduction. While it was important to show the otherness of the Burmese models, it was equally important to depict them as pacified subjects that were part of \textit{British} Burma; civilizing the primitive.

Between the mid and late 1800s, much debate arose between the photographic schools in relation to the use of furniture and backdrops. Critics questioned these conventions and preferred a simplified portrait that focused on the “moral as opposed to physical resemblance”.\textsuperscript{43} We can thus conclude that the images that will be presented in this study, which were produced after these debates had formed, focused on the physical characteristics of the subject rather than their moral and ideological likeness.

Regarding the tinting of photographs, McCauley explains that the practice “was snobbishly maligned by the photographic press and yet widely solicited by the public. Many reviewers refused even to discuss the tinted portraits littering international and photographic

\textsuperscript{41} McCauley, 4.  
\textsuperscript{42} McCauley, 6.  
\textsuperscript{43} McCauley, \textit{Likenesses}, 9.
society exhibitions, and the consensus was that coloring portraits was not within the domain of photographic art.”44 Since most of the photographic images created during the early days of colonial Burma were produced with the intention of reprinting them as postcards, the images belonged to popular and material culture rather than being considered art objects for exhibition at museum institutions either locally or abroad. Thus, it was less problematic to color the images to create a more attractive product that consumers would feel enticed to purchase. Further, the removal of the models’ identities and the mass production of the images to ship abroad removed all elements of true portraiture and focused on the type of human rather than the individual. McCauley remarks that:

Perhaps the most revolutionary discovery that photographers made (with the help of their printmaking predecessors) was that more money could be earned by selling portraits to people who weren’t the sitters than by selling to those who were. If a portrait could become either news or art, it touched an entirely new group of consumers.45

With these considerations in mind, it is important to question if the images in this study can be understood as portraits at all.

The following chapters consider these questions by employing the theoretical framework and context established in this introduction. The first chapter outlines the existing scholarship that has focused on photographic representations of Burma or more broadly, the ways in which the British represented their colonies through the photographic medium. This brief historiography establishes the main ideas and influential scholars who have contended with the

44 McCauley, 10. Note: An example that can help us consider the different statuses ascribed to photographic works based on their format (large calotypes versus small colored postcards, for example) are the untinted panoramic views created by Linnaeus Tripe, whose work was exhibited in a public exhibition and awarded for its artistic merit. His work will be discussed in the following chapter.

45 McCauley, Likenesses, 20.
histories of the early foreign photographers while considering their interpretations and establishing the mainstream trends related to this topic.

The second chapter explores the life and works of Felice Beato. The chapter first establishes the exiting knowledge and contentions about his life in order to consider his photographic work. Before delving deeply into Beato’s Burmese portfolio, the chapter explores his world travels and adventures as the man gained and lost his fortunes multiple times. The chapter contributes new biographical findings and chronologizes the scattered trace of written mentions throughout primary texts that stem from various parts of the world and considers them in order to contextualize Beato’s life and business in Burma. The chapter concludes with a visual analysis and interpretation in order to problematize how the photographer’s work is representative of the commodification of Burmese culture.

The third chapter takes a similar approach as the previous chapter and considers the life and works of Philipp A. Klier and D.A. Ahuja. This chapter contributes new archival sources that allow for the establishment of a clearer narrative on the individual and combined histories of both photographers. Further, the chapter analyzes the works of both photographers independently from each other in order to interpret the differences that exist between the works and as they compare to the work of Beato.

The fourth chapter concludes the study by considering the implications carried by the use of colonial images in contemporary contexts. Using the Barthesian semiological system and his concept of the myth, the chapter presents a critique of popular culture dynamics as colonial images are reappropriated and enter into the contemporary fashion milieu in a depoliticized form. The conclusion considers how the practice of the commercializing the Otherness of Burma,
which stems from the colonial period as established by European and Indian capitalists, continues today and serves to reinforce the *myth* of Burma.
CHAPTER ONE

A BRIEF HISTORIOGRAPHY ON COLONIAL PHOTOGRAPHY OF BRITISH BURMA AND BRITISH REPRESENTATIONS OF THEIR EMPIRE

During the time of the earliest photographers, especially of itinerant photographers traveling through the furthest regions of the world, images were captured, produced, and consumed as forms of material culture. It is only possible for scholarship to assert the consequences of this use of technology through careful archival analysis and with the help of comparative studies. This historiography thus begins in 1981 with Fabian Rainer and Adam Hans-Christian’s work and continues until today. Scholarship on photography has raised concerns pertaining to the medium’s role as a form of activism, political commentary, commodity, and ultimately fetish. Scholars who sought to explore new aspects of photography raised questions of its ethical dimension, in its use for the legitimization of power, its role in war, in famine, in eugenics, and its possibility of presenting an objective truth.¹

While the specific aspects of photography that have received attention from scholars has varied widely, a general consensus exists in the idea that colonial photography – depicting both the Orient and the Empire – served as a means to justify and condone colonialism. Due to the

¹ Additional sources that specifically work on the main photographers that are the focus of this study are considered at depth in the following chapters and are absent from this historiography to avoid repetition.
varying nature of the concepts explored by the field, the following literature review will take place chronologically, allowing the reader to make connections in the succession of the preoccupations of the discourse.

Fabian Rainer and Adam Hans-Christian’s *Masters of Early Travel Photography* (1981) considers the role of the photographer as a type of heroic adventurer. Rainer and Hans-Christian consider photographer Samuel Bourne and his work during the time of the British Empire. Traveling through India in the 1860s and the mountains of Kashmir in 1864, Bourne endured harsh climate and treacherous terrain to capture images of the regions.² The authors of *Masters* provide an interpretation of the traveling European photographer as a parallel to the “conqueror” arriving to annex, or take over the land.³ Before photography became largely commercialized by Kodak, photographers attained a status that equaled colonial officers. Since the early days of the invention of photography, the general attitude focused on the medium’s ability to provide information to colonial powers in order to improve, or perhaps even expedite, their conquest. As Rainer and Hans-Christian explain:

> The government of London realized that a handful of British could not govern half the world without knowing something about those vast exotic lands. It became popular to study alien customs, forms of government, mentality, and history, because such knowledge meant power. Officials immersed themselves in ethnology and ethnography, and the photographer’s work became a key means of doing this.⁴

Writing during the 1980s, scholarship related to this topic contended with the idea of “missing civilizations” and Rainer and Hans-Christian certainly take this approach. Due to their scholarly

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concerns, the writers did not consider the ways in which each non-European country received and accepted or refused the presence of traveling photographers. In the decades after the writing of Masters, scholarship shifted and began to take into consideration these nuances, enhancing our understanding of photography’s history.

Writing in the early 1990s, Noel F. Singer became known for his contributions to the study of photography in Burma. Although his work should be read with some of his biases in mind, such as the author’s Anglo-Burmese descent, his work is important for inserting Burma’s photographic history into the broader discourse of colonial photography.

Singer’s Burma: A Photographic Journey, 1855-1925 (1993) explains the interest of foreign photographers in Burma as directly related to the region’s religious expression through art. “The Victorian visitors,” he writes, “filled with their own sense of superiority, and accustomed to the servility of the Indian, were surprised at the independent nature of the Burmese. They found the gilded shrines overpoweringly exotic.”5 In the 1880s and forward, increased foreign presence also brought photography as a tool to produce postcards made for the European gaze.6

As one of the first scholars adding to our understanding of the early photographers that worked in Burma, Singer briefly explores the earliest arriving photographers John McCosh and Linnaeus Tripe, both who travelled in 1852 and captured scenes from the second Anglo-Burmese war.7 He also explores extensively the works of Beato and points out that world photographer Felice Beato is believed to have introduced the postcard in the 1890s that could be used as a form

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6 Singer, 7.
7 Singer, 8.
of greeting card. His studio sold postcards made for mailing, and sometimes including phrases such as “Wishing you a Happy New Year”. Singer’s contribution regarding the postcard industry in Burma, which he argues began with Beato and flourished at the turn of the century with companies such as D.A. Ahuja of Rangoon, allows insight into the production of photographic materials. Singer points out that an influx in tourism increased demand for such postcards. Subsequently, various countries from around the world produced them for import into Burma. Additionally, Singer explains that by 1910, albums of Burmese scenes from Rangoon to the Northern hill lands were produced and easily purchased at the newly built department stores. He further argues that although not initially produced for historical purposes, these photographic postcards, which are rare in present day, provide an important historical record of the early days of the colonial era.

An additional contribution given by Singer’s account is an early consideration of the role of women in photography. Curiosity towards “Burmese beauties” is prevalent in writings from Christian missionary accounts of the eighteenth century. The European fascination with Burmese fashion, smoking habits, and ways of living among women also permeates early photography. As Singer points out, ordinary women were hired to model for postcards and portraits, often posing with simple Burmese props such as umbrellas and palm leaves. However, this European tradition of portraiture brought new anxieties among the local population. Burmese beliefs in magic caused concern regarding the power that anyone who possessed such postcards would hold over the models. Questions of decency and Burmese morals and expected behavior from women were

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8 Singer, 8.
9 Singer, 12.
also causes for concern.\textsuperscript{10} Though the concerns amongst depiction of Burmese women seemed centralized within Burmese culture and beliefs, the true danger of the production of these images would become the ultimate sexual fetishization and commodity fetishization of the Burmese Orient.

James R. Ryan’s \textit{Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire} (1997) looked at the ways in which colonial rule was depicted during the Victorian and Edwardian periods. He argues that British imagination set conventions for ways to represent their empire, and photography was a conduit for these endeavors. He argues that in a post-colonial setting, archives of colonial photography serve to form a collective memory.\textsuperscript{11} Further, through visual analysis of colonial photography, Ryan shows how the rulers of the British empire understood and used photography in ways that had moral impact. For example, by analyzing the relationship between blurred and sharply-focused aspects of photography – which had many technical limitations in relation to capturing movement – we can discern if photography that was presented as candid was actually largely staged.\textsuperscript{12}

Regarding Burma, Ryan considers the work of Hugh Fisher’s work for the Colonial Office Visual Instruction Committee (COVIC) through India and Burma in the first decade of the 1900s. COVIC’s project involved the dissemination of images of Empire in schools through lectures using lantern-slides, an early form of image projection. This project helped promote

\textsuperscript{10} Singer, 19-29.


\textsuperscript{12} Ryan, \textit{Picturing Empire}, 14.
“imperial unity and citizenship.” Supervised by Halford Mackinder, Fisher was tasked with producing a pseudo-ethnographic record of the region, without failing to show the prosperity brought by British rule.

A publication produced by Fisher included his travel diary and his photographs of the region, along with maps of the land. Ryan explains Fisher’s perpetuation of the Oriental gaze experiencing Burma as a form of exhibition. Ryan argues that though Fisher failed at reproducing an image album of a unified British Empire (because it did not exist), his photographs were used in Mackenzie’s lectures in a skewed presentation that celebrated this false notion of unity.

The significance of Ryan’s account lies on his consideration of the development of photography in Burma both to legitimize colonial rule and to exoticize the region through images meant for Western consumption. In this sense, the Burmese population became an object of commodity fetish. A photograph, a postcard, its value measured with currency – a different way of owning the culture.

John Falconer, David Odo, Elizabeth Dell, and Mandy Sadan’s *Burma: Frontier Photographs 1918-1935* (2000) looked at the James Henry Green photographic collection encompassing more than one thousand photographs of the region and its people. Green was a professional soldier and amateur photographer and ethnographer. He worked and photographed the northernmost parts of Burma (presently Kachin state), providing the most comprehensive and

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13 Ryan, 187.
14 Ryan, 194.
15 Ryan, 195.
16 Ryan, 195.
only record of this region of Burma. His work took interest in ethnography and exploration of the physical attributes of the natives. This edited volume provides one of the most extensive scholarly sources that focus exclusively on colonial Burmese photography.

In her essay “Mapping Burma”, from the same volume as *Burma: Frontier Photographs*, Elizabeth Dell argues that Green’s ethnographic photographs differ from that of previous military photographers whose work was imbued with imperial prejudices because he built close connections with the Kachin peoples. His work, Dell writes, is based on actual ethnography rather than political agendas. As a result of this sympathy for his subjects, Green’s work sought to portray candid photographs that closely represented all aspects of Kachin culture. Although he did produce images focusing on the phenotypical characteristics of the Kachin, his collection is mostly comprised of more intimate images. Dell posits that the viewer can easily discern a close relationship between the photographer and the subject by observing the subject’s comfortableness in the images.

An inevitable question that must be asked of photographs from the past which display human subjects is what became of those individuals. Mary Sadan’s “The Kachin Photographs in the J.H Green Collection: a Contemporary Context” explores this question. Through an ethnographical approach, she locates living relatives and community members who may have memory of the subjects found in Green’s large collection. Her significant contribution raises questions of ethics and “puts the life back” into images that are often treated as documentary or


archival materials to write history. Her work is a reminder that the subjects in photographic collections were once alive. Though it seems obvious to state this, photography studies only marginally explore this concept and its ethical ramifications.\textsuperscript{19}

Through her research, Sadan encountered an unexpected response when she presented the Green collection to her participants. Because the Kachin people were converted to Christianity, Sadan mentions that contemporary Kachin nationalist Christians see the time when their culture practiced animist religions (the time of Green’s photographs) as shame-inducing and provoke a desire for dissociation.\textsuperscript{20} Thus, for some of her participants who recall their conversion to Christianity, a disturbing feeling is unearthed when confronted by this past. Sadan describes the relationship of the Kachin with their own past as “love-hate,” meaning that while the images resurface the issue of religion, a sense of nostalgia is not lost. Additionally, observing the images brings forth anxieties amongst contemporary Kachin related to the perceptions that outsiders may develop when allowed to see such images.\textsuperscript{21} This nervous anxiety is not unfounded, for the contemporary perception of ethnic minorities in Burma is widely used as a means to perpetuate the “exotic” nature of the land. For this reason, contemporary Kachin find anxiety in imagining outsiders who are unable to distinguish between the Kachin of the past, as pictured by Green, and their contemporary culture.

\textsuperscript{19} Note: For additional details on the extensive work that Dr. Sadan has conducted on Kachin history read: Mandy Sadan, \textit{Being and Becoming Kachin: Histories beyond the State in the Borderworlds of Burma} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).


\textsuperscript{21} Sadan, 61.
Focusing on the contemporary works by Burmese photographer Chan Chao in *Burma: Something Went Wrong* (2000), Jeffrey Hoone writes of contemporary concerns regarding Burma’s democracy movement. Hoone juxtaposes Chao’s photographic style as differing from that of other photographers who address the same subject matter by through “gritty and dramatic” images. Rather than take this approach, Chao presents calm and sincere portraits. This approach in contemporary photography marks a change in photography’s role as a catalyst for change. By presenting Burma’s people through intimate portraits that speak of the wish for a simple life, Hoone contends that Chao is successfully creating public awareness, the key component to change, and a purpose which photography can serve.

John Tagg’s *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (2007) is an important contribution that describes the function of portraits. His contribution adds to our understanding of the development of portrait photography within the Western world. John Tagg further testifies to European conventions of photographing the Other by stating that among the European tradition of representation, frontal portraits (even before photography), came to be understood by the Western eye as a signifier for “the bluntness and ‘naturalness’ of a culturally unsophisticated class.” Perhaps most significant for this study is Tagg’s explanation of the use of such images:

> The head-on view had become the accepted format of the popular amateur snapshot, but also of photographic documents like prison records and social surveys in which this code

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23 Hoone, 1.
of social inferiority framed the meaning of representations of the objects of supervision or reform.\textsuperscript{25} (my emphasis)

This frames the representations of Burmese subjects through the photograph as a possible means to maintain a panoptic eye on the colonized. We can take this assertion even further by considering the connotations that come with the photographic process. The idea of capturing an image or subject is not far removed from the effects felt by the colonized through this period of colonization.

Anne Maxwell’s \textit{Picture Imperfect: Photography and Eugenics 1870-1940} (2008) considers photography’s role in promulgating scientific race theory. Maxwell added to the scholarship a way of understanding how photography’s power to popularize and legitimize became a tool also used in science. Regarding the colonial period, Maxwell looked at photographs from the 1840s to determine the ways in which humans were depicted based on race. Using anatomical proportions and a set of rules for photographing individuals, photography became the tool to measure anthropometrically and categorize humankind. Following this legitimation of photography as an objective tool in the scientific evaluation and depiction of others (rather than its later reputation as fine art), Maxwell points out photographs “became popular among the home population of colonial powers who consumed them out of a taste for novelty as much as pride in the imperial project.”\textsuperscript{26} Thus, Maxwell’s contention allows us to speculate that the view of photography as an objective reality, allowed colonial powers the

\textsuperscript{25} Tagg, \textit{The Burden of Representation}, 37.

opportunity to use the medium as fact. After all, if photography could help hierarchize humanity, it could undoubtedly tell the colonial “truth.”

Through a study of 1900 photography in China, James L Hevia’s “The Photography Complex” (2009) arrives at the same conclusion regarding photography’s role in strengthening hegemonic powers. In a broader scope, and agreeing with Timothy Mitchell’s exhibitionary order, Hevia contends that present day applications of these theories may be used to achieve the opposite of their intended purpose. 27 Hevia’s contribution to the field lies in his invitation to revisit these sources of history, and to scrutinize them, as he has done, in attempts to reveal the hidden stories that have yet to be told. That is, Eurocentric fetishistic and orientalizing images of the past can serve today as part of counterhegemonic efforts. Consideration of body language, gaze, and other visual clues – in contrast to the written accompanying sources that are often found with them – can allow for a reconceptualization of hitherto told histories. In other words, Hevia’s work points to the beginning of retelling colonial history through new considerations of primary visual sources.

Additionally, Hevia advocates the study of colonial photographs that were unpublished at the time. He argues that they were produced as a means to gain deeper understanding of the colonial predisposition to present the “truth”. This method of visually analyzing deliberately unpublished or hidden images, Hevia reiterates the strongly argued view of photography’s ability to deceive. A later essay by John Falconer pertaining to Burmese photographs that were not published (and are unfortunately unavailable today) allows us to question our understanding of

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colonial power’s use of photography not only through what was made available to the public, but also what was not. The images that Hevia analyzes in this context show their staged nature and thus expose the hidden intentions behind colonial photography.

John Clark’s “Presenting the Self: Pictorial and Photographic Discourses in nineteenth-century Dutch Indies and Siam” (2013) considers the commensalist relationship between portrait photography and portrait painting. He posits that the elements of composition and lighting found in photographs borrowed from previously established painting traditions. In addition to the aesthetic qualities, photography also served as a conduit for self-propagandizing and marking the individuality of the elite. By using commonly accepted visual conventions as seen through painting, photography entered the social consciousness and was thus easily adopted into the mainstream. Additionally, the embodiment and seemingly magical ability of photography to capture the self was alluring. In this sense, the person in the photograph was seen as the real being. In existentialist terms, and through the eyes of the public, painting achieved likeness while the photographic image achieved presence.

Photographer Nic Dunlop’s *Brave New Burma* (2013) considered the role of photography in Myanmar’s political climate as he photographed the country for over two decades concealing his identity as a tourist. Seeking to use photography differently from the news media, Dunlop attempted to create a portrait representative of a “routine reality.” Dunlop also considered the

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29 Clark, 77.
30 Clark, 75.
difficulties presented to photographers who sought to capture imagery of a country that at the time allowed entry to very few outsiders. His account of photography in Burma problematized the role of the media in glorifying popular political figures such as Aung San Suu Kyi. Although he attempted to create a portrait of Suu Kyi that presented an honest view, he lamented that his photography could not overcome the media’s well-established global image of the political leader. Dunlop’s interest in photography extended to its potential to portray the lives of ordinary people. To the discourse, he adds the idea of photography’s ambivalence. Characteristic traits assigned to a photographic portrait vary and reflect the projection of the viewers’ perspective in addition to that of the artist.\textsuperscript{32} Through his compilation of images representing daily life, Dunlop intended to show that amidst political oppression, which seeks to “Burmanize” the country, a diverse culture thrives. In this sense, Dunlop’s work is as much a political commentary and a form of activism as it is art.

John Falconer’s \textit{Cameras at the Golden Foot: Nineteenth-century Photography in Burma} (2014) considers the ethical problems that arise when photography and war collide. According to Falconer, photographer Willoughby Wallace Hooper visited Burma in 1885 as the marshal leading military and civil order. During his stay, Hooper brought forth great controversy due to the practice of photographing public executions.\textsuperscript{33} While stationed in India, Falconer similarly recorded controversial subject matter when he produced family portraits of the victims of the Madras famine. The limitations presented with the camera’s ability to capture human subjects

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{32} Dunlop, 27
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appear to have led Hooper to interrupt the executions in order to attempt to document the moment in which the bullet struck the victim. An image of a group of rebels before execution has been attributed to Hooper.

Falconer raises the question of ethical responsibilities that naturally arise in such situations. Although the images were never published and may now be lost, Falconer uses newspaper articles to argue that that Hooper did indeed make such images, and that great opposition arose against his practice. After controversy arose, Hooper defended himself by announcing that the images were purely made as documentary evidence of the war. Although not stated by Falconer, it is also possible that Hooper sought to experiment with the possibilities of motion photography. Nevertheless, the issue at hand, as Falconer suggests, is that of the balance between documentary images made for benevolent purposes and purely gruesome images that create shock value, thus perpetuating the Western gaze. One must wonder, however, for whom these stark images were produced? Surely, images of death and famine would not be produced for European enjoyment in the same way that Orientalizing portraits were created. We can gain more understanding by considering that Hooper was working for the British army as they moved north to finalize the annexation of the country and likely had a political agenda in mind.

As Falconer explains, “the closing decades of the nineteenth century [slightly after Hooper’s photographic endeavors] saw Burma transformed in the Western mind from a closed and mysterious seat of oriental despotism to an exotic destination for the adventurous tourist.”

Regarding the ethical dilemma that is innate to photographic practices, we can question if Hooper’s actions were indeed morally wrong. We must ask if the influx of tourism in Burma

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34 Falconer, “Cameras at the Golden Foot”, 27.
after full annexation in 1886 and the general acceptance of British rule by the West may have changed if his work, which documented the atrocities of war, was made public and accessible to European societies. Would tourists still visit Burma if they had seen Hooper’s work? Further considerations of this ethical question, including comparative analysis of other colonial states, may further the field of study.

Sarah Greenough in her 2014 publication brought light into one of the first photographers to document Burma as early as 1855. Producing photographic works in India and Burma from 1852 to 1860, captain Linnaeus Tripe became the earliest photographer to record the region during that time. Sarah Greenough posits that Tripe, a British army captain, became part of the group of those interested in obtaining a scholarly understanding of India and subsequently Burma through direct observation. During this time, they used sketches, paintings, and photographs to survey the land and create the first comprehensive records.35 Unfortunately, through these collected documents, which were eventually reproduced and made available for Europe’s consumption, justification for British conquest and the propagation of Orientalizing views of the region became a reality. Today, Tripe’s photographic collections provide invaluable records for the fields of history and art history, but they must be used cautiously and with an understanding of their Eurocentric nature.

Greenough argues that Tripe’s photographic record surpassed that of mere documentary evidence. Citing the care he took to avoid visual distortion, the postproduction coloring he applied, and his artistic vision, Greenough posits that his work deserves the merit of art.36

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36 Greenough, 2.
Further, Greenough explains that the technological developments in photography, which provided more reliable production, allowed Tripe to find a professional vocation. Additionally, Tripe’s appointments led him to disseminate his skill in India through a printing studio that he founded.  

In “The Pioneering Photographic Expeditions of Linnaeus Tripe” (2015), Roger Taylor admires the photographer’s “aesthetic rigor” as evidenced by his painstakingly detailed coloring techniques. His important contribution of 120 photographs of Burma became the most comprehensive photographic record of Burma of the time. Although Tripe had access to daguerreotype technology, which produced images on silver plates, and to wet collodion technology, which produced images on glass, Taylor posits that Tripe most likely worked with calotype, which produces the image on waxed paper and does not require as many contraptions as the other methods mentioned. When Tripe was appointed to the 1855 mission in Burma, the country had experienced two Anglo-Burmese wars. The mission that Tripe joined was one with diplomatic agendas, seeking to secure a treaty between Great Britain and Burma. Indirectly, the mission included exploration of the land. Tripe’s job was thus to record photographically the

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37 Greenough, 3.


39 For a thorough narrative on the details of the mission, read: Henry Yule, The Court of Ava: A Narrative of the Mission Sent by the Governor-General of India to the Court of Ava in 1855, with Notices of the Country, Government and People (London: Smith, Elder & Company, 1858).; The mission to the Court of Ava was a reciprocal response after the Secret Committee of the East India Company instructed the governor general of India (Lord Dalhousie) to secure a treaty. The three-month mission was comprised of a British Indian deputation sent to Ava and led by the new commissioner of Pegu, Arthur Phayre. The mission included Linnaeus Tripe as photographer, and other artists, scientists, geographers, 440 soldiers, and a cavalry. The mission failed as King Mindon refused to sign the treaty.

40 Taylor, 25
events from the mission, and the region itself. In the same way that Tripe helped to bring photography to India, he too brought a daguerreotype for the King’s court of Amarapura. Records indicate that he also taught the King’s court how to use the camera.41

Of extraordinary importance to the historical record are Tripe’s photographs of Rangoon and the Shwedagon Pagoda. His visit was able to capture Rangoon’s last moments before the annexation transformed it into a bustling center under British power. His photographs thus show a rare glimpse that hold immense value to the historical record.42

The ways in which photography was used, or perhaps even exploited, to present an “objective gaze,” according to Taylor, were well known by the leaders of the mission.43 Thus, photography’s role from its introduction in Burma served both artistic purposes and political agendas as well. Nonetheless, Tripe’s contribution to the Burmese historical record, and to the field of photography through the development of outstanding developing and retouching techniques through experimentation, are worthy of investigation to achieve a round understanding of the role of photography in Burma’s colonial period.

Adding to our understanding of Tripe’s contribution to the field of photography in Burma, Crispin Branfoot’s “Intersection of Architecture and Religion in Tripe’s Photographs of India and Burma” adds that as the first photographer to arrive in Upper Burma and before photography became more prevalent in the 1970s, Tripe’s legacy consisted of introducing Burma

41 Taylor, 34
42 Taylor, 35
43 Taylor, 35.
to the West.\textsuperscript{44} By photographing the buildings, temples, and general Burmese landscape, and later publishing his account of travel, Tripe’s publication made it possible for Europeans to “experience” Burma without leaving their home. Further, Tripe’s work showed the Western powers at work, thus further legitimizing British rule. It is known that Tripe’s images of India were exhibited at the 1855 “Madras Exhibition of Raw Products, Arts, and Manufactures of Southern India”. During this exhibition, he was awarded for his skill, earning him great reputation. After the exhibition, he was chosen by Lord Dalhousie, governor general of India, to capture images of Burma. The images from his trip to Burma were eventually published in 1857. The images were well received and widely distributed among the government of India, members of the mission of Ava, the East India Company’s Court of Directors, and other members of the court. Further, Tripe personally distributed his own images through the King of Prussia, the Madras Photographic Society, and sold single copies for two rupees each at a studio in Madras.\textsuperscript{45} While Branfoot’s work fails to consider that photography in Burma was prevalent and thriving much earlier than the 1970s, as is shown in archival listings of flourishing studios as early as the 1920s, his work still provides an important addition of our understanding of Tripe’s legacy.

As demonstrated, discursive practices in colonial photography continue to grow in contemporary scholarship. Theoretical approaches to photography have considered the complexity of the medium, which lives between the world of art and science. Because of Burma’s colonial history and the subsequent military regime that continues to have strong

\textsuperscript{44} Crispin Branfoot, "Intersection of Architecture and Religion in Tripe’s Photographs of India and Burma,” in Captain Linnaeus Tripe, Photographer of India and Burma, 1852-1860, by Roger Taylor and Crispin Branfoot (Munich: Del Monico Books, 2015), 63.

\textsuperscript{45} “Linnaeus Tripe Biography,” Victoria and Albert Museum, June 12, 2013, http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/l/linnaeus-tripe-biography/.
influence today, even as the country has entered into a new political period, photographic evidence of the relationships between colonizer and colonized provide an opportunity to understand the region’s complex and dynamic history. With new advances in scholarship, we can now begin to reconceptualize Burmese history through the use of these archives. Photographs that were produced under a colonialist perspective and used to blatantly promote the exhibitionary value of the Orient now have the potential to be used as tools of academia to defetishize the image of Burma and its people through the process of visual analysis.

The following chapters will consider the works of Beato, Klier, and Ahuja from an art historical perspective and will seek to narrow the existing gap in the limited scholarship that has thus far been written on the subject.
CHAPTER TWO
FELICE BEATO (1832 – JANUARY 29, 1909) AND HIS OEUVRE: COMMODIFYING THE COLONIZED

This chapter looks at the existing historical discussion on Beato while situating it within the context of his photographic career in Burma, where he created his final portfolio after decades of work. The chapter will analyze the studio photographs that he produced during this time by considering major events that led up to his decision to depart from London to the recently fully-annexed territory of Burma. Additionally, this chapter seeks to demonstrate that Beato was foremost a commercial photographer who exploited any financial possibility that was made available to him, or which he created for himself. The life and works of photographer Felice Beato (1832 – 1909) have created endless debate among photo historians seeking to write his biography and trace his important influence.\(^1\) While some have called him “the most significant travel photographer of the nineteenth century”, much about his life is still unknown.\(^2\) Most of the information employed to write Beato’s biography relies on travel journals written by his contemporaries which occasionally mention him and his character. Because there are no

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\(^1\) Felice Beato has also been recorded under the names: Felix Beato, signor Beato (most extensively used in primary sources), Beat, and Biates.

extant writings directly from Beato, the chronology of his life and travels, which has been pieced together mostly using newspaper notices and directory listings, continues to have gaps that remain unfilled. His opportunistic and charismatic personality took him throughout the world as he produced images of the colonized, for the colonizer. As will be argued in later sections, Beato’s work succeeded in commodifying the touristic experience for travellers seeking to take home a part of “the colony”, most often through purchases of decontextualized and ahistorical images of local communities presented under idyllic and picturesque settings that were staged or selectively presented images of colonial spaces.

Beato’s travels spanned Europe, India, China, Japan, Korea, and Burma. Current historical discussion on Beato gives least academic attention to his work in Burma – a gap that this chapter seeks to bridge. By the time he arrived in 1887, just as the annexation of Upper Burma had been finalized, his photographic skills and techniques were fully mature. That is, Beato had spent decades perfecting his photographic skills and had worked in a number of settings that had allowed him to experiment with many photographic styles, so that by the time he arrived to Burma, a distinctive Beato style is evident in his works and was characterized by his use of full-length poses with soft light and low contrasts. With nearly three decades of experience in the field, Beato’s Burmese portfolio should be read with an understanding that his expertise included mastery of a range of photographic challenges, including dealing with the

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3 Wong Hong Suen, "Picturing Burma: Felice Beato's Photographs of Burma 1886–1905," History of Photography 32, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 2, doi:10.1080/03087290701723139. Note: John Clark, John Fraser, and Colin Osman on their "A Revised Chronology of Felice (Felix) Beato (1825/34-1908?)," in Japanese Exchanges in Art: 1850s to 1930s with Britain, Continental Europe, and the USA claim that Beato published an article on “Modern Mandalay” in the United Services Magazine on June 1893, as was advertised on the North China Herald. This information is incorrect. The article published is actually by someone under the name YEORAH, who knew of Beato and his curio shop. The writings are not actually from Beato himself. The North China Herald archive is available at: https://newspaperarchive.com/north-china-herald-jun-23-1893-p-8/
circumstances of war. Additionally, he was a savvy businessman who had vastly explored photography’s commercial possibilities mostly in colonial societies, and experienced multiple economic failures. During his first major photographic achievement capturing the Crimean War alongside his brother-in-law James Robertson, Beato established many of his British connections. These networks likely led to his decision to travel to India, where he was a semi-official photographer for the British Army from 1859 to 1861.

Beato’s background as a war photographer during the early days of the genre exposed him to the commercial potential of photography. This keen aptitude for exploiting the profitability of his work made him successful from the onset of his career. This is evident as his war photographs became primary documents purchased for military reports and as personal souvenirs for the officers involved in the Anglo-French expedition during the Second Opium War in 1860. Although much of Beato’s work was eventually published in travel literature, it is clear that his decision on subject matter was strongly shaped by consumer demands. In the case of Burma, his representations of the country can be read as a form of material culture that signifies the movement towards the commodification of the “Burmese experience”. As described by Hong Suen, “this commodification entailed depicting Burma in picturesque conventions – as a series of familiar, pleasing, and ultimately saleable pictures.”

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5 Suen, 4.
7 Suen, "Picturing Burma", 1, 3.
8 Suen, 1.
of a photographer-businessman with an artistic preference for capturing images of ethnic “types”.

The importance of Beato’s work lies in its depictions of Eastern countries as they were opening up to the West during the time of British expansion, making his images some of the earliest documentation of these places as they were undergoing paradigm shifts – transforming from self-governing regions to colonial states. Beato’s images capture the encounters between both cultures, himself as both photographer and viewer representing the ever present surveilling eye of the West.

As John Falconer has suggested, “whether the annexation of Upper Burma attracted him as a chance to photograph more warfare, or whether he predicted the commercial opportunities of a Burma absorbed completely within the British Empire is unclear.”9 While it is difficult to speculate on Beato’s motivations to spend the last part of his career in Burma, I posit that his decision was driven by the events leading up to his financial ruin in Japan, and his failure to capture the Anglo-Sudan war at length. His success while in Burma, as described by many of his contemporaries, and a possible romantic relationship allow us to contextualize this part of his life. As passionately described by the author of “Modern Mandalay” (1893):

No description of Mandalay would, I think, be complete without mention of Signor Beato. He cannot be left out of modern Mandalay after having identified himself with the place since our occupation of it in 1885. But, indeed, where has he not identified himself with the march of English conquest? From the Crimea to India and China, China to Egypt, Egypt to Burma. For the present he, his “old curiosity shop,” his photographs, his quaint anecdotes, and shall I not add his “Susanne,” cheer up where all else tends to

depress. He will probably remain in Mandalay until our next little war once more brings his footsteps into the path of the British army.”

Beato had only been settled in Burma for less than six years when this account was written, pointing to how quickly he gained notoriety and prominence within the milieu of the previously royal capital of Mandalay.

It is under this set of circumstances that I will explore the life and works of Felice Beato, in order to contextualize his motivations and his contributions to the colonial imperative of recording the colonized. I will also consider why his work, and that of other colonialist photographers such as Philipp Klier (whom I will later discuss), continue to be read and used in academic and museological discourse as objective representations of Burma’s colonial past.

**On Beato’s Life**

Beato was trained in photography by his brother-in-law James Robertson, with whom he spent a short time between 1857 and 1859 producing landscapes for travellers in the Mediterranean on the Grand Tour.\(^1^1\) Briefly after their partnership, the pair separated and took different routes. Beato chose to follow the British to Calcutta.\(^1^2\) From the time of the Indian Mutiny in 1857 forward, Beato never spent considerable time in the West. His nonstop travels

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\(^{10}\) YEORAH, "Modern Mandalay," in *United Service Magazine*, vol. 1 (London: H. Colburn, 1893), 805. YEORAH identifies himself as having lived in Burma for some time and does not consider himself a tourist when writing his brief article for the magazine.

\(^{11}\) The Grand Tour was a coming-of-age trip through Europe taken by the upper class and popularized in the seventeenth-century. Its purpose was to see the major achievements created during Greco-Roman period and the Renaissance. A typical tour included visits to France, Italy, Rome, Venice, Pompeii, Vienna, and many other sites.

and relocations have been a true challenge to trace, with his photographic work as the most useful tool to find his whereabouts.

Scholars on Beato’s biography have struggled to find details of his personal life. It seems that the artist did not marry or have children, although a woman by the name of Sussanah has emerged as having been linked to him, perhaps by marriage. She appears to be of Burmese descent in a portrait taken by Beato in his iconic beautiful-woman style, which will be later discussed (Figure 3). The photograph exists as part of a Burma tour album held at the New York Public Library and is captioned “Susannah, wife of the artist” (Figure 4). This same image has appeared in postcard format and is captioned “Beato’s Susannah” in the Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin (The Ethnological Museum of Berlin), and as previously shown, she was mentioned in one instance of a travel diary. However, details of their relationship have of yet to be found, leaving scholarship to simply speculate on the fact that a woman was closely linked to him and does not appear to have traveled with him after his departure from Burma. While I have been succesful at linking photographs that have been separated and belonged to the same series or photoshoot, “Beato’s Susannah” has only appeared once.

We also know of his younger brother, Antonio Beato, who worked as a photographer and joined both Beato and Robertson on brief occasions during their early career. He was mostly based in Egypt, where he died in 1906.

Few details regarding Beato’s photographic processes and techniques exist. Early in 1886 and before departing for Burma, he gave a talk at the London and Provincial Photographic Society. This is the only record we have of the photographer discussing his production techniques and the difficulties he faced in the various climates and regions he captured.
It appears that Beato used wet collodion on glass, a technique invented by Fredrick Scott Archer that yielded extremely clear and sharply focused images unsurpassed by any other method even today. However, he may have preferred to use dry albumen for his topographic negatives, which allowed him to print copies on paper.\textsuperscript{13} It is known that Beato began using gelatin plates in 1885. This new process, invented earlier by Richard Leach Maddox, made use of dry plate negatives which allowed for faster exposures and were called “instant photography”.\textsuperscript{14} Beato used this new method in Burma, allowing him to capture motion.\textsuperscript{15} Evidence of his use of this instantaneous photography is found in the series of photographs of the visit of Prince Victor who was later Duke of Clarence and Avondale to Mandalay in 1889. The caption of this photograph reads “instantaneous photograph by Beato”.\textsuperscript{16}

**Points of Contention: Beato’s Birth, His Departure from Burma, and His Death.**

The area of most contention related to Beato’s life has been the definitive dates for his birth and death as well as the location for both dates. Without the discovery of his death certificate until 2009, scholars have ranged in their estimations, some which employed creative approaches to almost ascertain the correct dates.

In 2001, John Clark, John Fraser, and Colin Osman, revised the chronology of the photographer’s life suggesting that he could have been born in Venetian territory in 1825, or that

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13} Suen, “Picturing Burma”, 4.; David Harris, “Topography and Memory”, 121.
\item \textsuperscript{14} “Instant photography” in this context refers to the ability to take faster photographs and should not be confused with the later developments of the Polaroid.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Anne Lacoste and Fred Ritchin, *Felice Beato: A Photographer on the Eastern Road* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2010), 25.
\item \textsuperscript{16} India Office 268/10
\end{itemize}
if he was the person mentioned as the son of David Beato from Corfu (Corfu belonged to Venice before the Napoleonic wars), he could have been born in 1834. They also suggested a possible date of death to 1906 or 1907 while he was still in Burma.

In 2004, Sebastian Dobson reaffirmed previous contentions in *Felice Beato in Japan*. Dobson’s research, based on a travel application made to the British authorities in Fort William, Calcutta, in March 1958 and stating Beato’s age as 24 and his birth place as Corfu.

In 2006, further specifying Beato’s date of birth, Terry Bennett’s research published on *Photography in Japan 1853-1912* showed that Beato enrolled as a mason at the Yokohama Freemason’s Lodge No. 1092 on July 16th, 1867 and was recorded as being 33 years old. These discoveries narrowed Beato’s date of birth to sometime between July 1834 and March 1835.

However, in 2009, Bennett revisited the topic in *History of Photography in China: 1842-1860*. He was the first to publish, with permission from John Hillelson who had found Beato’s death certificate, the date of January 29th, 1909 and the place of death as Florence, Italy. The death certificate also erases all previous doubt about his birth and confirms the year 1832 and the place of birth as Venice, rather than the previously accepted island of Corfu.

Another point of mystery is Beato’s departure from Burma. While we know that he spent the last few years of his life in Florence based on additional research from Hillelson shared by

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17 John Clark, John Fraser, and Colin Osman, “A Revised Chronology of Felice (Felix) Beato (1825/34?-1908?),” in *Japanese Exchanges in Art: 1850s to 1930s with Britain, Continental Europe, and the USA*, by John Clark (Sydney, Australia: Power Publications, 2001), 89.

18 Clark, Fraser, and Osman, “A Revised Chronology”, 116.

19 Suen, “Picturing Burma”, 3.


Anne Lacoste and Fred Ritchin in their contributions to the J. Paul Getty Museum’s catalogue for their exhibition *Felice Beato: A Photographer on the Eastern Road* (2010), it is still unclear when he departed from Burma. Further, Lacoste, mentions that Beato received regular sums of money from the British consul. This was “to prevent him from once more losing all his capital on some speculative scheme” during the last years of his life in Florence.\(^{22}\)

Bennet has traced the latest mention of Beato in Burma to October 21\(^{st}\), 1899 in the *Times of Burma* where Beato is mentioned as returning from a trip to Rangoon.\(^{23}\) This gives us an idea that at least during this time, he was still in the country. Yet by 1906, Henry Fielding Hall on his *A People at School* writes an emotive passage that laments the departure of Beato from Mandalay, although he does not mention a specific date or if he had gone completely from the country, or simply away from Mandalay. He writes:

> What numbers of men there were who came, like him, hoping to find an opening in this new country. Some of the men were good and obtained here just that opportunity they lacked. They were the men for new countries, and this new country kept them, to its benefit and theirs. Some there were very much the reverse. Yet many were picturesque rascals, and I miss them somehow in this well-ordered province now… there was Signor Beato, who became perhaps the best-known figure in Burma later. A man with a history of adventure going back to the Crimea. He had made many fortunes and lost them. There were few countries he had not been in. he came to Mandalay with a partner and ten pounds. He stayed to make much money, first by photography, and then in other ways. He was a man quite unlike any other, and Mandalay is different now he is gone.\(^{24}\)

Based on the current historiography, we can safely assume that Beato departed from Burma no earlier than 1899 but prior to 1906.


\(^{23}\) Bennett, *History of Photography*, 155.

The following section will consider Beato’s life from a pre- and post-Burma chronology. In order to elucidate his ideologies and the pretexts under which he worked while in Burma, we must consider the artists’ life prior to his arrival, as he was already in later stages of his life. Most emphasis will be given to India, China and Japan, where he developed practices that deeply influenced his Burma portfolio – and which will be the focus of my visual analysis.

**Beato’s Pre-Burma Portfolio in China and Japan**

If we consider all of Beato’s portfolios as one body of work, we can see some patterns emerge that developed very early on during his career. His work can be categorized chronologically as having begun with commerce as a focus and later adding on war photography as his niche, and after the first half of his photographic career, changing into fully developed studio-photography. As a commercial photographer at his core, Beato depended entirely on the market and what was considered in vogue. Since early on, the British military fueled his decisions on what subjects to capture. This is evident as he photographed “places where pivotal events occurred” and sold his views as unmounted prints that could be purchased as each customer desired, allowing them to create their own narrative. This practice of customization was later revived in his photographic business in Burma.

25 Thanks to Dr. Jane Ferguson for pointing out the complexities of interpreting Beato’s market due to lacking records that can elucidate on which images were most popular. Leaving us only to speculate on his marketing strategies and to assume that he anticipated what types of images were more likely to sell.

As explained by David Harris, “in the case of British colonial history, there has been a widespread scholarly acknowledgement of the symbiotic relationship between economic demands and political priorities in determining policies and shaping attitudes.”27 These practices, as will become evident, helped shape photography’s treatment of subject matter and also served to form the colonial narrative that was best suited for each region that he photographed. Further, we must consider the underlying ideologies and purposes of photography within the context and demands of British imperialism. As Harris warns, “any interpretations of [Beato’s photographs] are thus an increasingly complex and open-ended process. Rather than appearing as merely documentary records, Beato’s photographs reveal as much as they obscure and cloud.”28

India

Beato arrived in Calcutta in 1858 and stayed for about 2 years.29 His arrival to Calcutta was directly influenced by the British connections he made while photographing in the Crimea. British officers such as Garnet J. Wolseley and Henry Hope Crealock among others knew Beato and also travelled to India and later to China, making it clear that Beato’s travel route was directly linked with his British network. 30 It is under this context that we must consider how and why he found his way to Burma, promptly after the British had finished annexing the country.

Beato’s success in Calcutta developed rapidly. In the same year as his arrival, he lectured for the Photographic Society of Calcutta, and his work was also exhibited around that time. Thus,

27 Harris, "Topography and Memory", 127.
28 Harris, 127.
29 Clark, Fraser, and Osman, "A Revised Chronology," 91.
30 Harris, "Topography and Memory", 121.
by the time that he left India in 1860, he had already established himself as a prolific photographer. In fact, his photographs of the Indian Mutiny were accepted by the public as “authoritative forms of reportage rich in topographical information” while the images’ propagandistic functions may not have been overtly evident.31

It was in Calcutta that Beato’s experimentation with war photography and the depiction of death reached new levels. Beato’s specialty in war photography calls to question certain moral and ethical dilemmas. As stated by Falconer, “if photography lacked the means to show the heat of battle, the image of its silent aftermath could still bring home, in the words of the photographer Alexander Gardner, ‘the blank horror and reality of war, in opposition to its pageantry’”.32

Beato’s images of the interior and exterior of the Secundra Bagh, a walled garden in Lucknow, are evidence of his deliberate manipulation of subjects and context in order to (re)create representations of past historical events (Figure 5). This site was significant to the British as they had previously breached it to slaughter Indians as retribution from the earlier events of the Indian rebellion. David Harris describes that “in the restaging of the interior view four of five months later, Beato not only positioned the horse and Indians but, even more chillingly, arranged for disinterred bones to be scattered in the foreground.”33 The interior view of the garden, captioned by Beato as Interior of the Secundra Bagh after the Slaughter of 2,000 Rebels by the 93rd Highlanders and 4th Punjab Regiment. First Attack of Sir Colin Campbell in

31 Harris, "Topography and Memory", 120.
32 John Falconer and Louise Hide, Points of View Capturing the 19th Century in Photographs (London: British Library, 2009), 134.
November 1857, Lucknow, shows over fifty human skulls, partial skeletons, and bone fragments scattered around the foreground. The midground shows four Indian individuals and a horse, as they stare from the far distance into the camera’s gaze. The ruins of the garden walls tower over the image, attesting to the damage that was inflicted upon the Western-style structure.

This early practice of restaging during his war-photography period continued on to China, and most certainly influenced his treatment of Japanese and Burmese subjects under a studio setting. His deep connections with the British not only influenced his travel routes but more significantly, his ideological views and the manner in which he applied the colonial gaze, even if purely from commercial demand, into his colonialist photographs. Beato’s motivations during his brief stay in India, as demonstrated by his photographs and his self-described captions, were in line with the desired narrative which extolled the empire and its expansion throughout the Eastern hemisphere. Harris, whose reading of Beato’s Indian portfolio considers these circumstances, contents that “the historical value of such photographs rests upon their ability to reveal aspects of the inner mechanics of imperialism, and particularly in furnishing an apparently objective, but in reality a highly circumscribed and one-sided record of the contemporaneous events.”

Through his influential works, Beato’s oeuvre formed an integral component of nineteenth-century British colonial ideology.” Not only was he influenced by the British imperatives, but also played an active part in creating abundant material “evidence” to corroborate such narrative.

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34 Harris, "Topography and Memory", 126.
35 Harris, 121.
China

In 1860, Beato sailed to Hong Kong, once again following the British on the Anglo-French North China Expedition where he photographed the last year of the Second Opium War. During his stay in China, Beato continued experimenting by photographing landscapes, architecture, and some portraits. Most notably the portrait of Prince Kung who negotiated a settlement with the Anglo-French expedition.

A curious source mentioning Beato in China, and which seems to have missed the radar of historians thus far, states that Beato’s photographs of the Wall of China were available for sale in the early 1860s. The notice appears on The British Journal of Photography (1887) stating:

Since the Abbe Larrieu issued his pamphlet in Paris alleging that the Great Wall of China has not, or ever has had, any existence except in the imagination of writers and travellers, considerable discussion on the subject has taken place here as well as on the Continent. Several letters have appeared in the daily papers from persons who have actually seen the wall in different places along its length. One correspondent says that he is in possession of a photograph of the wall which he purchased in China about a quarter of a century ago, taken by that well-known artists Signor Beato.

This passage helps us understand the importance of travel photography and topographical views and their treatment as documentary evidence of real places and things. This treatment extended to events, and Beato knew just how to compose images that would undoubtedly sell to the European public. To elaborate on this contention, we can trace Beato’s continued practice of restaging events through his series of photographs that seem to commemorate the Battle of Taku Forts, an engagement that took place in 1860 and resulted in the death of members of the Qing

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troops and infiltration by the Anglo-French troops. To contextualize this historical event, it must be said that a previous attempt at dismantling the Fort had taken place one year prior but had resulted in failure of the expedition. With the previous conclusion of the Indian Mutiny, which Beato had photographed, additional troops were released and made available to make a second attempt in China. This second attempt was a sort of revenge, very much like the events of the previously discussed encounter in Secundra Bagh and which were photographed by Beato under historically similar circumstances.

An important document that elucidates Beato’s intentions was written by David Field Rennie, the captain in charge of the mission, who recorded the photographer’s excitement as he interfered with the aftermath of the battle in order to capture it before the troops could continue their mission. He wrote:

I passed into the fort, and a distressing scene of carnage disclosed itself; frightful mutilations and groups of dead and dying meeting the eye in every direction… Signor Beato was here in great excitement, characterizing the group as 'beautiful,' and begging that it might not be interfered with until perpetuated by his photographic apparatus, which was done a few minutes afterwards.  

Visual analysis of the photographs, which Beato took at various angles, has led some scholars to believe that he in fact rearranged certain bodies, as can be seen by the marks left on the soil as they were dragged (Figure 6). As Falconer suggests, “when the accepted narrative demanded it, he was not alone in rearranging a scene in the interests of dramatic and emotional resonance.”

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This early period in Beato’s career is marked by his development of the technical challenges of photography, the exploration of war scenes as a subject matter, and the beginning of his networks with the British army. The following section covers Beato’s time in Japan, where he spent considerable time and fully developed his businessman-photographer practice.

**Japan**

Beato arrived in Japan by the time it was already under British control in 1862 and for the first time in his career, opened a photographic establishment.\(^{40}\) Beato’s photographic business in Japan thrived from 1863 until 1877, when he subsequently sold it to Austrian photographer Baron Raimund von Stillfried-Ratenicz and the German Hermann Andersen, who continued to sell his images for decades.\(^{41}\) By 1877, he claimed to have given up photography.\(^{42}\) Beato left Yokohoma on November 29\(^{th}\), 1884 after more than 20 years in the country and after having lost all of his fortune on the Silver Exchange market.\(^{43}\) He returned to London with the help of his friends who paid for his travel fare.

By the time of his arrival, Beato’s pattern of following the British expansionist imperative was fully established. In fact, during the time of that he lived in Japan, Beato used his naturalized British citizen status to his benefit. For example, he claimed his British citizenship during a case against W.G. Thomson for damages to cargo in transit on steamer *Atholl*.\(^{44}\) It was

\(^{40}\) Clark, Fraser, and Osman, "A Revised Chronology," 95.


\(^{42}\) Clark, Fraser, and Osman, "A Revised Chronology," 107.

\(^{43}\) Lacoste and Ritchin, *Felice Beato*, 22.

\(^{44}\) Clark, Fraser, and Osman, "A Revised Chronology", 108.
also during this time that found himself in a number of cases with the courts based on the accusations of various ruses and misbehaving on his part, such as a case against him for beating up his cook in October 1875 and another for stealing hotel furniture on the same year.\footnote{Clark, Fraser, and Osman, 104-5.} In addition to having documentation on Beato’s behavior and personality, it was also in Japan where he developed closer friendships, providing us with additional records for this important period in his career.

One of those close relationships and business partnerships was with Charles Wirgman, the author and creator of \textit{Japan Punch} magazine, a somewhat irregular publication that was usually released monthly for about 25 years and was characterized by its satiric tone and coverage of various topics, including contemporary news.\footnote{Clark, Fraser, and Osman, 88-116; note: Japan Punch satirized Beato in September 1871, December 1875, May 1876, November 1876, April and May 1879, April 1880, August and November 1880, December 1880, 1882, and in 1886.} In \textit{Japan Punch}, Beato takes the character of “Count Collodion” and is satirized from 1871 until 1886 for being an eccentric fellow and having peculiar ways of determining how to charge his customers, among other things. Wirgman also had connections with the \textit{Illustrated London News}, a newspaper that had previously featured illustrations based on Beato’s photographs of war. Eventually, it seems that their partnership was dissolved for unknown reasons, and Beato opened the firm “F. Beato & Co, Yokohama”.\footnote{Clark, Fraser, and Osman, 107.}

Another important record of Beato’s life comes from Henry Felix Woods, a British naval officer, amateur photographer, and friend of Beato who visited Yokohama in 1865 and was tasked with taking the British Minister to Edo. His account of Beato is one of the most extensive
primary documents related to the photographer and gives us insight into his life, practice, financial status, and flamboyant personality. He writes:

“There was at the time, residing in Yokohama, a photographer who had attained a high reputation for the excellence of his work in respect of both portraiture views and landscapes. He was quite a character in a way and a general favourite for his openhandedness and the good temper with which he met his reverses. He had taken up photography in the Crimean War, and going off to India in the Mutiny, worked there for some time, and went on to China. He followed our Army, and was at the sack of the Summer Palace, and made a nice little sum by the purchase and subsequent sale of loot with which he returned to Constantinople. Thinking to make a fortune in a short time he took to the Bourse, and soon lost it all. Off he went to the Far East again, moving on from China to Japan. The gambling fever, however, was ever upon him. He was well paid for his portraits and albums of views, but the work was a ‘side-line,’ and whenever he had been able to put by sufficient money, off he went into speculation. Not long before I reached Japan he had made what some would consider a little fortune, but lost it again in the endeavour to enlarge it. His name was Beat [sic]. No one knew his real origin, and no one troubled themselves about it. He spoke funny English, and it was an amusement to draw him into a long argument. His most usual expression of welcome was: ‘I am delight!’ He used it on every occasion.

“We had become great friends, and when I heard of our approaching trip to Yedo I went to him and told him what I wanted to do, and he willingly fitted me out with a portable dark-room and all the necessary gear and chemicals on condition that I handed over to him the plates of any photos I might be able to take. We left soon enough in the morning for His Excellency to land at Yedo in ample time to settle down before his tiffin, to which he invited the Captain and myself. I spoke to him about my desire to do a bit of photography, and he was kind enough to arrange that I should have a ‘Yakonin Guard’ to meet me when I landed the next day with my outfit, so that I might start work at once. Photography in the open was no easy matter in those days, and my friend Beat’s success in that line was due to his wonderful skill in manipulating his plates. There was nothing but the wet process as yet to the fore. It was still in the full vigour of employment as the dry plate had not passed beyond a very elementary stage of experimental success, and the gelatin film had not even entered the realm of thought.”

Important elements of this lengthy narrative include knowledge of Beato’s characteristic and recurring financial failures as he was known to make risky financial decisions through gambling. Having little fear of losing everything and perhaps lacking solid roots in any one place, Beato

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continued this behavior even into his later years, until the government helped him through regular maintenance. Additionally, this account allows us to understand Beato’s own regard of his photographic practice. It seems that he continuously sought other opportunities, never being fully satisfied with just maintaining photography. This pattern of abandoning photography and inevitably returning to it continued with him until his death. It is possible to imagine that Beato’s return to photography after each financial ruin was a safe decision on his part, since the reliability of the trade and his aptitude to handle the camera implied little risk.

A later account comes from one of Beato’s contemporary known as captain Sydney Henry Jones-Parry from the late 102nd Royal Madras Fusiliers, who had known him before his travels to Japan, and had met him on various occasions. He writes:

I must not forget to mention that I met my old friend Signor Beato here. I had first made his acquaintance whilst engaged in photography under the walls of Sebastopol; I next accosted him amidst the blood and carnage at Lucknow; and now finally we met in the streets of Yokohama. Could anyone have chosen three more distant places, or more varied circumstances, to meet under? I have seen some splendid specimens of his art taken at all these places. I mention Beato here because he may be said to be the father of photography in Japan, and many of the best negatives there now are his productions. He was a true artist and not only manipulated well, but chose his subjects carefully and treated them artistically. He established his studio at Yokohama, but finding he had larger fish to fry, he sold his business; and I am sure scores of my old comrades will be glad to hear he is doing well. I think, next to Mrs. Seacole, Beato is as well known to the British army as any private individual.”

This account adds to our knowledge that Beato had quite a close relationship with the British army and fostered these connections throughout the years.

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It was during this long stay that Beato developed and attuned his photographic and marketing skills to their most impressive level. His photographic work differs from his earlier images in terms of subject and technique. From a technical perspective, Beato’s Japan portfolio is characterized by its fine hand coloring, a process that had been introduced in Europe in the 1850s and employed oil and watercolor paints to produce subtle coloring in photographs.\(^{50}\) Beato is credited as having been the first to consistently practice this in Japan. He is also credited for having initiated the staging and photographing of portrait and ethnic “type” scenes in Yokohama that were later adopted by others.\(^{51}\)

From a marketing aspect, Beato repackaged images of places and commercialized them through his photographic business by providing full experiences in albums that included views of Japan and portraits of Japanese people, authenticating his work by adding captions written by Charles Wirgman. Beato validated his choices of imagery based on his 6 years of stay in the country.

An advertisement on an 1870 issue of Yokohama’s *Japan Weekly Mail* announces:

> Signore F. Beato, begs to announce to the public of Yokohama and travellers visiting the East generally, that he has just completed a handsome collection of albums of various sizes, containing views &c., of Japan, with descriptions of the Scenes, Manners, and Customs of the people; compiled after visiting all the most interesting localities in the country during six years residence.\(^{52}\)


\(^{51}\) Hight, "The Many Lives ", 128.

This practice and business model was also applied to his ventures in Burma, as he continued to explore the commercial opportunities of the medium.\footnote{Suen, "Picturing Burma", 5.}

As for subject matter, Beato’s Japan portfolio is highly characterized by eroticized images of Japanese women engaging in daily personal activities, such as spending time indoors and performing actions deemed as feminine. His erotically charged photographs, as explained by Eleanor M. Hight, served to fulfill the voyeuristic tendencies of foreign travelers who were increasingly present in Japan.\footnote{Hight, "The Many Lives ", 139.} In some cases, partial or full upper nudity were displayed by Beato’s sitters. She also contends that “photographic portrayals of Japanese women as geishas and beauties were produced to satisfy two primary demands: a perceived need to capture the ‘old’ Japan before it disappeared under Westernization, as well as the travelers more internalized desire to take home personal souvenirs.”\footnote{Hight, "The Many Lives ", 151.} These new demands, unlike those Beato previously catered to during his war-photography period, necessitated a new type of setting and format – one which Beato adapted to seemingly with ease and which he continued to explore during his years in Burma.

**Beato’s Burma Portfolio and His Curio Shop**

During a two year stay in London, Beato tried to venture to Sudan to capture the Anglo-Sudan war but arrived much too late to produce a substantial body of work, forcing him to return to London once again. This event, and the calamity of the Japan Silver Exchange gamble has led Hong Suen to speculate that it may have directly impacted his decision to explore Burma as a
new possible commercial venture.\textsuperscript{56} It is also highly likely that Beato came to know the increasing tensions between Burma and Britain – especially between the Burmese ruling council (the \textit{Hlutdaw}), Burma’s king Thibaw, and the Burma Expeditionary Force sent to dethrone the king. News about the final stages of the annexation were widely disseminated in the London papers since the previous year. Newspapers such as the \textit{Illustrated London News} regularly reported on the events taking place as the British army moved throughout Burma, annexing all of its territories by 1886. Beato would have undoubtedly known about the newspaper, as his work had previously been used and credited as reference for artists’ illustrations. One might also speculate that Beato’s arrival to Burma was an opportunistic endeavor in the part of the photographer.

It is known that Beato arrived on June 29, 1887 as he was listed as passenger on the \textit{SS Martaban} from Liverpool and was described in the \textit{Rangoon Weekly Budget} as “Signor Biates” (\textit{Figure 7}).\textsuperscript{57} By 1888, he travelled from Upper Burma to Bhamo, a city in Kachin state in the northernmost part of Myanmar, perhaps to photograph ethnic groups from that area.\textsuperscript{58}

The photographic market in Burma thrived under the influx of European travelers who were increasingly visiting after traveling became easier in the 1880s, especially aided by the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869.\textsuperscript{59} The opening of the Canal allowed travelers to reduce the distance and time it took to travel to India and in connection, Burma, by going through the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{56} Suen, "Picturing Burma", 6.
\item \textsuperscript{57} "Arrivals," \textit{Rangoon Weekly Budget}, July 5, 1887, microform.
\item \textsuperscript{58} There are extant outdoor photos of Kachin women that have been dated as 1889, making it possible that they came from that trip.
\item \textsuperscript{59} Suen, "Picturing Burma", 7.
\end{itemize}
Mediterranean and cutting through into the Indian Ocean. Even more so, travelling to Burma became easier after 1885 when Burma became British Burma. The increase in tourism brought a new market for travel guidebooks and literature accompanied by photographs of the country and its people. Beato’s opportunistic business mind capitalized on this demand, as is seen by the inclusion of his photographs in multiple travel guides and other travel writings.\textsuperscript{60}

A remarkable feature around Beato’s customer-centric business was the customizability of his photo albums. By allowing customers to pick their favorite views from a master catalogue, which was then bound, captioned, and numbered to create a personalized product, consumers could return home with a visual narrative of the places they visited or most enjoyed (Figure 8).\textsuperscript{61} This commodification was also catered in the form of postcards (photographs that were attached to thicker cardboard) and produced as a shareable souvenir, targeting possible future travelers or by the time he released his shopping catalogue, new mail-order customers.

It is clear that Beato quickly employed all of his previous experiences and learnings from past failures into his endeavors in Burma. In just two years from his arrival, Beato had earned good reputation and assimilated into Mandalay’s community. By this time, he was already operating a photographic business and arranging sales of Burmese arts and crafts, although it is not known if he already had a brick and mortar establishment. He was also focused on recording important events such as funerals and significant foreign visits, such as the visit of H.R.H Prince Albert Victor to Burma during 1889-90. Stanley William Coxon writes a memoir of the

\textsuperscript{60} Suen, 7.
\textsuperscript{61} Suen, 7.
photographs taken by Beato, and the unintentional impersonation of prince Albert by Coxon based on a photograph that was arranged and somewhat coerced by Beato. He writes:

Before bidding the Prince good-bye, I feel I must record one other amusing incident. At Mandalay we had a Signor Beato, who combined the business of a photographer with that of a seller of Burmese curios, in the shape of silks, silver, wood carving, &c. [sic] But Signor Beato was more than this. He was one of the best fellows in the world, and a member of the Mandalay Club. He had been all through the Crimean War with the British Army, and had the most wonderful collection of photographs of that campaign. Sir George Wolseley, who was commanding in Upper Burma at the time, was a personal friend of him, and he was a welcome guest at every regimental mess and club throughout Burma. As the photographer of the place he was naturally most anxious to get a good group of His Royal Highness and staff, and I had arranged, with the Prince’s permission, to have one taken at our garden-party. But unfortunately for him, we had as one of our side-shows a tug-of-war between Burmese damsels and this so interested and amused the Prince that several more contests, not provided on the card, had to be arranged. The consequence was, when we eventually sat down to have the group taken, the light was defective and Beato, to his great regret, failed to develop anything fit for printing. His loss was, however, partially made good in rather an amusing way.

The town had arranged with the Prince’s consent, to present him with an album of the principal views of Mandalay and as he was particularly fascinated with the carriage and the mounted escort which accompanied him on our various sightseeing expeditions, he asked me to be careful to include a photograph of the cortege in the album. It was interesting from the fact that it consisted entirely of Burmese ponies none of which exceeded twelve hands in height. I accordingly arranged with Beato to have a photograph taken at the entrance to Government House. He took several successfully, but for the last one he insisted upon my getting into the waggonette and holding the reins. To oblige him I did so. In many Burmese homes I am to this day pointed out as His Royal Highness going out from Government House for his morning drive!!!

Interestingly, Beato appears in the Indian Directory of Thacker and Spink, Calcutta and in Wright’s directory as a landscape photographer in 1891. It is possible that at the time of Coxon’s writing, Beato’s full curio shop had not yet been established and he was still itinerant.

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63 Clark, Fraser, and Osman, 113. Note: The Thacker Directory published lists of foreign businesses and residents in India and Burma since 1863.
This contention is validated by analyzing Beato’s Burma portfolio – as most of his early work is largely comprised of outside views.

By 1893, he is listed in Thacker’s with H.C. Smith who worked with him in Burma for 10 years. It appears that by 1896, almost a decade since his arrival, Beato owned “The Photographic Studio” and had opened his curio business in Mandalay and Rangoon under the name F. Beato, Ltd.

F. Beato, Ltd.

Beato’s addition of curio sales to his photographic business was not an unusual business model. In fact, many photographers listed in directories of this time usually listed their business as dealers in various Burmese objects and by the early 1900s even dealt with precious stones. From various primary sources, we can learn of Beato’s curio shop and how he managed it in conjunction with his photographic studio. Thus, his enterprise should be considered as one operating business rather than two separate unrelated ventures. It should also be considered not as the work of a single man, but rather a full enterprise, as shown by Hong Suen’s research.

By 1893, Beato was listed with 2 associates, and by 1899 his business purportedly had 800 workers. His curio shop in Mandalay, F. Beato Ltd., produced catalogues featuring gelatin silver prints of Burmese objects that could be ordered by mail. As Hong Suen points out, the company’s building which appeared photographed on his mail-order catalogues was in the scale.

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64 Clark, Fraser, and Osman, 114.
65 Clark, Fraser, and Osman, 114.
of an emporium.\textsuperscript{67} The three-story brick building, located in the corner of C road and extending to the adjacent street, was built in an architectural style that merged both Burmese and European elements, a common feature of colonial architecture from this time.

Further, it is worthy to note that Beato opened a second shop in Yangon, where the prolific German photographer Philipp Klier had settled and opened his own studio, competing with Beato and other thriving studios during this time. By 1904-5, Klier had adopted the curio-shop model as established by Beato, selling various types of Burmese crafts.\textsuperscript{68}

In \textit{Picturesque India: A Handbook for European Travellers} (1898), W. S. Caine created what was clearly a publication intended to increase tourist travel to Burma. The introduction states:

\begin{quote}
Queen Victoria is Empress of India; The object of this book has been to try to interest holiday people in our greatest dependency and its two hundred millions \textit{sic} of our fellow subjects.\textsuperscript{69}
\end{quote}

Specifically writing about Beato’s shop and providing him with excellent advertisement, Caine explains that:

\begin{quote}
No better memento of Burma can be taken home than some of the finer specimens of native silks, which are in all respects, colour, design and fabric, greatly superior to their foreign imitations, of which beware. Signor Beato, who keeps the principal bric-a-brac shop at Mandalay, and who is a very honourable as well as a very capable man, has a large stock of native silks, and I bought from him some old pieces of embroidery that have ever since awakened the envy of my friends. His shop is most interesting, and his prices reasonable. He has every kind of Burmese and Shan curio, and is also the principal photographer of Burmese scenery and incident. Signor Beato is one of the institutions of Mandalay, and is an honoured and influential citizen. He employs over 800 people in the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{67} Suen, 7.
\textsuperscript{68} Suen, 8.
various industries, which many stock his two fine shops in Mandalay and Rangoon, and no one should fail to make his acquaintance.70

Cain also tells us that “Mandalay is a great place for pwes and other open-air entertainments, and Signor Beato generally knows what is going on”, attesting that Beato had become well adapted to the city and had made it his home by the time of his writing.71 Additionally, this account allows us to understand the magnitude of Beato’s business. Whether the figure of 800 employees is an accurate estimate, or if it was a figure given by Beato to account for both of his shops is not clear. However, it is clear that, as Hong Suen pointed out from photographic evidence of Beato’s Mandalay building, he had an enormous three-story building located in the corner of “C” road and extending to the adjacent street.

Beato’s reach also extended to Amarapura, the city near Mandalay known today for its weavers and textile production. As described by Caine:

Scattered among these ruins are the wooden houses of the present villagers, who are all engaged in the silk-weaving industry. The looms stand in the open air, under the trees of the eaves of the houses, and contain the finest and costliest silk fabrics made in all Burma. Inspection is welcomed by polite weavers, and if one fancies some very beautiful piece of work, the reply will likely be given that it is on order for Signor Beato.72

A later source that reminisces on the influence and charismatic persona of Beato appears in *The Times of Burma* on November 15, 1902 as a letter written to the editor by J. Whitfield Hirst, the later manager of the Yangon branch, in response to a previous letter submitted by a Mr. Parry in another paper and related to some controversy related to the employment of Rangoon jail inmates for wood carving production. He reminisces:

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70 Caine, *Picturesque India*, 636.
71 Caine, *Picturesque India*, 641. Note: A Burmese pwe is a type of dance performance.
72 Caine, 644.
We [the current management of F. Beato Ltd] took over the business, when Signor Beato retired, and left the country. There is now unfortunately no Signor Beato, who was a personality belonging to Burma, who could weave so wonderful a legend about any little article he had for sale, that, people gladly paid his price for this amusing characteristic of the man. He was a showman – Aye, more! He was a successful showman with all the Italian’s love of the artistic and beautiful. He has gone and his like will not again be seen there.\footnote{Times of Burma (Rangoon), November 15, 1902, microform.}

The notice also dates Beato’s career as dating from 1887 to 1895, an issue which will be later revisited.

Hong Suen argues that Beato’s business was the most prolific and dominated the market over the work of others, including that of Klier.\footnote{Suen, 7.} She also concludes that Beato copied the model of Klier’s postcard and greeting card production, but that due to the introduction of the ubiquitous Kodak Brownie in 1900 and the following decrease in photographic demand, he diverted his business to prioritize the curio sales over photography.\footnote{Suen, 8.} Kodak’s marketing model for the Brownie was a success due to the camera’s portability and affordability.

While this interpretation seems viable, it is impossible to ascertain such a claim without actual evidence of decline in Beato’s photographic sales after the introduction of the Brownie. It is also difficult to infer how widespread the use of the Brownie was in Burma and if the travelers were developing their film before returning home or taking the risk of developing damaged or underexposed rolls of film. The new technology of photographic film and the portability that the Brownie marketed to its consumers might have added to the traveler’s image collection rather than completely replaced the need and desire for purchasing extra images. Additionally, while
the Brownie could record a more intimate narrative of the traveler’s actual trip, it could not replace the value of Beato’s varied portfolio and his extensive collection of ethnic “types” in full garb and regalia.

An alternative interpretation to Beato’s opening of a curio shop and mail-order service is that as an avid entrepreneur, Beato’s photographic business allowed him to recoup his previously lost fortune and this led him to capitalize on a new venture – a pattern of behavior similar to that of his time in Japan. It seems a rather natural progression for a photographic business that targeted tourists to expand by providing additional goods and services that catered to those interests. As recorded by Bird in his *Wanderings in Burma*, Beato’s shop sold:

> “art in wood, metal (especially old and modern Shan silver work), ivory, silk goods (both printed and embroidered), images of Buddha, costumes and arms of indigenous races, and quantities of other curios and objects suitable as mementos of a visit to this interesting country.”

Today, art collections such as the Burma Art Collection at Northern Illinois University, housed by the Center for Burma Studies, hold extensive Burmese artifacts as the ones described by Bird, and which have been donated to the Center largely by American travelers and missionaries who toured the country on diplomatic, religious, and educational missions, or purely out of leisure and who purchased and collected these objects for their private use and as mementos of their time in the country. Eventually, as people’s lives change due to age, retirement, downsizing, and other life events, their valued objects end in museums and collections, allowing us to understand what type of material culture permeated the tourist markets in Burma. In this context, it seems very natural for businessmen like Beato to have responded to this interest and not only profited...

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from it but also helped shape the market. Additionally, it is possible that Beato’s idea to sell Burmese material culture was born out of his need for photographic props to sit or otherwise set his portraits. Beato’s emporium can thus be seen in context as a growing enterprise that sought to monopolize the tourist market and all of its profitability.  

In his research related to Burmese colonial postcards and discussion of D.A. Ahuja, the Indian photographer and major exporter of Burmese postcards, Noel F. Singer states that “a large number of photographs, for Ahuja’s early series, were acquired by [D.A Ahuja & Co.] from the studios of Beato soon after his death in 1904; they then claimed copyright.”  

Outside of having written this before Beato’s death certificate was found in 2009 and thus using the wrong date of death, this contention does not consider that Beato Ltd. continued to operate under new management after Beato sold his shops in Mandalay and Rangoon. In Rangoon, new management under J. Whitefield Hirst continued and was advertised on the Times of Burma in 1902 (Figure 9). Additionally, based on a copyright lawsuit between photographers Klier and D.A Ahuja in 1907, in which Klier accuses Ahuja for copyright infringement of his work, it is possible that Ahuja and Beato Ltd.’s new management did not have a mutual agreement to sell Beato’s images outside of their own shop.

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77 A notable example of a collector who purchased directly from Beato’s curio shop is founder of the Horniman Museum, Fredrick John Horniman.  
79 Times of Burma (Rangoon), November 15, 1902, microform.  
80 The Criminal Law Journal: A Monthly Legal Publication Containing Full Reports of All Reported Criminal Cases of the High Courts and Supreme Court in India, vol. 6 (Nagpur: W.R. Rajandekar, 1907), 6.; Aviet Agabeg, ed., The Burma Law Reports, vol. 13, series 1 (Rangoon: British Burma Press, 1907), 336. See chapter on Klier and Ahuja for more details. This archival information has not been mentioned in the literature pertaining to these photographers, however, the author finds that it is important evidence to elucidate on the type of relationships that existed amidst the competing world of photographic studios.
An interesting finding which seems to have escaped the major body of work related to Beato’s biography deals with the travels and collecting trips of Frederick John Horniman to Upper Burma during 1895-6, which shed some light on the cost of objects sold at Beato’s Mandalay shop. Nicky Levell’s *Oriental Visions: Exhibitions, Travel, and Collecting in the Victorian Age* published a list of objects purchased from Beato’s shop on December 13, 1895. The large purchase of over one hundred items includes albums and photographs. One historical album was purchased for 40 rupees, while another for 20. In the same order, four large photos were purchased for 4 rupees in total. On another undated list, 8 photos were purchased for 6.10 rupees and 8 Christmas cards for 3.6 rupees.\(^{81}\) Other items from the list include prices ranging from a small toy for 0.8 rupees to a princess costume for 300 rupees. Overall, sculptures and other medium sized items like umbrellas and wooden figures were similarly priced to the photo albums.\(^{82}\)

Regarding the type of output and sales through catalogues that Beato might have made during this time, Levell notes that the catalogue she analyzed displayed the number “1078”, and contends that there is a possibility the number refers to the number of catalogues made by Beato, Ltd. “If this is correct,” she writes, “it is incredible to believe that Beato circulated so many

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\(^{81}\) It is very likely that the Christmas cards showcased photographs of Burmese views and people. Many surviving cards commemorating holidays such as Christmas and New Years were made in this manner and can be found in various museum collections today, such as the *Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin* (The Ethnological Museum of Berlin).

catalogues. But by running off prints from his own negatives and binding them with printed captions using cheap labour it is, perhaps, not improbable that he made use of this number.”

While it is difficult to speculate how profitable his business had become at the turn of the century, the catalogue numbering can give us a good estimate, along with the first hand accounts and photographs of his building, we can make a good assumption that Beato’s choice to move to Burma was a successful risk on his part.

As if not enough points of contention exist about Beato’s career, the end of his management of Beato, Ltd. has also been largely disputed. Most scholars originally marked 1905-6 as the end date for Beato’s operation of F. Beato Ltd, although Clark et al. have shown 1899 as the end date based on advertisements found on the Times of Burma. Hong Suen has once more revised this date to 1898 based on her findings of archives in the Public Records Office at The National Archives in London. The archives show that Beato sold his business to former military officer Maitland Fitzroy Kindersley, who kept the company’s name. By this time, after decades of photographic production, Beato’s photographic career in Burma had come to an end. In 1902, Beato Ltd. also took over Watts Skeen of Rangoon, another curio and photographic business established in 1887 by Frederick Albert Edward Skeen. Beato Ltd., was dissolved in 1905, after a 7-year operation under Kindersley.

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84 Clark, Fraser, and Osman, "A Revised Chronology", 115.; John Falconer, "Cameras at the Golden Foot", 30.
86 Clark, Fraser, and Osman, "A Revised Chronology", 115
Interestingly, Bennet has shown that the company, F. Beato Ltd., was registered as “Merchants & Manufacturers of Carvings”, with address 53 Chancery Lane, London W.C. on August 3 1898, the same year as it was sold in Burma, and dissolved in 1913, four years after Beato’s death.\textsuperscript{87} This is evidence that the company was established in London and might help narrow Beato’s departure from Burma even further, although it is currently just stipulation. It also adds to the possibility that Beato traveled between London and Burma during the last stages of his life, as the London record takes place almost a year before the last mention of Beato in the \textit{Times of Burma}.

The following section will present a visual analysis and interpretation of selected works by Beato from his Burma portfolio. The focus of this analysis will be narrowed down to Beato’s portraits of women and children. Although he occasionally took portraits of men, they do not form the majority of his extant portfolio. Additionally, he created numerous views of the city and other areas in Burma. Beato’s work will be contrasted with the work of Phillip Klier in the following chapter. The concluding chapter will consider the photographers’ images in a contemporary context, as they continue to be used today.

\textbf{A Visual Analysis and Interpretation of Beato’s Burma Portfolio}

Some of the main museum collections that hold original prints from Beato include the British Library, The Ethnological Museum of Berlin, the New York Public Library, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the J. Paul Getty Museum. From these collections, some which hold duplicates of the same images, it becomes apparent that extant work from Beato’s Burma

portfolio only spans from 1889 to the first few years of the 1900s, perhaps even earlier. The majority of his work seems to have been taken from 1889 to 1890, with very few images confirmed after that date. It is highly plausible that Beato focused on creating a large body of work soon after his arrival and that subsequently he concentrated on reproducing those same images and in starting his curio shop. In fact, his work seems to have been completed in such a brief period, that only one painted backdrop was used for the majority of his portraits, with the exception of plain white walls and exterior views, or two make-shift photoshoots that seem to have been orchestrated in an impromptu setting.

Some of the earliest images of Burma captured by Beato for inclusion in his tourist albums are of various Burmese ethnic groups in outdoor settings. These images were likely of visual interest to foreigners due to their marked qualities of difference. One such example from 1889 captioned “Kachin Women” presents the viewer with an image of two standing women staring back with their eyes fixed on Beato, one woman appears older than the other (Figure 10). The outdoor scene is set against a pale, cloudless sky with the women standing in front of a tall wooden picket-style fence that is partially covered by sparse foliage. Both women are clothed in the traditional Jinghpaw garb characterized by their use of waist hoops, anklets, and bulky headwrap or turban among married women.88 Their outfits are decorated with cowry shells and buttons throughout and their bodies adorned with necklaces and in the case of the older woman, dangling earrings.

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An intriguing aspect of this photograph is the evident uncomfortableness of the subjects. This is apparent in their body language, particularly their hands, facial expression, and overall stance. The older woman appears unsure about her body and how to situate herself in relation to her partner and the fence. Her hands are nervously brought together in a form that is neither a full clasp or comfortably on top of each other. Her standing posture also reveals her anxiety as she is strongly leaning the upper part of her body towards the younger woman while her lower body seems to stay at further distance. This phenomenon usually occurs when a photographer instructs a person in a group photo to stand closer to the group. Rather than moving their entire body, the models lean sideways, shifting their center of gravity and causing them to feel and appear uncomfortable. In contrast, the younger woman stands firmly with arms to the side and her body slightly turned towards the older woman. Her facial expression is serious, and her gaze somewhat defiant and untrusting.

While this portrait can be read as the work of an amateur portrait photographer who lacked the skills to help their subjects appear comfortable, such a contention cannot be applied to Beato. Further, while it is very likely that the women were not accustomed to standing in front of the camera, it must be recognized that the purpose of this photograph was to depict a “type” of person rather than an intimate portrait that reflected on the individual qualities of the women.  

To present a point of contrast between Beato’s portraits of Burmese women, and to dispel doubts about his ability to photograph models in studio settings from an individualistic approach, we can consider his work for theatrical cards that presented actresses and other known figures.

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His portrait of Ève Lavallière, a French stage actress, is a sepia-toned photograph taken from a close angle and processed with soft focus and a superbly executed soft light (*Figure 11*). The actress, poised with both hands clasped and propped underneath her chin, gazes up and past the camera, which is situated at an angle that is slightly higher than her but not in a way to make her look diminutive. These considerations are all in stark contrast from the stylistic treatment that was given to the Burmese photographs. Aside from the notable differences in subject, where it is highly probably that the French actress would be more comfortable in front of the camera when compared to the Kachin women, the photographer’s skills and decisions on how to execute the portraits were deliberate and suited for his purpose. Notably, even if the Kachin Women portrait was executed under difficult conditions, the post-image processing and the identification of the women’s names were not beyond the capabilities of any photographer and his practice. Thus, by acknowledging that Beato was capable of producing portraiture in a range of styles, we can conclude that his treatment of the Burmese images was a deliberate *choice*.\(^9^0\)

Another Burmese portrait from the same year captioned “Shan Beauty” portrays a young woman in standing position in front of the exterior wall of a home on stilts, a common type of construction (*Figure 12*). She wears a wide conical hat on top of her headwrap as well as a striped *hsin*, or woman’s skirt, and a breast cloth. She also wears jewelry on her neck and arms and has metal ear plugs on her slightly stretched ears. The young woman exhibits a similar attitude to the previously discussed example of the Kachin women, with her arms, gaze, and body posture demonstrating a state of unease. A second example of the same woman from a

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\(^9^0\) Additional examples of portraits taken by Beato of military men in comparison to Burmese “warriors” can elucidate these points further. See the Victoria and Albert digital collection and the British Library collection for examples of these male portraits.
slightly different angle helps us reveal these points even further (*Figure 13*). In both photographs, the woman holds her hand out to grasp the wall behind her, almost as if reassuring herself of her position. From looking at the second angle, it seems that she is standing on uneven and rocky ground, this can account for her deliberate grasping. It is probable that Beato wanted to clearly capture the pattern created by the split bamboo used to construct the walls and the feature of the stilts which hold the home above ground, adding to the image a sense of rurality.

Keeping in line with the theme of rural village scenes, Beato composed a studio portrait captioned “Young Shan Girl” (*Figure 14*). This portrait is part of a long series of “ethnic type” photographs that Beato created in an identical setting showcasing a hand painted backdrop depicting a wooden landscape. This backdrop, which has been used to effectively identify Beato’s work from various collections, depicts a painterly forest scene marked by three tall tree trunks to the left and various bushes and foliage in the foreground and midground. To add to the naturalistic goal of these portraits, Beato arranged piles of real leaves and branches across the ground where his subjects stood. Throughout the series, we can observe the foliage pushing against the backdrop and causing it to warp, revealing the wrinkles in the fabric and exposing the noticeably manufactured setting.

In this particular scene, the young model stands in a confident pose as she stares slightly off camera, as if over Beato’s shoulder. In this scene we see an instance of Beato’s introduction of props, a practice which he employed less extensively in Burma in comparison to his work in Japan. Nonetheless, the young model, dressed in silk skirt and velvet slippers, and wearing an array of jewelry along with a perfectly combed hairdo, holds a large clay water jar on her hip, and another container and rope as would be needed for bringing water up from a well. The
dissonance between the woman’s garb and the props she was given is characteristic of much colonial imagery of this type.

Hong Suen uses the term “recognisable exotica” to describe the juxtaposition of common western elements and pictorial conventions (such as the use of a painted backdrop and the use of certain lighting styles) with “exotic” subjects. While she doesn’t mention the use of props such as pottery, artificial plants, and furniture, as well as the standardized set of body poses, these elements also added to the recognizability and familiarity of the images. In the case of “Young Shan Girl”, all of the elements required to signify Otherness are present and succeed at showing the subject in a setting familiar enough to earn the qualification of recognizable exotica. The young girl appears approachable, with her hands occupied by props that also force an adjusted posture (in order to carry them), her presence is unthreatening and to the interpretation of some viewers, she may even appear charming. This type of image and others in the “beautiful women” genre, as extensively produced by Beato and his contemporaries, served multivariate purposes ranging from being objects of curiosity to belonging to the culture of commodification and fetishism as will be later discussed at more length.

An interesting image that may be considered recognizable exotica, whether intentionally or not, is the c.1890 portrait captioned “Palaung Woman” (Figure 15). This portrait captures a young woman wearing Palaung garb against the same backdrop previously discussed. Citing Singer, Hong Suen reflects that “Beato’s penchant for using his staff’s relatives as models, the sitter is… Renee, the daughter of J. M. Samuels, Beato’s assistant and photographer.” This

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91 Suen, “Picturing Burma”, 13. Note: Another type of recognizable exotica is found in material objects such as wooden furniture that have been lavishly decorated with Burmese motifs but that exhibit a European form.

conclusion is most likely drawn from the facial features of the model, which appear to be European. Additionally, this is the first image discussed thus far that includes the traditional Burmese cheroot, a type of cigar that is common in the country, and which is extensively featured in Beato’s Burmese portfolio as a sign of “Burmese-ness” in the broadest sense of the word, as he indiscriminately gave the prop to sitters of all ethnic groups.

A representative example of the “Burmese beauty with cigar” stereotype is found in a Christmas Card captioned “A Windy Day in Mandalay” dated to circa 1900 but most likely the photograph was taken much earlier and later reproduced multiple times in this greeting card format (Figure 16). The photograph depicts an image of a young Burmese woman dressed in typically Burmese garb of fine quality, featuring a floral jacket and a silk skirt in the acheik-luntaya wavy pattern. She wears myriad bracelets and has her hair adorned with flowers. Unlike other portraits of Burmese women, this model is shown standing with her legs spread widely and her skirt arranged to show her ankles and a large portion of her left leg and knee. She holds an unlit cheroot up to her chest, presenting it clearly to the viewer and creating a focal point within the composition.

The cheroot cigar as a signifier of Burmese-ness and the practice of smoking has intrigued the West since the time of the first colonial encounters. This preoccupation with smoking often appears in the form of travel writings and as discussed, in visual representations of the Burmese. Writing in 1896, Surgeon-Major John Macgregor describes that:

The Burmese, male and female, smoke, smoke, smoke from mere infancy, till they get so weak and old that they cannot suck any longer. And the size of the green cheroots that

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93 This image also appears in a plain postcard format at the Ethnological Museum of Berlin’s digital collection and is captioned “Mädchen aus dem Volk” meaning ordinary girl or a low-class girl, without pejorative meaning in the German language.
you see in Burmese ladies’ pretty mouths quite puts you off, as they distort their ruby lips out of all reckoning.94

The association of smoking cigarettes and cigars as a sign of the “Oriental” lifestyle has been applied to multiple regions outside of Burma. The tobacco industry and demand for cigarettes rapidly developed in Egypt in the 1880s and was quickly followed by foreign demand from Europe, Britain, and the US. The tourist industry fueled an increased awareness as purchases of the product were made to bring back home. Additionally, British occupation in Egypt contributed to the popularization of the products as army officers and celebrities promoted their consumption.95 It was during this time of the popularization of tobacco that images of the Burmese ‘types’ were created, and which largely focused on the trope of the Burmese woman and her giant cigars.

Schechter’s categorization of Middle Eastern smoking culture explores the ways in which smokers from lower classes, who smoked a different type of tobacco, “were conflated with notions of otherness.”96 Additionally, Before WWI and the worldwide popularization of the cigarette, smoking was associated with exoticism and mystified in packaging design, which suggested the origin of tobacco was rooted in ancient cultures.97 Further, “the exotic image of the Egyptian cigarette in the eyes of consumers worldwide played a major role in its initial success in overseas markets.”98 Concerning the cigar, Schechter states that in contrast to the cigarette, it

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96 Shechter, 119-126.
97 Shechter, *Smoking, Culture and Economy*, 56.
98 Shechter, 8.
was “the perfect stranger (Other)”, and that “it took its meanings and allure from abroad and was coveted but also made to look sinister for the same reason”. Once transported into the world of commodity, the cigar took the meaning of “power, authority, and success.”\textsuperscript{99} Thus, in interpreting Beato’s obsession with giving a cheroot to the majority of his female models, we should contextualize the practice alongside the European smoking milieu and the connotations that such objects carried when presented via the photographic medium.

Today, the cigar as a colonial commodity continues to find a market in Burma with stores that sell souvenirs, such as French-owned business Yangoods. Making them accessible to the Western public in over-priced, repackaged and redesigned boxes that contain a sampling of the cigars with a small card containing informative details about the product. Yangoods and its line of tourist-focused merchandise will be discussed in the concluding chapter.

Through cross-comparison between collections, I have found a series of four extant photographs that were taken by Beato in the style of a family photoshoot, with various poses resulting in more than one photograph. This collection was separated at some point, with two of the photographs being held at the British Library and the other two at the Ethnological Museum of Berlin (Figure 17-Figure 20). Because the photographs are varied, and clothing changes took place, the series has not appeared as a whole set in previous scholarship. The British Library has erroneously dated their photographs, one to 1890 and the other to 1895. Simple visual analysis reveals that the photos are of the same woman wearing identical clothing and hair style, implying that the series was taken on the same day. The Ethnological Museum of Berlin has not dated their photographs.

\textsuperscript{99} Shechter, 127.
The first photograph in the series (Figure 17) is a portrait of a younger woman and a little girl, perhaps a mother and daughter. This is the only example where they appear together. The remaining three photos from the series are of them individually. In this portrait, the pair are dressed in traditionally Burmese luxurious garments. The mother wears a formal Burmese skirt in velvet and silk with a long train. She also wears a floral bodice under a white *htaingmathein* jacket. This type of buttonless jacket, characterized by its flaring bottom and tight-fitting form, was a most formal type of dress during the pre-colonial period until today. The daughter wears a very similar outfit in terms of fabrics, patterns, and style. Both models are outfitted with lavish necklaces, bracelets, rings, earrings, and hair floral ornaments on their bun-style hairdos. As far as props and composition, Beato has given the mother the iconic cheroot, and the daughter a paper folding fan which both hold with their right hands rather languidly. Exceptionally, this series employs the use of a chair as a prop for the little girl, a rare occurrence that Beato only repeated once more for the portrait of the previous Primer Minister to the dethroned King Thibaw.

Although in this photoshoot Beato introduced furniture which is fully covered with a patterned textile, he did not change the backdrop to an interior scene or remove the real leaves scattered around the floor. The juxtaposition of the interior and exterior elements of this composition create a disjunction that interrupts any sense of realism, if it ever was achieved at all.100 As for the gaze and posture of the models, we see the mother who appears comfortable in the setting, she leans her body in contrapposto and her arm against the high-backed chair,

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100 This dissonance is also present in the case of the portrait of the Prime Minister, who sits in a chair with an intricately decorated table next to him that holds what appears to be a chalice, probably in carved silver as was traditional of the time.
allowing her hand to fall gracefully with the unlit cheroot pointing downwards. Her head is turned in a slight angle as she gazes distantly, almost pensively. The daughter, in contrast, looks directly at the camera with a slight raise on her eyebrow and a hint of a pout, appearing a bit cautious or showing a bit of skepticism. Her small body is elongated by the trail on her skirt, hiding the length and volume of her legs underneath the fabric, thus making her appear rather disproportionate. Nonetheless, she sits obediently with her arm crossing over her body and resting on her knee a position which was carefully orchestrated by Beato when he posed her. The overall image thus presents a mother and daughter portrait of more intimate nature than what we have seen before.

The following image from the set housed at the British Library shows the mother in a full-body standing portrait, dressed in the same outfit and holding the same unlit cheroot (Figure 18). The placement of her rings, jewelry, and hair adornments are also identical from the previous photograph. She exhibits the same contrapposto stance and natural expression with alert eyes and the slightest hint of a smile.

The images held at the Ethnological Museum of Berlin are also single portraits of both models. The first shows a portrait of the young girl once again dressed in the same outfit and adornments, except this time she is in full body standing pose, as she leans confidently on the seat of the same chair as previously used (Figure 19). For this setting, Beato gave the child both the cheroot and the fan to hold in each hand. An additional aspect of this portrait that was rarely employed by Beato in his Burma portfolio is the use of a round vignette, a type of effect that obscured or blurred the perimeter of the image and created a border. This effect was applied in
the processing stages and required additional effort. The only other time that Beato seems to have used this effect is in the portrait of Susannah.

The last photograph in the series is of the mother once again, but this time she sports a different outfit and hair adornments, while keeping the same set of jewelry (Figure 20). She also carries the fan and presents it to the viewer almost fully open, and a darker and slimmer cheroot that she holds up to her midsection, causing it to get lost in the composition. Beato has also changed the props in this image and added a real potted plant behind the model. While it’s possible that this photograph was taken on a different session, based on the consistency of the lighting, it was likely on the same day after a simple change of outfit.

Due to the nature of this photoshoot, which likely took Beato considerably longer to capture and process than the simpler point-and-shoot styles earlier discussed, and to the fact that it was a full series that received careful attention to detail, I posit that this set of images does not belong to the same category of the “ethnic type” but rather was likely a commission that Beato completed for a family of higher status. The subsequent applications of these images in “type” albums and postcards are outside of the initial reason for their creation.

Hong Suen visits this same question of individuality and the difference in treatment in some of Beato’s portraits. She notes that “although Beato’s photographs of elites were ostensibly portraits of individuals, the sitters were still subjects to the dominant colonial gaze, under which they become ‘picturesque exotica’ in traditional costumes, made more authentic if they were part of the legacy of an exiled monarchy.”101 Another difference between the images of elite groups and the ‘Burmese types’ series, is that the elite photographs exist as a body of work. That is, a

101 Suen, “Picturing Burma”, 17.
complete photoshoot was taken of them, with multiple photographs in different poses and arrangements. In the ‘Burmese types’ series, single-shots were the norm. Further, images of the elite as captures by Beato do not appear to have been produced as postcards for sale based on existing collections of his work.

As a way of concluding this chapter, a consideration of the ways in which we can interpret Beato’s work will help in contextualizing and expanding our reading of his work within the broader discourse of colonialism and his place as an artist and businessman operating in an imperial milieu.\(^{102}\) The following discussion will take a semiotic approach, in line with Hong Suen’s interpretation, to reveal the relationships between the images (the signifier) and its referent (the sign) as they depended on certain ideological understandings operating within the “matrix of colonial discursive practices”.\(^{103}\)

Beato’s work, although visually disparate from the images that were produced as anthropometric studies during this period, can be interpreted as belonging to the same imperative, as he followed a systematic categorization approach complete with captions and labels that separated Burmese individuals into specific dehumanized “types”. In fact, Beato’s work was featured in Hutchinson’s encyclopedia *Living Races of Mankind*, fulfilling the role of ethnographic evidence for racial difference.\(^{104}\) The danger in these images is their ability to conceal their *sign*, as they present themselves in the context of personal views of people in their everyday environment. However, “the suggestions of a personal encounter in fact enhances the unmediated and analogical claims of the representations and obscures its generalizing

\(^{102}\) Suen, 2.

\(^{103}\) Suen, 3.

\(^{104}\) Suen, 9.
tendencies.” Through the various methods of photographic composition previously analyzed, we can also reveal that an equal encounter between Beato and his sitters was unlikely, and that the uniformity of treatment in the portraits suggests the subjects had little agency in regard to their representation. Certainly, while some of the sitters may have been active agents in the portrait making process, especially the local elite, there is not enough evidence to suggest that the sitters were aware of the subsequent use of their image, leading to the inclusion of their identity as part of the general trope of the colonized.

Adding to the layers of interpretation, after a formal comparison of Beato’s portfolio in various countries, Anne Lacoste contends that Beato’s work should be read in a “nuanced and differentiated manner” regardless of Beato’s inevitable participation in the colonialist discourse. Lacoste proposes a reading which considers that the visual aspects and attitudes of the sitters as directly linked with the political status of each country. For example, she states that “in photographs of China, recently defeated in the Second Opium War, and Burma, ruled by Britain as part of its colonial empire, native people are usually placed close to monuments and primarily express a passive presence. In the images of Japan, which preserved its hegemony, their presence is often less circumscribed, and they usually pose with confident, even defiant stares.”

Beato’s Japan portfolio allows us to gain greater understanding on his work in Burma because unlike his previous work in India and China, this new era in his oeuvre expanded beyond war scenes. By this period in his career, Beato’s clientele consisted of the military and European and American travelers that were increasingly coming to Japan. It is during this time

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105 Suen, 17.
106 Lacoste and Ritchin, Felice Beato, 5.
107 Suen, 5.
in Japan that Beato began to explore portrait and studio photography, focusing on Japanese subjects from all social ranks. Thus, it is important for us to understand how to contextualize each of Beato’s portfolios.

While it is true, as Lacoste proposes, that we must consider each of the country’s political context in relation to the West at the time that Beato arrived to photograph, we must also consider the presence and development of the medium before his encounter with his subjects. In the case of Japan, by the time he arrived, the medium was no longer a mysterious process. Experimentation with photography had begun in 1849 when the Satsuma clan purchased a camera. By 1856 photography lessons were given to Nagasaki students. Extant photographs taken by Japanese photographers in 1857 also point to an acceptance of the medium. In 1860, studios were opened and just a year later local Japanese Shimooka Renjo opened the first Japanese studio in Yokohama. Four years later, Beato arrived, with the country already having over a decade since their adoption and acceptance of the camera.

In the case of Burma, photography developed at a different pace, and Beato is accepted as being one of the earliest to work in Mandalay in a studio setting. While studios were opened by photographers since the 1860s, the relationship between local communities and photographers in the early colonial period is largely unknown. Aside from the interest of the local elite, the photographic economy in Burma was largely controlled by foreigners. Sadan’s study of Burmese photographers reveals that it is not until the 1890s that names of local staff are listed for the

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bigger studios, including F. Beato Ltd and Watts & Skeen.\textsuperscript{109} Taking into consideration that the medium developed radically different in each country, and that the development of photography in local communities varied even from city to city, we can understand why Beato’s subjects may have looked passive, as described by Lacoste.

We must also consider gender roles within each country’s context in order to assess the impact that such roles may have had in the body language and expressions of the sitters. While in Japan, Beato photographed long series of men, including warriors, sumo wrestlers, and clan envoys. His portraits of women were mainly of geisha and other service women, who actually appear rather passive and in some instances, they display a timid gaze. In Burma, only a handful of male portraits are extant and mostly depicting civilian men. In one example of two Burmese men with servants, the pair stand tall with hand on hip and a strong gaze towards the camera – their stare most certainly can be interpreted as defiant (Figure 21). As discussed, most of Beato’s Burma portfolio of people are in the “beautiful women” genre and depict women that evoke similar passive attitudes as those found in the Japanese examples.

In the larger context of photograph-making in Burma, a general popularization of the “beauty” genre as evidenced by the myriad images produced in this category by nearly all of Burma’s studio photographers from the late 1800s onwards, reflect “the demands of the European market for a vision of Burma as picturesque and exotic.”\textsuperscript{110}

This style of the picturesque is described by Hong Suen as:


\textsuperscript{110} Suen, 10.
An aesthetic theory that developed from the Grand Tour and the growth of travel to remote British destinations in the 1700s. From being a theorization on landscape during the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, the idea of the picturesque became extended to the perception and representation of architecture, and even people during the nineteenth-century, and connected to the emergence of national consciousness in Britain. The picturesque tradition provided its followers with a distinct set of aesthetic conventions by which to represent landscape visually, and, in addition, provided a philosophical context within which larger issues of representation could be conceived. This doctrine naturally inhabited the discourse of nineteenth-century photographers including Beato, and informed their aesthetic sensibilities.\footnote{Suen, 9.}

Within the colonial history of Burma, the picturesque aesthetic fit perfectly as a mode of attraction for tourists who could safely experience an exotic encounter in such foreign land. The entire experience was commodified from the arrival via steamer boat through the idyllic experience of the country via a carefully planned and described tour complete with travel books, personal guides, and best of all, vast opportunity to take their experience home as immortalized by Beato’s albums, effectively removing “the fear of the imminent loss of the ’authentic Orient’ under European modernity”.\footnote{Suen, 10.} However, these contentions are only applicable within the context of the relationship between European understanding of the picturesque, and the visual representations that carried these meanings. Hong Suen’s classification of Beato as a producer-encoder helps elucidate this point.\footnote{Suen, 25.} That is, Beato took the role of producer as a photographer operating in the picturesque tradition, and also of encoder of meanings and conventions that were then transferred to his market, the decoders, who belonged to the same milieu and through their gaze activated the message that Beato (and his contemporaries) clearly understood and commodified as an object for consumers hungry for the experience of the Orient.
CHAPTER THREE
PHILIPP ADOLPHE KLIER (1845-1911) AND D.A. AHUJA (? – ?): COMPETING FOR THE PHOTOGRAPHIC CRAZE, EXTENDING THE MYTH OF BURMA

Unlike Felice Beato, who has received considerable attention in the photographic discourse due to his extensive oeuvre, Philipp Adolphe Klier (1845 – 1911) and D.A. Ahuja (? – ?) have only been superficially explored by the leading scholars in Burmese photography. Their legacy, however, has been recognized for its importance, as a large portion of their portfolios survives. This chapter presents the existing scholarship related to both individuals and sheds new light on previously undiscussed archival resources that tell us more about their lives and reveal some of the conflicts that arose during the development of a new type of image-driven consumer – the photographic voyeur. Further, visual analysis is presented through a comparative approach that contrasts the stylistic differences between their works and Beato’s, while arguing that the images ultimately achieve the same effect of fetishization and commodification.

These artists and their businesses are discussed in tandem because they were part of the early photographic-studio milieu, living in colonial Rangoon, and often competing for customers and employees. Their stories intertwined multiple times, and eventually they encountered each other in a legal battle over copyright issues. Their businesses adapted to the growing demand in
the postcard industry, and catered to both the foreign and local markets, a key element to their success.

This chapter will continue the previously introduced discussion and semiotic interpretations that allow for a richer reading of these colonial sources, while adding on the theoretical background that Malek Alloula and other post-colonial scholars explored after Said’s *Orientalism*, and which will be further applied in the concluding chapter.

In relation to the colonial postcard, Alloula expressed that the images acted as “the fertilizer of the colonial vision”, as they quickly spread and became available at once to “the tourist, the soldier, and the colonist.” The distribution of imperial images through the postcard medium represented the glory of the British empire and its subjects, while also presented the “pseudo-knowledge” and “truth” that inevitably solidified the stereotypes that formed in the colonial imagination. These contentions will be explored through visual analysis and interpretation to support Alloula’s seminal work.

**Klier’s Life and Business in Burma**

Immediately from his arrival in 1870 to Moulmein, Lower Burma, Klier entered into partnership with Heinrich Murken and ran a business that offered services in jewelry, optometry, watchmaking, and photography. In 1873, Moulmein papers listed the town as having only one

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photo studio.\textsuperscript{3} This partnership lasted until around 1875, and according to Falconer, Klier thereafter operated his own studio in Moulmein and operated it for a decade.\textsuperscript{4} He recorded important events, such as the celebrations of January 1\textsuperscript{st} 1877 when Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India. He captured a number of views in Moulmein and sent his work to the \textit{Illustrated London News} and \textit{The Graphic}, both which published illustrations based on his work in March of the same year, but without crediting him. The \textit{Illustrated London News}, however, described him as a “local artist of considerable repute”.\textsuperscript{5}

Based on the appearance of a \textit{carte-de-viste} in his own collection, Singer believes that by late 1870 Klier had a Rangoon studio.\textsuperscript{6} I have found a mention of him in 1881 in \textit{The Wright's Australian and American Commercial Directory and Gazetteer} listing Ph. Klier in the Rangoon section with the following advertisement:

Photographic Artist, York Road, two doors from the Literary Society’s Rooms. Studio open for portraits from 8am to 4p.m. Views of Rangoon. Moulmein, Sals-River and Andaman Island on hand… Also Burmese Character.\textsuperscript{7}

The 1877 photographs and this 1881 advertisement allow me to narrow Falconer’s contention that Klier had his Moulmein studio for a decade, which he based on the date of the beginning of a new partnership he established in Yangon. With these findings, it is evident that Klier’s operation in Rangoon started sometime between 1877 and 1881. Using Singer’s methodology,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Singer, 107.
\item Falconer, "Cameras at the Golden Foot", 27-29.
\item Singer, "Philipp Klier", 106.
\item Singer, 107.
\item Wright's Australian and American Commercial Directory and Gazetteer: A Complete Handbook of Trades, Professions, Commerce and Manufactures in the Australian Colonies, with Lists of the American Exporters and Manufacturers, and Traders of British India. (New York: G. Wright, 1881), 76.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
we might safely say that in 1880 he had at least secured an address for his studio, therefore shortening the time he ran his Moulmein studio to about five years. The advertisement also allows us to learn that by 1881 he already had obtained views of Rangoon, creating the possibility that Klier travelled to photograph and establish his new operation in Rangoon before actually moving his family. Certainly, travel between both cities would have been possible by sea, via the gulf of Martaban, since both cities had ports during this time and continue to exist today.

Once established in Rangoon with his own studio, Klier began a partnership with J. Jackson, who had until then the only studio since as early as 1865.8 During these early years in Rangoon, Klier was highly productive, “his output was high in quality and extensive and represented the consolidation of the mass-market views trade over the 1880 – 1890s – a world wide trend.”9 It was also during this time that he began to enter his work in exhibitions and competitions as he regularly advertised. We know that in 1883-84 he earned a medal from the Calcutta International Exhibition.10

Although based in Rangoon, Klier continued to expand his portfolio by making a short trip up north to photograph Mandalay. It seems that he visited in the second half of 1886. Ironically, Beato and Klier would have missed each other’s path by a brief few months, as Beato arrived in Rangoon in June of the following year. By this time, Klier was already advertising the views he obtained during his trip to Mandalay on the Rangoon Gazette & Weekly Budget. The advertisement also mentions the customizable options that buyers could make when creating

10 Singer, 110.
their own albums of views and that they were available as Christmas cards. Another advertisement found by Falconer from this year, mentions the new series and the expansion of his portfolio:

Views of Upper and Lower Burma, Maulmain [sic] and the Andaman Islands, also Burmese celebrities and characters of Burmese life… the new series includes views of the Ruby Mines, Magok, Barnardmyo, and other places in our newly acquired territory, which cannot fail to be most interesting to friends at home.

Certainly, now in his forties, Klier had established a fully functioning business that allowed him to earn fame by his own merit and collect enough views to be a serious contender among other arriving photographers. By 1890, two new studios on Phayre Street had opened. Johnston & Hoffman of Calcutta, and H. H. Watts & F. A. E. Skeen. On the same year, the Klier-Jackson partnership dissolved for unknown reasons, and Klier began operating independently on Signal Pagoda Road. His name as Rangoon resident appeared inconsistently from 1894 to 1909 and he changed address to 3 Signal Pagoda Road around 1897.

During these earlier years in Rangoon, Klier began to mark his work in various ways, perhaps due to the increase in competition. This savvy move on his part has helped with dating his work, as well as with identifying images that were erroneously attributed to other names. By

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11 Singer, 108. Note: An example of a custom-made travel album is housed at the Queensland Art Gallery under their Gallery of Modern Art Collection. The Album, titled “Volume IV: Untitled (photographs collected in India by a travelling theatre group) c.1880-1900” contains a series of photographs collected and organized by a Mr. and Mrs. Hannibal A. Williams. The album of 51 albumen prints contains a narrative of their travels through India and Burma and features a few pages of Klier’s photographs of Shan people. The album is indexed thoroughly and organized by each place that was visited, beginning with a few scenic views and panoramas, and followed by the “ethnic types” photographs for each region. This type of album is certainly characteristic of the type that may have been found at Beato, Ltd. And Klier & Co. during their active years. The album’s acquisition number is 2011.066.001-051 and can be partially viewed on their website. http://collection.qagoma.qld.gov.au


13 Singer, 110.

14 Singer, 110.
the late 1880s to 90s he was embossing his signature on the bottom of his photographs. In some cases, he simply wrote “copyright”, without a signature. Most commonly, he wrote his name, a title for the work, and a number related to his series of views. Additionally, he began to experiment with various stamps with his name, some elaborately decorated and used to advertise on the back of his carte-de-viste, a practice that was quite popular at the time. These cards were produced and manufactured in Berlin and ranged in style, although evidence shows that he used multiple styles during the same year, making them ineffective for establishing a definite chronology.

During this important decade, Klier also began to produce his own postcards printed in Germany with the marking “Copyright’ P. Klier, Rangoon”. The early series had a couple of views collaged in one card and were not hand-colored. Singer’s collection allowed him to speculate that in 1890 Klier might have partnered with Verlag v. Albert Aust, a postcard company in Hamburg. Alternatively, they may have acquired Klier’s images and printed them as a Burma series entitled Birma. Series Asien (Burma. Asia Series).

Unlike Beato, Klier seems to have spent more considerable time photographing family commissions in his studio, as seen on his advertisements that detail the daily hours he was open for portraits and based on the extant evidence of such images. From the family portraits that have been collected, it is apparent that he was popular among European Rangoon residents, and that he had return costumers who commissioned their portraits from him more than once (Figure 22-.

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15 Singer, 106.
16 Thanks to Dr. Jane Ferguson for noting that Indian copyright laws date from 1894 and might have given Klier an incentive to employ some type of branding for his work.
17 Singer, 113.
Unlike his views of “Burmese characters”, these family portraits were produced for private use and were photographed with the established and popular visual conventions of European portraiture. These patrons were most likely belonged to the newly growing European bourgeoisie that settled in the new city of Rangoon.

Klier’s in-country networking allowed him to make several connections that brought him business from beyond Rangoon. For example, Holt Samuel Hallett, a government worker who visited Burma and retired in 1879 published a “manners and customs” type of travel diary in which he reminisces on the catastrophic loss of his photographs due to humidity. He promptly sent his negatives of about fifty views to “Klier, the photographer in Rangoon, who had kindly promised to develop them.”18 This shows that Klier was well connected throughout Burma and had films sent to him from far in the upper parts of the country. He also worked in official commissions and was featured in multiple publications during his time. These projects included photographing railway construction for the government in the 1890s and photographing Burmese objects for catalogues written by Harry L. Tilley, the Rangoon District Magistrate, between 1901 and 1904.19

Klier seems to have continued working until the last few years of his life, although his daughter Lizzie is listed as “asst. To P. Klier & Co.” on the “List of Residents” from 1906 to 1908.20 However, the business continued to expand and even added an additional location. On Blood, Dreams and Gold: The Changing Face of Burma (2015), Richard Cockett mentions that

20 Singer, 110.
Klier was a tenant of the Sofaer Building in Rangoon in the most prestigious office block in colonial Rangoon (now the Lokanat Gallery Building) that had strong links with the Jewish community. The status of the building was of such importance that the governor-general inaugurated the opening. The building was completed in 1906 and housed a number of high-end mercantile goods, including a variety of imports. It appears that Klier moved into the Sofaer as soon as it opened, since a December 1906 advertisement in The Rangoon Times lists the building. Their studio and head office were listed in a separate location on 5 Signal Pagoda Road. Klier’s operation continued to be financially successful, as he kept his Sofaer location and his head office location for a number of years. By 1912, Another advertisement in The Rangoon Times shows that they were still at the same locations. They listed as “dealers and manufacturers of Burmese wood carvings, Burmese silverware and ivory carvings.” They also list “views of Burma and pictorial postcards” and “Kodak Supplies”. Although Klier expanded his business to include curio sales, advertisements continued to promote their photographic studio, and it seems that even with the introduction of the Kodak, there was still enough demand to keep Klier & Co. open.

By the start of World War I (Jul 28, 1914 – November 11, 1918) Rangoon was still under British rule, but ruled via Calcutta as a Province of India and saw the forced closures and building requisitions of Austrian and German firms, and the internment of Austrian and German people in Kyaukpyu, a major town located northwest of Yanbye (Ramree) Island in Arakan state.

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22 The Rangoon Times, December 1912, Christmas ed.

23 The Rangoon Times, December 1, 1906.
and to other towns in India. These events have led to some speculations on the manner of the closing of Klier & Co. Falconer and Singer both agree on the last mention of the business as 1915. Singer also speculates that the reason for Klier & Co. not recovering after the war was due to negative perceptions of Germans during that time. However, I have been able to trace a later mention of P. Klier & Co. in the 1918 publication of Thacker’s Indian Directory listing the business as a member of the Rangoon Trades Association. Further, in 1919, he is listed as a curio dealer under the name Klier & Co at 3 Sule Pagoda Road among 4 other shops in The Asylum Press Almanack And Directory Of Madras And Southern India including Burma. Additionally, I have found another mention in 1920 in the annually published Kelly’s Directory of Merchants a listing of Klier P. under the Photographic Material Dealers section, with the address as Merchant Street. The same section also lists the Ahuja businesses. We can speculate from these later listings from 1918 to 1920 that Klier’s business continued to operate and that someone continued to list the business post WWI. These sources, however, do not indicate the extent of the business and who was managing them.

An additional resource that has allowed me to trace some of the Klier lineage after the war is The Pioneer Mail and Indian Weekly News, which announced on February 1920 that:

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24 Singer, 113.

25 Thacker's Indian Directory (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink, 1918), 499. Note: On the same publication, D.A. and T.N. Ahuja are listed as “photographers, photo material dealers, photo engravers, picture framers, pictorial postcard publishers” at 47 Sule Pagoda road in 1918, page 503.


Another party including Mr. and Mrs. Klier and two daughters and Mr. L. Klier arrived yesterday.  

This notice appeared under the section “Germans in Rangoon” and detailed various parties of Germans returning after being interned in India during the war. This is likely have been Klier’s progeny and their children, assuming that he had sons who married and bore their own children while living in Rangoon. Further research can add clarity to the lineage, but it is certain that the Klier family did not completely disappear from Rangoon history after 1915, as previously thought.

Nonetheless, P. Klier’s oeuvre spanned four decades and is a rich resource to understand the complexities of the photographic studio industry in Rangoon. The following section will consider his work from an art historical perspective, by applying visual analysis to reveal patterns in his practice that may be easy to dismiss as coincidence rather than choice.

**Visual Analysis of Selected Klier’s Studio Portraits of Women**

One of Klier’s well known photographs that has appeared multiple times in Burma studies publications is his photograph of a dancing girl dated to 1895 and taken in his Rangoon studio (*Figure 25*). Like Beato, Klier employed the use of painted backdrops with landscapes, props, and simulated ground space by using real foliage and soil, although with more variation and attention to detail. For this portrait, Klier posed a young girl in full ceremonial dress, including a *naga*-headed crown and flared panels fully decorated with embroidery and sequins,

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as traditionally worn by royalty. The portrait is nearly identical in its composition when compared to the work of Beato, except that Klier succeeded in creating a seamless transition from the backdrop to the floor and into the foreground. Further, his model is thoroughly engaged with her viewer as she pretends to dance in the traditional style. The incongruity between the movement of the hands and the rigidity of her feet reveal that she had to hold her position in order for the photograph to take place. Nonetheless, when compared to Beato’s work, Klier’s subjects show more dynamism, a consequence of Klier’s instruction and ability to connect with his models. This image was used as part of Klier’s early postcard series, which he catered towards the tourist market in the uncolored format previously discussed (Figure 26).

Another portrait from this series that allows us to appreciate Klier’s style is his photograph of a young Burmese girl, also from 1895 (Figure 27). The model for this portrait is a girl dressed in an every-day hta-mein (wrap-around skirt) and a jacket. Her simple clothes are accentuated by some jewelry and hair adornments, making her ensemble appear well put together. She stares pensively and seriously into the distance as she twiddles with her cheroot cigar, marked by the back and forth blur of the object. This portrait show’s Klier’s creativity for recreating full settings for his models. A bridge was set up to elevate the model above ground, and a wooden railing made from tree trunks for her to lean on, appearing as if she stopped on a mid-day walk to take a break. Most impressively, beneath the model is a recreated river that reflects the lush foliage and bushes that frame the model at each side. Judging from the placement of rocks and the clarity of the reflection, it is highly likely that Klier constructed a real

29 A naga is a type of serpent being that holds varied meanings and purposes in Burmese culture and has pre-Buddhist roots.
pond for this portrait. Another detail that shows Klier’s refined portraiture skills is the placement and composition of the backdrop, which focuses all dark and mid tones to the edges while concentrating an area of highlight in the center, to represent the sky. By placing the model’s head and upper body in this area of light, Klier created an aura effect around her that force the viewer’s attention on her facial features and expression.

An important departure from the style of images produced by photographers like Beato, is Klier’s inclusion of more personable and somewhat intimate portraits that were captured in a manner that exudes candidness. A prime example of this stylistic treatment is found in a series of two images of the same model (Figure 28-Figure 29). The first image, captioned “A Burmese Girl”, was shot from a closer distance, allowing us to see her from a more intimate point, as one would when holding a casual conversation with someone (Figure 28). The model is seated in a cushioned chair and employs the armrest to prop her arms, as she casually lifts her nearly finished cheroot. Klier carefully added small smoke clouds to the cigar during the processing of the image, further adding to the feigned realism of the portrait. Most unique of this type of postcard is the sitter’s comfort and warmth in her gaze, and her exhibition of a full smile, a rare feature in images of this type.

The second postcard of the same model, captioned “A Burmese Lady”, presents a similar angle and proximity, as well as the soft focus of both images, creating an ethereal visual effect (Figure 29). For this image, the model is changed in a completely different outfit and adornments, although the same level of detail is present. Instead of a cheroot, she holds the other distinctive signifier of Burmeseness – the parasol. Although visually different from the images
previously discussed, the portraits inevitably became postcards with captions that situate them as belonging to the “Burmese types” body of work.

Klier’s practice to use the same model for different images is also present in another set of two images that were shot in drastically different styles from the previous pair discussed. The portraits are captioned “A Burmese Village Girl” number 510, and “A Burmese Lady” number 516, and present opposing settings that provide evidence to the roles that were played by Klier’s models (Figure 30-Figure 31). Based on the numeration system that Klier employed, both of these images were likely taken on the same day. In fact, the model’s hair style is practically the same on both portraits, even sporting the same type of daisy flower and having the top bun slightly shifting on the left side.

For the first portrait, Klier recreated a “village” scene by using a simple backdrop and a number of plants and bushes heavily emphasized on the left side of the image (Figure 30). The “village girl” is posed standing on a slight angle and positioned with her body in an active pose as she holds a large clay vessel, perhaps to hold water. For this setting, Klier chose to remove all trace of jewelry, sandals, and elaborate costume. Instead, the model wears a simple flower in her hair, styled in the popular top-bun of the time, and a plain undecorated cloth wrapped around her body. The manner in which the model is wearing her hta-mein, pulled up to cover her breasts, as she is shirtless, is reminiscent of the way women in Burma wash their bodies in semi-public spaces. Perhaps this “village girl” is on her way to the river, to cleanse herself. In any case, the narrative that Klier has constructed for this portrait is that of a lower-class girl, going about her day, and being comfortable in receiving the gaze of her viewer, as she stares back with a calm expression. The image is rare for its level of body-exposure when compared to the cumulative
body of work from photographers working in Burma at this time. Although she is not nude, her bare shoulders and arms, and the form of her dress, present a different type of “Burmese woman” – one that is accessible. The difference here is that she, the model, is giving her attention back to us, sanctioning our gaze, in the same way that the Burmese dancer who is performing her dance act allows this form of viewing. This form of image allows for a form of objectification that was initially found in the “odalisque” type of portrait, and which becomes more evident in the next image.30

The same model takes a different role in the “a Burmese Beauty” portrait as a woman of elite status, albeit equally accepting of the viewer’s gaze (Figure 31). Klier created a lavish scene with all of the characteristics of an Orientalizing portrait. Draped tasseled textiles hang from above, creating an intimate interior, and serving as a framing device. An empty background allows us to focus completely on the model, who reclines comfortably on one side, expressing a lounging attitude with her long cheroot positioned to her side as she holds it casually. Props are abundant in this scene, with a paper fan, closed parasol, and flowers all fitted in a large vase with a luxurious fur laid as a type of table cover. The recliner used for the model is decorated with a textile cover that is reminiscent of Islamic geometric patterns and weaving forms, while the flower vase with its adorned surface depicting floral and animal motifs is aesthetically European.31 The model is dressed in traditional Burmese clothing and adorned with previous jewels and floral hair décor. The juxtaposition of these incongruent objects, along with the

30 An odalisque is a woman in a harem, usually a slave or a concubine. Representations of whom were popularized by French painter Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, who worked in the Orientalist style of painting during the 18th century.

31 Thanks to Dr. Rebecca Houze for point out that the pattern in the textile might be Dutch Indonesian.
positionality of the model’s body create a composition that is truly in line with the Odalisque type, as popularized in French Orientalist painting and which promoted the freedom of the male gaze.

This important set of images allows us to determine that Klier’s portraits, as was the case with Beato, were highly manipulated visual representations of imagined stereotypes rather than honest captures of real people. While the degree of negotiation between the photographer and viewer has been discussed in previous scholarship, and while it is important to accept that some degree of communication existed between both parties, the visual analysis thus far presented here provides strong evidence that an unequal and highly contrived relationship existed. A relationship that favored the photographer’s ability to manipulate, while also allowing him to hold the power and control of the final representation.

The following section will consider the role of D.A. Ahuja as producer and distributor of these types of images and the implications that the medium of the postcard has in the context of colonized peoples.

**D.A. Ahuja, the Postcard Craze, and the Practice of Piracy**

Scholarly attention to D.A. Ahuja & Co., the largest manufacturer and distributor of postcards in colonial Rangoon has received the least attention when compared to the work of Beato and Klier. Other names and misspellings for D.A. Ahuja have been found in archives as Ahaja and D.A. Ahiya, Rangoon.
the academic discourse, devoted collectors who have found interest in the Ahuja postcards provide a valuable resource for research. Further, as the Ahuja firm was successful during the early colonial years, periodicals and directories prove to be of useful value for establishing a rough chronology of their settlement and long stay in Rangoon. This section will consider the brief scholarly works that have been written, while providing a revised chronology based on a wide range of previously undiscussed archival sources.

Singer, lamenting the threat of losing this important part of Burma’s history, mentioned that “although late nineteenth-century photographs are believed to exist in the Universities’ Central Library in Rangoon, very few postcards from the colonial period have survived.”33 Based on Singer’s communications with friends residing in Burma, it was believed that “modern-day Burmese [were] unaware of the existence of these early photographs”. However, a visit to the National Archives in Yangon has revealed that in 2015, their collection held at least four large volumes of original photographs from the colonial period, including many from Klier’s studio. Additionally, I have found, perhaps to Singer’s delight, that interest in colonial photography among Burmese locals exists and is thriving in Yangon and Mandalay today. Namely, private collections exist among Yangon artists and collectors, although mostly undigitized or catalogued. An important collection of postcards and photographs is currently held by the owner of Pansodan Art Gallery, who has been curating his collection for decades, making it a rich resource that will benefit from digitization. Another important collection is held by Sharman Minus, who has taken on the monumental task of digitizing and publishing hundreds of postcards from colonial

Rangoon. A number of contemporary artists such as Nyein Chan Su are also working and appropriating these colonial images for their own paintings and collages.

In his discussion of nineteenth century photography in Burma, Falconer discusses that the marketing of postcards by professional photographers became a strategy to alleviate the economic impact caused by amateur photography. Singer also accepts this speculation, but also adds that “photographers from whom Ahuja bought their material began producing their own. These were printed in such diverse places as Bavaria, Britain, India, Japan, and Saxony.”

However, it is important to note that Klier was advertising his Christmas cards, which were mailed as a form of postcard, by at least 1886 and Ahuja claims to have been established in 1885, making it difficult to assess who initiated the practice in Rangoon. Falconer adds that “the cheap duplication of their elegant compositions for the tourist market clearly signaled the end of a photographic era.” In the case of Burma, I posit that the development of professional photography, postcard production, and amateur photography developed in tandem rather than in distinct eras, this contention is based on the late arrival of photography to the country, and the almost-immediate introduction of the postcard within less than a decade from the arrival of studio portraiture. A stronger distinction is perhaps found in the works of travelling photographers who came to Burma and left briefly after, such as Linnaeus Tripe and Willoughby Wallace Hooper, from the photographers who decided to stay and establish their businesses.

Falconer further mentions that D.A. Ahuja was producing postcards in large quantities very quickly from the opening of his business, and which ranged from his own work to the work

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34 Falconer, "Cameras at the Golden Foot", 33.
36 Falconer, "Cameras at the Golden Foot", 33.
of others. He speculates on the possibility of D.A. Ahuja using works without permission but does not provide any conclusive evidence. Singer also speculates on this possibility, but determines, without a clear source, that Ahuja purchased the rights to the images he reproduced. In addition to Klier and Jackson, Ahuja also reproduced the works of Beato, James Henry Green, and possibly others. Through inspection of various law reports from this period, I have found evidence to support Falconer’s speculation and can definitively say that D.A. Ahuja did not always have permission or rights to reproduce and sell the photographic works, specifically from Klier. On September 19th, 1907, Klier is listed as holding a case against Ahuja for using his images. The case was published on The Criminal Law Journal and on The Burma Law Reports. The full report states that:

In India, where there is no provision for registration of trade-marks a trade-mark may be acquired by adoption and user upon a vendible article, and a trade-mark so acquired falls within section 478 of the Penal Code. Photographs such as those produced before the Magistrate are vendible articles and if a photographer applies a trade-mark to photographs which he sells, the provisions of the Penal Code are as applicable to such trade-mark as they are to trade marks on other foods and vendible articles.

The trade-mark claimed was “P. Klier.”

It was contended that, because, the name was printed in ordinary type, it could not be trade-mark.

Held that this would be so in England, because, under the Patents, Designs and Trade-marks Act of 18~3, a name of an individual cannot be registered as a trade-mark unless it is printed, impressed or woven in some particular and distinctive manner; but that in India there is no similar provision of law and section 478 of the Penal Code covers any and every mark used for denoting that goods are the manufacture or merchandise of a particular person.

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37 Falconer, 33.

38 Singer, 9.
Visual evidence to support Klier’s case against Ahuja is also present. An example of this conflict is Klier’s photograph of a Burmese couple originally captioned “Burmese Man & Girl” and marked with number 354, and the notice “REGD.” This original photograph has been dated to 1906 by the National Archives, UK (Figure 32). The marking by Klier to note that the image was registered points to his concern over the use of his images but is a feature that he did not use regularly. The postcard version of the image produced by Klier, depicts the same image but has been modified with a tighter cropping and a coloring treatment (Figure 33). The postcard has also been given the marking “Copyright” P. Klier, Rangoon. 2 on the bottom of the front of the image. The Ahuja reproduction of this postcard has kept the same cropping (Figure 34). The coloring is nearly identical with some minor and nearly unnoticeable changes, mainly to the coloring of the grass and flowers. The Ahuja version also removed the Klier copyright notice and re-added the same caption with a different font and style. The back of the postcard is marked with “No 19. – D.A. Ahuja, Rangoon.” These images provide evidence that the practice of piracy existed during this time of high competition for business from the tourist market, and that the photographic milieu in Rangoon was brewing with complex relationships that were not void of civil conflict.

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40 Multiple examples of different Klier images being reproduced by Ahuja exist and can be found via cross-comparison between Klier’s original work held in museum collections to the private collections of Ahuja postcards, or through online sellers such as e-bay, attesting to the prevalence of this practice.
Even after this court case, Ahuja and Klier continued to operate their business and appear listed on various directories together. For example, in the 1918 version of *Thacker’s Indian Directory* and the 1920 *Kelly's Directory of Merchants, Manufacturers and Shippers of the World*. These later listings show that the businesses continued but were under new management. By this time, Ahuja had also grown considerably in prominence and seems to have dominated the wholesale sector. The following discussion will present a partial chronology of the Ahuja businesses from the late 1800s until contemporary times.

A Rough Chronology of the Ahuja Businesses

Although little is known about D.A. Ahuja’s personal life, including his arrival to Burma, he claimed 1885 as the date of the establishment of his business. As detailed by Mandy Sadan, by 1901 he was already prominent in the Rangoon community as evidenced by his publication of a photography manual. The manual was published in Burmese and the English translation of the original title is *Photography in Burmese for Amateurs*. The *British Journal Photographic Almanac and Photographer’s Daily Companion* regularly listed him, with few exceptions, since at least 1908 but possibly sometime after 1895. These sources also provide a clear idea of the numerous changes of address that Ahuja

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underwent throughout the years, although mostly remaining in the same general area around Sule pagoda, the center of Rangoon.

In 1900, *The Photographic News* posted a note that lists the merging of Kundandass & Co under the name of D.A. Ahuja. The notice lists that:

Mr. D.A. Ahuja will for the future carry on under his own name the business of photographic dealer at 87, Dalhousie Street, Rangoon, Burmah, which has hitherto been carried on under the title Kundandass & Co.43

*The Photogram* also makes mention of this event on the same year, stating:

D.A. Ahuja, 87, Dalhousie Street, Rangoon, Burmah, now carries on under his own name the business hitherto known as Kundandass & Co.44

It is unclear if D.A. Ahuja was initially operating under the name Kundandass and switched to using his name, or if a different individual was the manager of Kundandass.

By 1908 they were still listing a studio and the Ahuja buildings at 47 Sule Pagoda Road.45 According to Singer, in 1910 Ahuja charged 2 annas for a postcard, twice the cost of a plate of rice and curry at the bazaar.46 Just a year later, in 1911, they described their selection as the largest of “pictorial postcards of Burma and India” and priced them at 8 annas per dozen. They also listed wholesale prices at Rs. 2/8 per 100 and Rs. 22/8 per 1,000.47

46 Singer, "Philipp Klier", 113. Note: An Indian anna was equivalent to 1/16 of a rupee.
47 *The British Journal Photographic Almanac & Photographer's Daily Companion*, 1911, 1249. Note: Rs. was an abbreviation for Indian Rupee.
By 1917, the business had continued to flourish, expanded to multiple branches, and developed a large sales catalogue. The business had become internationally known through the *International Trade Developer Annual*, where a lengthy advertisement on D.A. Ahuja mentioned:

D.A. Ahuja, Photographic Stores & Studio  
Ahuja Buildings, 47 Sule Pagoda Road  
The leading up-to-date dealer and importer of photographic drawing requisites, fine art engravings, picture mouldings, photo-button machines, and parts from actual makers.  
Pictorial postcards a specialty. Sole agent for Ilford Plates and Papers, Ross Lenses, Butcher’s Specialties, Barnet Bromide and Gaslight Papers, and Thornton Pickard cameras, etc.  
Depot for all Kodak Camera & Supplies. Catalogues, samples, and quotations for everything photographic, invited from Japan and USA.  
Ahuja’s wholesales and Commission Agents  
No 4. Pagoda Rd, Rangoon Burma.  
Branches: Karachi, Shikarpur (Sind) and Amritsar  
Samples, Catalogues and prices for silks, and cotton goods and every kind matches, soaps, cigars. Rice, sugar, and saw mill machinery. Exporter of Burma products.48

By this time, the Ahuja name was not only linked with photography, but also with the importing and exporting of numerous types of goods.

Ahuja’s prominence by the 1920s was apparently well known, as he took the portraits of important individuals. *The Messenger* directory listed him as having photographed a portrait in Rangoon of C. Jinarajadasa, the 4th president of the American Theosophical Society, in 1920. The sepia portrait was listed as available for purchase “nicely mounted on card” for seventy-five

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On the same year, T.N Ahuja, possibly a son of D.A., appeared for the first time on *The British Journal Photographic Almanac*, indicating that he was officially in partnership on this or the previous year. Although he did not appear listed in the 1919 almanac. He was listed as T.N. Ahuja & Co. “Late managing partner to D.A. Ahuja” at 7, Phayre Street, Rangoon. Newly listed items included mounts, background, optical lanterns, and novelties.\(^{50}\) T.N Ahuja did not list a studio and seems to have solely focused on wholesale and retail.

By the following decade, it is evident that Ahuja continued to have strong links with the Rangoon community, and also a strong relationship with the police department. The *Report on the Rangoon Town Police* shows that they paid Messrs. D.A. Ahuja & Co. for photographic services from 1926 to 1930 in sums ranging from 4000 to 5500 rupees.\(^{51}\) Their growth continued, and by 1936 the *Times of India Annual* listed D.A Ahuja as having a branch in both Rangoon and Mandalay.\(^{52}\)

There is a considerable gap in the archival records from 1930 to 1950, but it appears that they continued to operate throughout the years, and in 1950 *Rangoon: Sites and Institutions* lists both D.A. and T.N. Ahuja as photographers, the former listed at 134 Sule Pagoda Road, and the latter at 86 Phayre Street, both having moved to new addresses.\(^{53}\) D.A. is also mentioned as dealing in photo, cine, and x-ray services including wholesale and retail.\(^{54}\) The following year, a notice advertised that D.A. Ahuja & Co. were “the leading photographic wholesalers and

\(^{49}\) *The Messenger: The Official Organ of the American Section of the Theosophical Society* 7, no. 3 (January 1920): 256.

\(^{50}\) *The British Journal Photographic Almanac & Photographer's Daily Companion*, 1920, 834.


\(^{52}\) *The Times of India Annual* (Bombay, 1936).


\(^{54}\) *Rangoon: Sites and Institutions*, 146.
retailers. Importers of high class photographic and cine apparatus”.\textsuperscript{55} This listing, and the one for the following year in 1952, showed a newcomer to the Ahuja businesses, R.N. Ahuja, with an address in Bombay, an also dealing in the wholesale of photographic equipment and as managing agents for Orient Gold Industries Ltd.\textsuperscript{56}

The Ahuja businesses continued to operate through the 1950s and appeared somewhat regularly in different listings. In the 1954 \textit{Rangoon: A Pocket Guide}, both D.A. and T.N. Ahuja are mentioned as photographers with the former listed with a new address, at 128 Sule Pagoda Road, and the latter still operating at 86 Phayre Street.\textsuperscript{57} In Kenton Clymer’s \textit{A Delicate Relationship: The United States and Burma/Myanmar since 1945} (2015), the cover photograph depicting US president Dwight D. Eisenhower and Burmese prime minister U Nu meeting in Washington D.C. in 1955 gives credit for the photograph to T.N. Ahuja & Co.\textsuperscript{58} The following year, in the \textit{Burma Trade Directory}, D.A Ahuja appears listed with address still at 128 Sule Pagoda.\textsuperscript{59}

By 1958, more address changes had occurred. The \textit{Burma Year Book and Directory} listed D.A. Ahuja under photographers with the address 124 Sule Pagoda Road.\textsuperscript{60} Also listed in the classifieds section were T.N. Ahuja & Co. with address still at 86 Phayre Street, and another newcomer, R.A. Ahuja & Co., with address 368 Maha Bandooola Road.\textsuperscript{61} R.A. Ahuja seems to

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{55} \textit{The British Journal Photographic Almanac & Photographer's Daily Companion}, 1951, 500.
  \item \textsuperscript{56} \textit{The British Journal of Photography Annual}, 1952, 564.
  \item \textsuperscript{57} \textit{Rangoon, a Pocket Guide}. (Rangoon: Burma Information and Broadcasting Department, 1954), 38-9.
  \item \textsuperscript{58} Clymer, Kenton. \textit{A Delicate Relationship: The United States and Burma/Myanmar since 1945}. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015.
  \item \textsuperscript{59} \textit{Burma Trade Directory.}, vol. 1-2 (Rangoon: Burma Commerce, 1956), 429.
  \item \textsuperscript{60} \textit{The Burma Year-book & Directory}, vol. 26 (Rangoon: Student Press, 1958), 27.
  \item \textsuperscript{61} \textit{The Burma Year-book & Directory}, vol. 26 (Rangoon: Student Press, 1958), 7.
\end{itemize}
have had a wide reach and along with D.A. Ahuja, printed color posters on paper, a new type of product that may have competed with original photographic prints and postcards. Sometime during the history of R.A. Ahuja, they moved to 101-32\textsuperscript{nd} St, Rangoon, as listed directly on their posters.\textsuperscript{62}

By 1959, \textit{The British Journal Photographic Almanac}, they were still operating in Mandalay and listed their address as 26\textsuperscript{th} B. Road. This year they also debuted the catch phrase: “Ahuja, the name that stands for leadership in every field of photo, cine, & x-ray services wholesale & retail.”\textsuperscript{63} Attesting to their continued success for over seven decades. Ahuja discontinued listing their businesses on \textit{The British Journal Photographic Almanac} sometime between 1960 and 1964, coinciding with the 1962 dismantling of prime minister U Nu’s democratically elected government by the army Chief of Staff general Ne Win. On the 1962 \textit{Fodor’s Guide to Japan and East Asia}, which included Burma, D.A. and T.N. Ahuja are recommended as the places for developing of black and white film and as capable of developing the Kodak Ektachrome type of film.\textsuperscript{64} Thus, by this time, the most successful photographic firm and wholesale in Rangoon seemed to have begun a period of decline.

Another possible relative of the Ahuja photographers was Mr. A.T. Ahuja of Rangoon who was mentioned as being the famous timber-merchant who created a cushioned teak chair in 1944 that was donated for a special exhibition at the Indian Museum in Calcutta in 1980.\textsuperscript{65} It is not clear what relation he had to the other Ahuja names, but it is possible that during the period

\textsuperscript{62} Catherine Raymond, e-mail message to author, February 1, 2018.


\textsuperscript{64} \textit{Fodor’s Japan and East Asia}, Fodor’s Modern Guides (New York: D. McKay, 1962), 663.

of World War II (1939 to 1945), if A.T. Ahuja was also in the photographic business, he might have changed his profession to timber merchant, in order to avoid persecution for being a photographer.

In 2012, G.M. Ahuja, the last living descendant of the Ahuja family who was trained in traditional plate photography, was interviewed in *The Old Photographer*, a short film created by Thet Oo Maung, a cinematographer living in Yangon. In the film, a woman named Mary, who cares for G.M. and was previously his assistant, discusses that all of his relatives live in India and his only daughter in Kuwait. She tells us that their major demand was passport photographs, which they developed in a dark room at the studio. G.M. states that his father opened the studio in 1916 and that after his father’s death, he continued to run the business. The name of G.M.’s father is not mentioned explicitly in the film, although a sign to the entrance of the studio stating R.A. Ahuja is shown. Further evidence showing that R.A. is the father of G.M. is based on the 1959 advertisement on *The British Journal of Photography Annual*, which states that the business was established in 1916. Tracing his lineage back to D.A. Ahuja, it seems G.M. is about three generations apart from the original business. During the film, G.M. recognizes that the name Ahuja bears strong roots in the history of Yangon.

G.M. recalls that during the World War II (1939 to 1945), he fled to India by foot, due to the halt of all businesses and the eminent arrival of the Japanese, and to the risk that photographers faced during that time based on their ability to record events. This exodus took place in after the bombing of Rangoon in December 1941. During his stay in India, he met an

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Indian girl and they had a daughter. He laments being alone now without any family descendants left except his daughter.

Interestingly, G.M stated that after the nationalization of the country, photography’s popularization increased tremendously and demand for his services skyrocketed, leading to long lines of people standing outside of his studio to be photographed. Today, the once-famous studio is no longer operating, as G.M. is too old to photograph, marking the end of the Ahuja’s long photographic lineage.

While the previously discussed sources help to shed some light on the long chronology and history of the Ahuja businesses, visual analysis of their images is necessary in order to assess the ideological impact that the distribution of their postcards had on the colonial history of Burma. The following discussion will take this approach and will contextualize and interpret the images through the theoretical lens of Malek Alloula.

**Visual Analysis and Interpretation of Selected D.A Ahuja’s Postcards**

While the previously discussed sources help to shed some light on the long chronology and history of the Ahuja businesses, visual analysis of their images is necessary in order to assess the ideological implications that the distribution of their postcards had on the colonial history of Burma. The following discussion will take this approach and will contextualize and interpret images produced and manufactured by D.A. Ahuja that have not been attributed to other photographers, through the theoretical lens of Malek Alloula.

Alloula presents an important analysis of picture postcards of Algerian women created and consumed by the French, who were in Algeria during the early twentieth century. Taking an approach that uses Freudian and Barthesian theories, his study calls to attention the absence of
the “gaze of the colonized upon the colonizer” in the photographic record and argues that studies of colonial images are thus relevant and not superfluous.\footnote{Malek Alloula, \textit{The Colonial Harem} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 5.} He positions the representation of Algerian women in French-made postcards as non-representative of Algeria and its culture, but rather “the Frenchman’s phantasm of the Oriental female and her inaccessibility behind the veil in the forbidden harem.”\footnote{Barbara Harlow, "Introduction," introduction to \textit{The Colonial Harem}, by Malek Alloula (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), xiv.} Alloula borrows the term “phantasm” from psychoanalysis in reference to a person’s imaginary fulfillment of a wish, whether it be conscious or not. Through this lens, we can question where the trope of the Burmese female ‘type’ or the “Burmese Beauty”, fits in the broader discourse related to the fetishization and commodification of Otherness. Although Burmese women during the colonial period were not part of the same harem milieu as in Algeria, or part of pleasure districts such as those existing in Japan at the time of Beato’s visit, their representation in photographs nonetheless served as a vehicle for the colonial gaze and their phantasm. Through the removal of the model’s individuality and identity, and the process by which they were typified to represent a whole gender through the use of oversimplified labels superimposed on the image, Burmese women’s agency was at once removed and replaced with a new message. That is, Burmese women became passive receptors for the Western gaze and thus objects of fetish that could enter the realm of commodity through the medium of the postcard.

Ahuja’s “Self Admiration” postcard, presents an important example of the type of representation of nudity that existed during this time, although likely only circulated in private circles and away from the public’s attention (\textit{Figure 35}). The postcard depicts a standing long-
haired woman who is giving her back to us as she views herself in a full-length vanity mirror. She is partially clothed in a draping sarong that hangs loosely from her body and reveals her uncovered breast and torso as she stretches her arms to hold her hair back. From the surroundings, which include various objects for self-adornment, the jewels that embellish her, and the rouge on her lips, we can assume that she is in the process of becoming ready for being in public. This portrayal of a personal and highly intimate moment in a woman’s life is sanctioned by the caption of “self admiration”, thus turning the act of viewing unto the model, and effectively avoiding the confrontation that in fact, we are doing the viewing. However, she is not actually admiring her body. Instead, her gaze, which is reflected back from the mirror and directly onto us reveals our presence, and she is fully aware that she has been sighted from behind, and rather than looking at herself, she is confronting us – hervoyeurs. This incongruity between the caption and the actual depiction, as seen before, reveals the forceful nature of the images, which seek to impose and conceal, while providing seemingly banal imagery of everyday life.70

The “phantasm” of the harem described by Alloula is thus fulfilled in the colonial Burmese context by the boundless opportunities for the commodification of the country’s resources, culture, and ultimately, its people. While the male gender was subjected under British rule through military efforts, the women, being absent from the scenes of war, entered into the story as they were disenfranchised, and their image made a profitable commodity – with its

70 Thanks to Dr. Catherine Raymond for pointing out that access to large full-length mirrors such as the one depicted in the postcard were made more accessible to a greater number after the British arrived in Burma.
popularity strong enough to drive economic success even in the hands of photographers like Beato who had arrived in the county with empty pockets.

In his considerations of the odalisque genre, Alloula reflects that “hiding in the deepest recesses of the harem, where she reclines in lascivious self-abandon, the odalisque has become the goal of the photographer. For this obsessive guest of the harem, she is the very personification of the phantasm.”\(^{71}\) As previously discussed, Klier recreated his own version of the odalisque, one that would be fitting in the Burmese context. Klier’s Odalisque was also explored in Ahuja’s repertoire as the representation of women reclining privately in splendor and exuberance continued to fulfill the expected visual tropes.

Examples of this visual theme are found in Ahuja’s “A Burmese Beauty” and “Fashionable Burmese Lady” (Figure 36, Figure 37). In “A Burmese Beauty” a lavishly dressed and adorned woman lays on her side, greeting us with a smile as she holds a small flower on her hand. Her head lays comfortably on the high back of the recliner, and her hand rests on her slightly bent knees, revealing to us her bracelets and rings while drawing attention to the linear patterns on her skirt, and the floral patterns on the richly carved wooden recliner (Figure 36).

The backdrop is painted with an outdoor scene that depicts lush flowers on the left side and a tall European style table on the far right.

In “A Fashionable Burmese Lady”, a similar scene is depicted, with a woman lounging on a wooden bench that is filled with pillows and draping fabrics (Figure 37). The model is dressed and adorned finely with the usual draping necklaces and multiple thin bracelets. In contrast to the previous postcard, the model’s hair is not coiled in the usual top bun but is rather

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fully flowing down through the front of her body all the way down to the floor, where it gathers next to the woman’s slippers. These uncommonly represented signs, and the calm posture of the model, create the narrative of a woman who has allowed herself to relax by removing her shoes and letting her hair down.

In this context, Ahuja’s Odalisques provoke an attitude of harmlessness and receptibility. However, Alloula contends that “it is unnecessary for the photographer to capture the pleasure that the odalisque evokes” because “this is a subject with a long pictorial history which advantages him”. Due to this established tradition, colonial postcards depicting the Odalisque-type can serve an even more bold and abrupt function, taking the image beyond “latent eroticism and sensual presence” and “filling in the gaps with all the conventional and redundant implements at its disposal.”

Thus, the Burmese versions do not require the full use of the already-established conventions to recall the messages that the viewers are already attuned to through previous exposure.

In the case of Algerian women, Alloula finds the photographers’ affixation on the veil as having multiple functions for the photographer. Aside from representing “Algerian-ness”, the veil also functions as a representation, to the photographer-voyeur, of the private spaces to which he is not privy. Thus, the unveiled harem becomes the object of his desire and the phantasm that removes his frustration. What then, can we read in the representation of “Burmese-ness” in images of women? Is there an equivalent of the veil in the colonial representations found in the work of Beato, Klier, Ahuja, and their contemporaries? As previously discussed at length, I have

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argued that the cigar and its pervasive, almost forced presence in the images of Burmese women served a similar function. The dissonance between the signifiers linked to the cigar and those linked with typical notions of femininity, however, can be interpreted as failing to satisfy the phantasm of the male colonial gaze.

Ahuja’s version of the smoking beauty is found in “Enjoying a Smoke”, which presents an interesting composition that is unique in its depiction of full smoke (Figure 38). In this image, a model stands inside her home while she smokes a cheroot by the window, blowing a full smoke cloud that partially obscures her neck and chin. The setting presents the liminal space between the private interior and the public exterior, which is marked by the bamboo walls of the home and the trailing plants that grow on the surface, framing the window and serving as a symbolism for the outside. Thus, as viewers, we stand outside, and are privy to this moment of “enjoyment”.

Alloula contends that the photographer’s intention of creating realism is feigned by the inclusion of excessive and unnatural props standing in for signs of authenticity. This creates a paradoxical image that is so saturated with such signs that it actually achieves the opposite effect. Due to the photographer’s desire to capture his notion of reality, however, he “cannot stop to consider this paradox, busy as he is with attempting to make something more real than the real and developing an almost obsessive fetishism of the (sign’s) object.”

We are thus left with a body of work that is replete with contradictions and layered meanings, as has been revealed through this analysis.

As discussed in this chapter, the works of Klier, Beato, and Ahuja, provide ample evidence of the power of the photograph to impose predetermined meanings once it is turned into

74 Alloula, 18.
the medium of the postcard. One of the key aspects of the medium, and which greatly separates it from a photograph, is the designation that is given, via text, to the subjects being depicted. As Behad explains:

> The title chooses the meaning of the photograph in advance; it fixes the signified of its iconography in a repressive fashion that precludes any other viewing but a guided identification. The title counters the terror of uncertainty, the possibility of any intrusion by the Oriental other into the life of the European viewer. In this way, the Orientalist photograph freezes the Oriental other twice: once through the exotic staging of his or her reality, and a second time thorough an ideological labeling of his appearance in the image.⁷⁵

Because the postcards are created from images that originated as photographs, however, their qualities transfer over and continue even after the change of medium. Sontag notes that “there is something predatory in the act of taking a picture. To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed.”⁷⁶ This power that is granted upon these early photographers and their businesses has brought forth myriad consequences in the colonial history of the country. As I’ve demonstrated, the pervasiveness of these images in their original colonial context reflect the pre-existing condition of photography’s possessiveness but are further complicated with a commodified and commercialized element.

In a contemporary context, the reintroduction of these colonial images in a new and redefined setting create another set of paradigms that extend the myth of the colonial past. A phenomenon that will be considered in the following conclusion.

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CONCLUSION

“MAKING MYANMAR FASHIONABLE”: THE DECONTEXTUALIZATION OF
BURMESE COLONIAL PHOTOGRAPHS

To conclude this research, I will present a case study that considers the contemporary use of colonial images in Myanmar to demonstrate that there is a practical need for scholarship on colonial visual sources. While authors and scholars who are beginning to consider the visual legacy of photographic practices in Myanmar from the period of the 1950s onward believe that early colonial photographers have received much attention, and that there is a need for scholarship beyond those years, particularly on Burmese-owned studios, there is still an important element that makes the study of early foreign-owned studios relevant and important – that is, their images are still circulating today in new contexts.

In his analysis of the colonial image, Alloula warns of the ways in which contemporary audiences consume these images through the lens of nostalgia, while quickly forgetting the forces that were at play when the images were being created.\(^1\) The danger lies not only on the romanticization and idealization of the colonial period, but also in the threat of what Alloula considers a renewed “racism and xenophobia titillated by the nostalgia of the colonial empire.”\(^2\)

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In the context of twenty-first century Myanmar, Alloula’s contentions are not far reaching, although I will argue that today’s threat is a new form of neocolonialism under the guise of commercialism and consumerism justified through the general project to “modernize” Myanmar.

Interest in colonial postcards has not disappeared, as may be expected in a world that emphasizes digital transmission of information and images. This continued interest was documented in the late 1990s, when Klier’s photographs were spotted at a Yangon shop where the owner sold copies for customers based on original plates. More recently, the production and distribution of postcards is still present, especially in tourist sites such as the ancient city of Bagan and various sites in Mandalay, such as in Sagaing Hills. At these sites, ambulatory postcard vendors are abundant, and sell contemporary images in sets of 10 or 12 for prices ranging from one to five dollars, depending quality, size, and the buyer’s bartering skills. The new postcard milieu focuses largely on panoramic views of the country’s most famous sites, and a large emphasis on the Buddhist aspect of the country, including numerous views featuring monks and nuns in contrast to the ancient sites. The sale of old postcards is not commonly found at these tourist places as the objects have earned a new status among collectors and are priced as “vintage” or “antiquities” rather than every-day ephemera.

At local book stores in Mandalay, sets of reproductions of old postcards, printed on thick cardboard and stored in themed box sets are sold for about six US dollars. These reproductions are interesting because some of them are scanned reproductions of previously sent postcards. These meta-postcards feature the original mailing stamp and postage, and even the message written by the original sender, creating an interesting illusion of time-travel if someone were to

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send them again, adding once more a new layer of mailing stamps and messages (Figure 39). Other postcards sold in this boxed-set format feature thematic collections, which include groups of Burmese celebrities from the 1960s and 1970s, sets with reproductions of watercolor drawings created during the early 1900s by foreigners, sets with reproductions of Burmese artists’ paintings made originally for postcards in the 1970s, and other similar boxed sets. Further, a collection of painted postcards created during the late 1960s and which sought to depict the various ethnic groups living in Burma is housed at the Ludu Library in Mandalay, an important repository that is evidence of the continued tradition of postcard making beyond photographic means (Figure 40).

Today, foreign businesses continue to profit from this interest in colonial images and the marketability of the “ethnic” other. Some companies like Crazy Buff, based in Chiang Mai, Thailand, have taken on the niche of Myanmar textiles and created fashion lines that directly imitate traditional dress and are made by and for foreigners.4 Other companies such as the French-owned Yangoods reappropriate colonial images to represent Myanmar and its people. They cater to the recent tourist boom that the country is encouraging since the reopening to foreign entry in 2007. In 2011, roughly 800,000 international tourists came to the country. By 2015 4.6 million visited, creating a high demand in the hospitality and tourist industries, thereby attracting the attention of foreign businesses.5 Although in 2016 the country experienced a strong

decline from the previous year, with 2.9 million visitors who stayed for an average of eleven days.\textsuperscript{6}

I will frame this contemporary case study of the company Yangoods by employing a theoretical framework that utilizes Roland Barthes’ concept of \textit{myth}, Edward Said’s \textit{Orientalism}, and Timothy Mitchell’s idea of the “exhibitionary order” to contextualize the attitudes which informed Burmese colonizers, and to problematize how these images have come to be known and declared by the West as representative of Myanmar’s heritage.

The original studio portraits which were already carefully orchestrated by the colonial photographers are now digitally manipulated by Yangoods – further infusing them with an ideology that is still not Burmese in nature. Additionally, Yangoods benefits from the practice of consumerism that has existed in the country since the colonial period. Their marketing strategies cater to the tourist boom and mirror the opportunistic strategies that influenced British colonialism. Although the country is changing due to its newly elected government, the roots of colonialism are still present and have the potential of changing into a form of neocolonialism that encourages the consumption of both products \textit{and} stereotypes. These practices of reproducing the visual culture of the colonial period have become neutralized, depoliticized, and absorbed into the social identity of the country – a dangerous evolution that Roland Barthes has famously called \textit{myth}.\textsuperscript{7} As each year passes by, the country is further Westernized and with this change, the agency of the Burmese continues to be cast aside in order to fit into the expectations of the West.


It is important to question contemporary practices among this wave of new foreign businesses that are establishing their storefronts in Myanmar because they present their ideologies as the new dominant reading of colonial sources. Thus, this reading must be questioned and put up to scrutiny. Because Yangoods has marketed to the local Burmese community, and it is estimated to comprise one third of their consumer base, we must ask how the reading of their merchandise changes when the consumer switches from foreigner to local.\(^8\)

Like Beato’s nineteenth century curio shop, Yangoods offers an exotic culture in the commodified familiarity of souvenir goods, sold to travellers in a westernized setting, in stores that are trendy and staffed with English-speaking locals, while accepting western forms of payment such as Visa and MasterCard credit cards in their air-conditioned shops. Their trendiness is marked in their storefronts by setting a casual atmosphere with popular music, adorned spaces that present quirky displays that attract younger local and foreign consumers.\(^9\)

While this practice is no longer uncommon throughout the country, stores that offer these commodities and luxury goods are often for local consumers from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. These places sell high end fashion and products such as digital devices, household goods and appliances, and other merchandise, rather than souvenir curiosities. Other shops that offer this level of comfort and accommodation that sell Burmese material culture are art dealers, often trading with art collectors for the market on Asian arts and artifacts. Further, stores like Yangoods remove the common practice of bartering for a lower price at the market, making it


\(^{9}\) An example of the company’s trendiness is their recently opened shop that features a side car adorned with flowers and provides an opportunity for costumers to take photos of themselves, or “selfies”, as they display and promote the company’s product line.
attractive to travelers who want a western-style transaction without the uncertainty and pressure of the typical sales environment.

We must further question what happens when such a practice takes place in today’s society. In this new context, where the image producers (the business-owners), and the image consumers (the shoppers) are no longer part of the imperial milieu, what do the images mean? What sort of encoded messages do they carry? Once again, we can elucidate some answers and interpretations through visual analysis of the new images, as presented to us by Yangoods.

**Theoretical Approach to Reading Contemporary Reappropriated Images**

Western postmodern theories can help us understand the practice of imaging and presenting the Other, and how nineteenth century photographers operated under the influence of a binary understanding of the East versus the West. We can then apply this knowledge to our understanding of current times to contextualize the potential issues that arise when these practices are carried on.

Roland Barthes describes myth as the manifestation of meaning that is deeply embedded into everyday things and practices. Myth can be dangerous because it dehistoricizes and depoliticizes meaning. While it does not conceal, myth can also distort meaning into a type of collective illusion that can often be used to justify the behaviors of those in power. In a contemporary Burmese context, the use of colonial photographs by companies such as Yangoods during a time of rapid Westernization allows the company to reintroduce them under the disguise of heritage and culture with a modern twist. The images, now seemingly devoid of their colonial context, appear as benign representations of a country that is modernizing. Beyond the images, the objects in which they are printed signal to the West that Burmese culture retains its own
individuality while allowing the influence of other fashion styles. After all, the purses, cushions, and coasters sold by Yangoods may be Western in style and form, but the decorative elements remain “Burmese”. Thus, the products that result from this process and become part of the local material culture are adopted as a version of contemporary Burmese style, which obscures its relationship to Western dominated and controlled mass production.

As presented early in this study, Orientalist thought as expressed by Edward Said, and one of the earlier theories to expose this problem, although not directly in relation to Burma, considers the ways in which Western colonizers perceived the Orient as “exotic” and “primitive”. This theory contends that the “Orient”, or the non-European “Other” exists as a justification to create binary opposing terms in which the colonized can be understood.10 This colonizer gaze, and the desire to possess and control material culture, became evident through the writings and artistic representations of the Other, or the non-Europeanized, created by Westerners. In Art, Orientalism found its way into a large number of artistic movements which prevailed in Europe, including Impressionism and Neo-Classicism. Though less studied, works created by traveling artists in Burma were likewise shaped by Orientalism. Yangoods’ decontextualization of these innately Orientalist images does not remove their original meaning but rather neutralizes them and reintroduces them into contemporary Burmese society as benign fashion statements. While Said considered how Orientalism existed in academia and in literature, we can understand how this ideology entered into visual culture as a form of language that signified to the Other that the Western panoptic eye was omnipresent, even well after the British retreated and granted the country its independence.

10 Said, *Orientalism*. 
Furthering Said’s theory, and considering the idea of surveillance and the gaze, Timothy Mitchell’s 1989 “Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order” elaborated on the concept of the imaginary Orient as having three fundamental features: essentialism, otherness, and absence. The Orient was imagined as irrational and chaotic, whereas the West as rational and ordered. Furthermore, essentialist ideas sought to portray the Orient as unchanging and unevolved. To elucidate his points, Mitchell analyzed the Paris 1889 Exposition Universelle to highlight the way in which the West erroneously represented the Orient. He explained that Egyptian visitors felt disturbed to see their culture and home displayed in a degrading manner through the exhibition displays. The French, dressed as “Orientals”, acting about in the carefully constructed “Cairo”, showed the West’s infatuation with the Other. According to Mitchell, not only the Egyptian facades created for the exhibition enforced this opposition, but also the way in which the visiting non-Westerners were gazed upon as a form of living exhibit. He further described how Orientalized writings expose Westerners as people who stare, and thus turn non-Western culture into a type of exhibit. Non-western participants who attended the exhibition became objects to this gaze, and inevitably morphed into part of the exhibition rather than as rightful members of the audience. Acting as participant-observers in search of “exotic” ethnography, Westerners continued to see the world beyond the West as simply an exhibition.\(^\text{11}\)

Mitchell’s concept of the exhibitionary order helps to explain how the Yangoods products function. The purse, a personal object that belongs to an individual, is produced as both a status symbol and as a functional object which holds one’s possessions. On the other hand, a

photograph captures its subjects, it freezes them in time, forever immortalizing their image while also forbidding the viewer from understanding the subject beyond that particular moment. When the captured images of Burmese women are printed on these purses, a paradigm is born. Now, we can literally own the Burmese and sport their image for the world to see. This paradigm also includes the control of Burmese economy. By profiting from this type of merchandise, the heritage of Myanmar is not revitalized. Rather, the West remains superior and in control of the country’s economic future.

Drawing from Barthesian theory, John Tagg’s seminal book The Burden of Representation explores the role of the camera within its own European milieu. Tagg sees the camera as an instrument that can serve beyond producing evidence but one that is incapable of producing an “existential essence”. An image is thus empty, created as a testament of its time, rather than of the subject matter which it depicts. In this context, the photograph is treated as a material thing which denotes a history. For Both Tagg and Barthes, a photograph can never bring back its referent and thus cannot be treated as confirmation that the subject matter as we see it truly existed. This contention is born out of the understanding that an image is contrived by its maker under a production influenced by various photographic conventions and institutions as described in the previous sections. While nineteenth century Europe also treated photography as a tool for evidence and record, Tagg problematizes this treatment and exposes the myth behind such acceptance of an image as a tool for evidence. As he explains, “the portrait is therefore a sign whose purpose is both the description of an individual and the inscription of social

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identity.”

14 Through this definition, we must wonder what happens when these iconographic traditions are applied to a culture which existed outside of the European photographic milieu. Can the social identity of the Burmese, as depicted in the original portraits and the new Yangoods images, be accepted as authentic and representative of their heritage if they ultimately became an object to be possessed?

These theories help elucidate the biased foreign attitudes that existed towards Burmese heritage and culture – especially those attitudes coming from colonial powers, which often demonstrate a non-favorable view rooted in Western determinism. Yangoods can also be understood through this lens, especially when analyzing the company’s history.

Yangoods in the News and Social Media

According to Le Petit Journal, a website that publishes news about French expatriates, Delphine de Lorme is a painter who left Paris ten years ago. She traded the Parisian lifestyle for the Philippines, where she resided for quite some time. Upon traveling to Myanmar and falling in love with the city, she decided to settle in Yangon in 2013.15 A recent article by Merritt Gurley in the online magazine Travel & Leisure: Southeast Asia further adds to de Lorme’s background. Before arriving to Myanmar, the artist produced TV shows in France and a line of handcrafted furniture in Cebu, Philippines. Gurley places the company among other trendy businesses who

14 Tagg, The Burden of Representation, 37.
are helping create a “hipster scene” in Yangon. Further, Gurley’s interview with de Lorme reveals that the idea behind the business came to life in 2014, when de Lorme and her friends Clara Baik and Jean Curci encountered old post-colonial postcards at a party. The three founded Yangoods, with de Lorme as the creative lead and later on adding Htin Htin, a local fashionista and editor of the Yangon style magazine Moda. To Gurley, “the collection is super cool and holds up a mirror to the trendy subculture emerging in Rangoon.” This reputation of coolness and style has allowed to company to be widely associated with the youth fashion scene in Yangon, as it appeals for its relatively novel product line when compared to other local fashion brands.

Since its inception, the company has grown rapidly. Today, they hold multiple shops in the major cities in Myanmar, including multiple branches in Yangon, Mandalay, Inle Lake, Bagan, Naypyidaw, Shan State, Rakhine State, and others. The two biggest shops are in Yangon, in the upscale French restaurant Le Planteur and the historic Bogyoke Market. Within Burma, orders can already be placed online at shop.com.mm, and they have plans for international online sales directly from the Yangoods website. Additionally, the line has expanded to the major Myanmar airports, cruises, and airlines, catering to travellers who wish to shop while in transit. In just three years, the company has grown considerably, increasing the popularization and dissemination of their images across the world. Their internet presence has also continued to

16 Hipsters belong to a contemporary subculture and are associated with a revival of older material culture. Things such as the use of vinyl records, corded telephones, and “vintage” clothing. They often associate with “indie” (independent) music, and things that are considered unpopular. Ironically, being a “hipster” has become popular, thus creating a paradox on the initial definition for this subculture.

grow, with nearly 70,000 “likes” on Facebook at the time of this writing, and over 8,000 “followers” on Instagram. Additional marketing by the company includes various commercials, fashion shows and special events, as well as their brand appearing on well-known Burmese reality TV such as the competition show “Forever Stars”, where Yangoods products among other prizes are given to participants.

The company’s website states that “Yangoods is a lifestyle brand that specializes in the blending of historical art with twenty-first century sensibilities to revitalize Myanmar’s heritage.” This business mission is problematic because it insists on the idea that Myanmar’s heritage needs revitalization, that the country has not adapted the (Western) modernisms of the current century, and assumes that at one point heritage disappeared or died down, therefore needing a revival. These types of ideologies stall the country’s attempt to rewrite their own autonomous history by infusing same Western ideologies that prevailed in colonial times.

The ideologies behind the business also become apparent through social media. For example, a posting made by de Lorme, featuring a photograph of her as she presents one of Yangoods products, includes the following caption:

Already more than 3 years that I’ve arrived to Myanmar. My new traditional Chin blouse match perfectly with my pop city pouch! Love to use traditional and make it fashionable.

This statement reflects a similar ideology to what is found on the company’s website. It assumes that traditional designs do not belong in the category of fashion, and that the country’s use of

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traditional textiles and garb has become outmoded. While the country has indeed adapted new forms of fashion in recent years, such as the American blue jeans, traditional Burmese textiles continue to belong in the realm of fashion as evidenced by the country’s numerous fashion editorials and storefronts that are devoted to this aspect of Burmese identity.20

As previously mentioned, Yangoods has made a notable presence in the social media platform Instagram, where they regularly update the English-speaking public on their current affairs, upcoming seasonal merchandise. Almost daily, the company publishes on Instagram, and regularly includes images of carefully curated set ups of arrays of items in interesting configurations, otherwise known as “flat lays” to the Instagram community, to showcase their products. These montages, akin to the setup of an European still life, include the featured product as a focal point while also featuring non-Yangoods products. This mode of representation has become commonplace among the Instagram community as it allows amateurs and professionals alike to publicize moments in their lives or provide curated glimpses into their own belongings. Yangoods has employed this strategy to elevate their brand to the same level as well-known high-end beauty and fashion companies such as Guerlain, Dior, and Urban Decay, while remaining relevant to social media users.

An example of a flatlay published on Instagram features a Yangoods cushion among other high-end beauty products.21 Pictured in the lower right-hand corner is a container of the Guerlain cosmetic known as “meteorites”. This cosmetic is a blush-like illuminating powder in

20 Thanks to Dr. Jane Ferguson for pointing out that blue jeans were initially popular in Yangon among stereo sound artists and musicians in the 1980s.

the shape of pearls, and retails online for $62 US dollars. Pictured to the right of the product is Guerlain’s *Shalimar* perfume, which retails online for $80 US dollars. Products such as this can be found in high end specialty shops inside malls in Yangoods and are usually priced higher than online due to importing fees. Given de Lorme’s French background, it comes as no surprise that she has chosen the brand to create this montage. Guerlain is a high-end French beauty company that was founded in Paris in 1828. The company sells skincare, cosmetics, and fragrance products for both men and women. Their products are usually distributed to restricted shops. The company was founded by Pierre Francois Pascal Guerlain. Their products are made in Orphin and Chartres in France.22 Interestingly, Guerlain’s own website description of the Shalimar proclaims it as “the first oriental fragrance in history”. Since the colonial period until today, French perfumeries such as Guerlain, Yves Saint Laurent, and Hermes, developed lines that evoked a sense of exoticism with names such as “Opium” and “*Un Jardin Sur Le Nil*” (A Garden on the Nile). The choice of including such a product may be intentional on the part of Yangoods – further exoticizing their brand. A closer look at the company’s line of products shows the same ideologies so far revealed through the company’s marketing as they transform from a small business to a full enterprise.

**The Case of “The Princess” and “The Enchantress”**

Among Yangoods’ first line of fashion accessories, released in summer 2015, is a series of postcards, totes, clutches, and purses that feature images of colonial Burmese women. The

company designers have taken the original nineteenth century studio portraits taken by photographers such as Felice Beato and Adolphe Klier, and re-colorized them, added or removed elements from the originals, removed the original captions, and printed them on a variety of foreign-made mass-produced objects including handbags, pillows, wall hangings, and even candles. Thus, the company has successfully and completely decontextualized the primary images through the process of commercialization.

I have been able to trace the photograph printed on Yangoods’ “princess” handbag to Beato, who took a series of photographs of the “princess” and other Burmese women in a fashion-type photoshoot sometime soon after his arrival, and likely before he set his full studio, as these images appear to be in a make-shift impromptu setting. The photograph used for the Yangoods bag is one of three extant from the series, which included other models of similar status gathering together in a convivial manner (Figure 41). Beato’s original black and white photograph captures a female model of likely Burmese descent among a wealth of objects that signal her high status within Burmese society (Figure 42). She casually reclines on her side on a traditional floor cushion, confronting the viewer with a strong direct gaze – perhaps welcoming our presence. Her legs are semi-extended and tucked in, pointing away from the camera in a customary position which would allow her to converse, relax, or eat a meal. She wears a Burmese long skirt and loosely fitted shirt, both made with intricately weaved floral and geometric fabrics. Her hair is styled with a high bun and adorned with a flower diadem. She wears multiple rings, bracelets, and necklaces – all signaling to the viewer that she is a woman of status. To her left, we see that Beato has chosen to include a number of colonial silver bowls and
some Burmese lacquered containers. The bowls hold two cheroot cigars, while another half-smoked cheroot is carefully laid on the edge of the models’ cushion. The setting’s surroundings are equally adorned with a hanging patterned curtain, a potted flowering tree, and differently patterned rugs.

The 2015 Yangoods version of the image has been changed in multiple ways that remove the image from its original context and add a new layer of manipulation achieved through digital means (Figure 43 and Figure 45). Rather than being presented in an interior setting, the Yangoods designers have carefully cut away the princess and transported her to an imagined Burmese natural landscape (Figure 44). This landscape is only slightly colored, creating a stark contrast between the princess and her surroundings. In the far distance, we see two small pagodas and possibly a Buddhist monastery or a palace. Flanked by a tropical palm and a tree, the scene features various valleys and bushes that recede into the distance, while the princess lays on her cushion placed on the bare ground, perhaps now enjoying a day picnic in the outdoors. In the midground, to the left of the princess, we can see a roaming elephant, defined by his rough silhouette. The composition recalls the works of the Parisian modernist painter Edouard Manet and his infamous nineteenth-century paintings that depicted nude women relaxing outdoors such as his 1863 “Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe” (English: “Luncheon on the Grass”).

In the larger version of this bag, a different background is presented. It features a similar background but adds the sculpture of a mythical lion-like creature called a chinthe, and other

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23 This type of silver bowls and lacquered containers were commonly made during the colonial period and can be found in Burmese art collections today. See the Burma Art Collection at NIU for examples. Thanks to Dr. Raymond for pointing out that these objects were historically associated with the rank of the family and that silverware was usually offered by the royalty.
wandering people. The designers have created this imagined landscape by juxtaposing Burmese motifs and iconography that are visually contradicting. In scale, the elephants appear too small to the people around. Additionally, the *chinthe* stands alone as if wandering around – an unusual depiction since *chinthe* are usually sculpted and displayed in pairs and stand as guardians at the entrances of religious sites. On both bags, the foregrounds where the princess sits have also been altered. The silver bowls have been removed and replaced with a container and possibly a lamp that appears Chinese. A traditional Burmese nesting food container has been added as well, but it is laid bare on the ground without its accompanying holder. The back side of the purse features an identical landscape without the princess, who has now been replaced with the caption “beautiful maiden from Bagan” in Burmese (*Figure 45*). Interestingly, the new caption adds the location of Bagan, likely referring to the landscape depicted. However, the original image was most likely taken in Mandalay, where Beato primarily worked.

A new series of products released in 2017 as the third season of the company continues this tradition of image manipulation and under the same ideology. Their “enchantress” bags present a setting composed of parts from multiple photographic works to depict an image that creates the narrative of a Burmese woman dancing for a Burmese man. The original image used for the female dancer is a studio photograph that has been dated to 1900, although it has not been linked to a particular photographer. The original photograph is captioned in white letters and all capitals, similar to Klier’s style, although not matching in font and form of numeration (*Figure 46*). The caption gives the photograph the number S6, and actually gives the name of the dancer as Sein Kyaw. Additionally, the caption states in parenthesis “Burmese Dancing Girl”. The setting of the portrait is an interior studio decorated with props including potted plants, a table,
and various drapes and clothes. Sein Kyaw is captured in a dancing position as she eloquently presents a white handkerchief in active pose. She is lavishly dressed and decorated with myriad hanging pearls.

The Yangoods version, printed in their selection of handbags, has been named “enchantress”, and has cut away the background to transplant the model into a new interior space (Figure 47). Interestingly, the slight smile in the original photograph has been exaggerated in the Yangoods version, a practice that is new to this series. Within the new composition, Sein Kyaw has been paced to the left, and a sitting Burmese man has been paced behind her and to the right side, making a direct line from his gaze to the body of the model. The male model sits with one leg crossed over casually and his arms resting on the arm rest and his boot. Beneath him, a small white cat sits, as if partaking in the viewing of the dancing show. To add a sense of narrative, the setting takes place inside a spacious room with grand doors that flank an enormous portrait of a family. This portrait is also from another photograph that has been manipulated to appear as a painting installed in the wall of this ballroom. Additionally, an old gramophone sits atop a black piano to the far right of the scene, presumably producing music for the dancer. The back side of the bag is decorated with a plain background and two Burmese-style decorative frames.

The composition of this image represents a new direction in the line of Yangoods colonial image manipulation because rather than simply mixing elements of “Burmese-ness” to create an interesting composition, the new style actually presents a narrative that sends a direct message and may be interpreted as the whole composition being part of an originally conceived photograph during the colonial period. That is, unless viewers are aware that the composition is a
composite of three different colonial sources, there is a risk involved in how the new image will be absorbed into the visual record of the perceived past.

The company’s website describes the “enchantress line” as follows:

A young noble man falling under the enchanting beauty of the dancing maiden. From the time of dynasties to the colonial period, dancing maidens are respected and desired for their stunning grace. Keeping such allure, the Enchantress design creates a sense of elegance.  

Through this description, consumers are presented with a story that validates the visual narrative while granting certain associations to those who purchase and wear this item. With this presentation, the owner of an “enchantress” bag is guaranteed status of elegance and allure.

An alternative interpretation of this image, which deviates from the ideology presented by Yangoods, might consider the original sources and the context in which they were created to question the idea of the model’s agency and imposed objectification. By removing the given identity of the model found in the original image and by qualifying her intentions as serving the purpose to enchant the male viewer, the Yangoods image further disfranchises and dehumanizes the model – Sein Kyaw. Further, it is important to question if the new Yangoods image of the dancing girl is authorizing the foreign gaze (and ownership, through purchase) because it has already been legitimized by the dominant Burmese male gaze. That is, the literal depiction of a Burmese man looking at a Burmese girl, permits us as foreigners to equally objectify and possess the dancer and her image.

These considerations are pertinent because the company seems to be introducing new lines that feature highly-stylized and digitally-colorized contemporary photographs of ethnic...
minorities. The production of new photographs of ethnic groups by de Lorme and her team as they travel to various villages and capture their own images raises the questions of image copyright, model and photographer rights, monetary compensation through royalties, and ultimately the important aspect of human agency and repatriation of a person’s image. While this is not the scope of this case study, it is an essential element to consider for companies such as Yangoods, who profit from the image of living human beings (Figure 48).

While Yangoods has created new versions of many of these old photographs, which they describe as a practice that “revitalizes Myanmar’s heritage” and draws inspiration from its rich artistic tradition, I question how the company has come to portray a Western ideology under the disguise of local heritage.

Through this study, I have sought to (re)politicize and (re)historicize the myth of Burma’s “lost” artistic heritage through the unveiling of the deeply coded messages that colonial images from the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, and contemporary reappropriations such as those created by Yangoods, are perpetuating for the West. In the same way that colonial postcards transited through the West to present a neatly packaged version of another British colony, the mass produced Yangoods products have become a contemporary symbol for a new form of possession. While I do not condemn the practices of immigration, localization, and cultural assimilation – all widespread forms of the human experience and all which are prevalent in Myanmar’s cosmopolitan cities, I problematize how emerging companies present their public identity in misleading terms. This study thus seeks to contribute to our understanding of these broader historical, economic, and cultural processes, that the potential for exploitation is present
when foreign businesses and entrepreneurs immigrate to Yangon and localize their businesses by culturally assimilating their novel product lines for the local market.

Today, Yangon’s youth have adopted fashion styles from all over the world. The rapidly changing access to the internet has accelerated this process, providing new generations with ample inspiration for their creative outlets. This form of globalization is not the myth I have explored in this study. Rather, I have problematized the seemingly innocent use of politically charged historical images as a form of benign expression among contemporary businesses. It is these images that can dangerously morph the way in which new generations perceive the past – leading to the potential erasure of the collective memory of the colonial period and thus, giving interested powers a new opportunity for repeating the process of colonialization.

Through this study, I have demonstrated that while scholarship relating to photography of Burma is limited in its scope and often takes a purely historical approach, art historical analysis can greatly contribute to our understanding of these sources. By deconstructing the multivariance and subjectivity of these images, we can thus reveal the ambiguous meanings that these images carried at the time of their creation and for contemporary audiences. In chapter two, I have considered the work of Beato as a businessman-artist who largely profited from the recent annexation and removal of status in the royal city of Mandalay by commodifying the image of the local population through the process of mass-production of albums and postcards for tourist consumption. In chapter three I have looked at the connections between the German photographer Klier and the Indian capitalist D.A. Ahuja to demonstrate that a vivid photographic scene existed in the new city of Rangoon. Their motivations differ greatly, and this study can benefit from further considerations in relation to these differences, as well as expanding on the
history of the Indian capitalist networks and forms of trade that were accelerated after the British annexation, which put India in political and therefore economic power over Burma. Moreover, this study presents the first extensive attempt to present the stories of these three photographers together to demonstrate, through visual analysis and interpretation, that Burma’s history of colonial photography is complex, nuanced, and needs to be considered critically. Therefore, it is the responsibility of academic discourse and scholarship to reveal the dangerous potential of these sources to be used once again by the hegemonic powers to coerce specific attitudes about Burma. As Laura Mulvey’s states: “It is said that analyzing pleasure, or beauty, destroys it.”

This study has thus attempted to show the potential that visual analysis has on revealing and therefore destroying the colonial attitudes that permeated the extensive corpus of colonial photography of Burma.

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Figure 1 D.A. Ahuja, “Civilization”, date unknown, with permission from the collection of Sharman Minus.
Figure 2 Philipp A. Klier, “A Shan” (Man with bow and arrow), 1907. From the collections of The National Archives, UK.

Example of an “active” pose.
Figure 3 Felice Beato, "Beato's Susannah", date unknown, Photograph mounted on cardboard. With permission from Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz (The Ethnological Museum of Berlin).
Figure 4 Felice Beato, "Susannah, wife of the artist.", 1889, from Album of photographs of Burma, India and Egypt. The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Photography Collection, The New York Public Library. Public Domain.
Figure 5 Felice Beato, "Interior of the Secundra Bagh, Lucknow after the Slaughter of 2,000 Rebels by the 93rd Highlanders and 4th Punjab Regiment. First Attack of Sir Colin Campbell in November 1857, Lucknow., 1858. Albumen silver print. Wikimedia Commons. Open Access."
Figure 6 Felice Beato, Interior of the Angle of Taku North Fort Immediately After Its Capture by Storm. August 21, 1860, Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain.

Figure 7 "Arrivals," Rangoon Weekly Budget, July 5, 1887, microform. Northern Illinois University.
Figure 8 Felice Beato, "Kachin lady, Shan girl, Burmese girls", 1889, from Album of photographs of Burma, India and Egypt. The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Photography Collection, The New York Public Library. Public Domain.
J. WHITFIELD HIRST,

(Late Manager of Bank's Lt, Rangoon.)

Commission & Financial Agent,

36 Sule Pagoda Road

At the Arts Handcrafts Competition open to the whole of Burma, held at the Jubilee Hall, Rangoon, this week, on 3rd and 4th November, 1902. My Exhibits of Wood Carving and Silverware obtained, First money Prize, First certificate and extra Prize, respectively, for Excellence of design and Workmanship.

In soliciting a further extended patronage, I assure those, who place orders with me for specimen Burmese Work, that the same care and diligence will be given to their orders, as were expended upon my Prize Exhibits.

Burmese Wood Carvings, Silverware, Curios, Photographs, Views of Burma, Etc,

Everything electrical for Lighting and Tramway installations.

The OHIO Electric Lamps, Lanterns, Fans, Telephones, Telegraphs etc

The perfect and permanent "Addison" Electric Belts, sent V. P. P, for Rs. 10

P. & B. Ruberoid Roofing is fire-resisting, Durable, not affected by Sun, Rain, Acids, Alkalies or Fumes; Vermin will not touch it! It is the lightest, can be taken from old roofs, and used again on others.

DEALER IN PRECIOUS STONES.

Figure 9 Times of Burma (Rangoon), November 15, 1902, microform. Northern Illinois University.
Figure 10 Felice Beato, "Kachin Women", c1889, Albumen Silver print. Partial gift from the Wilson Centre for Photography. Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program.
Figure 11 Felice Beato, Photograph of Éve Lavallière, nineteenth century. Sepia photograph on paper. Guy Little Collection. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
Figure 12 Felice Beato, “Shan Beauty”, c.1889, Albumen Silver print. Partial gift from the Wilson Centre for Photography. Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program.
Figure 13 Felice Beato, “Shan Beauty”, c.1889. Open Access.
Figure 14 Felice Beato, “Young Shan Girl”, date unknown, Photograph mounted on cardboard. With permission from Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz (The Ethnological Museum of Berlin).
Figure 15 Felice Beato, Photograph of a Palaung woman, c1890, Photographic print. By permission of the British Library. Shelfmark: Photo 15/6(39).
Figure 16 Felice Beato, “A Windy Day in Mandalay”, c1900, Photograph mounted on cardboard. With permission from Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz (The Ethnological Museum of Berlin).
Figure 17 Felice Beato, Untitled, 1890, Photographic print. By permission of the British Library.
Shelfmark: Photo 15/6(38)
Figure 18 Felice Beato, Untitled, 1895, Photographic print. By permission of the British Library. Shelfmark: Photo 15/6(40).
Figure 19 Felice Beato, “Little Princess”, date unknown, Photograph mounted on cardboard. With permission from Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz (The Ethnological Museum of Berlin).
Figure 20 Felice Beato, “Young Girl”, date unknown, Photograph mounted on cardboard. With permission from Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz (The Ethnological Museum of Berlin).
Figure 21 Felice Beato, “Burmese Gentlemen and Servants”, 1894 - 1897, Albumen silver print. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Partial gift from the Wilson Centre for Photography. Digital image courtesy of the Getty’s Open Content Program.
Figure 22 Philipp A. Klier, Photograph of Archie, Frank, and Maggie, 10th January 1882, albumen print on cardboard. Flickr Commons. Public Domain.
Figure 23 Philipp A. Klier, Photograph of Frank C. Dickson at 2 years old, September 1882, albumen print on cardboard. Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain.
Figure 24 Philipp A. Klier, “Ethel Isabel Grant (née McNeil), c. 1894, albumen cabinet card. © National Portrait Gallery, London. NPG x26170
Figure 25 Philipp A. Klier, photograph of a Burmese dancing girl, 1895, Photographic print. By permission of the British Library. Shelfmark: Photo 88/1(45).
Figure 26 Philipp A. Klier, “Burmese Dancing Girl”, date unknown. With permission from Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz (The Ethnological Museum of Berlin).
Figure 27 Philipp A. Klier, photograph of a young Burmese girl, 1895, Photographic print. By permission of the British Library. Shelfmark: Photo 94/2(19).
Figure 28 Philipp A. Klier, “A Burmese Girl”, date unknown, with permission from the collection of Sharman Minus
Figure 29 Philipp A. Klier, “A Burmese Girl”, date unknown, with permission from the collection of Sharman Minus
Figure 30 Philipp A. Klier, “A Burmese Village Girl”, 1907. from the collections of The National Archives, UK.
Figure 31 Philipp A. Klier, “A Burmese Beauty” date unknown. With permission from Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz (The Ethnological Museum of Berlin).
Figure 32 Philipp A. Klier, “Burmese Man and Girl Holding Hands”, 1906, from the collections of The National Archives, UK.
Figure 33 Philipp A. Klier, “Burmese Man and Girl” No 2, date unknown, postcard. Author’s Collection.
Figure 34 D.A. Ahuja, “Burmese Man and Girl” No 19, date unknown, postcard front (above) and back (below). Author’s Collection.
Figure 35 D.A. Ahuja “Self Admiration”, date unknown, with permission from the collection of Sharman Minus.
Figure 36 D.A. Ahuja “A Burmese Beauty”, date unknown, with permission from the collection of Sharman Minus.
Figure 37 D.A. Ahuja “Fashionable Burmese Lady”, date unknown, with permission from the collection of Sharman Minus.
Figure 38 D.A. Ahuja “Enjoying a Smoke”, date unknown, with permission from the collection of Sharman Minus.
Figure 39 Unknown artist, unknown date, reproduction of an original postcard sent in early 1900s. From the author’s collection.
Figure 40 Artist unknown, Postcard printed by Bamakhit Press, Mandalay, sent on February 6, 1967.

Translation:
The 20th, Union Day, Magway Regional College
Figure 41 Felice Beato, title unknown, date unknown. Wikimedia Commons. Public Access.
Figure 42 Felice Beato, title unknown, date unknown. Wikimedia Commons. Public Access.
Figure 43 Yangoods, Merchandise sold by Yangoods including the “Princess” handbag, various postcards, and a notebook. 2015. From the author’s collection.
Figure 44 Yangoods, “Princess” handbag. Front side. 2015, printed image on canvas and leather purse. From the author’s collection.

Figure 45 Yangoods, “Princess” handbag. Back side. 2015, printed image on canvas and leather purse. From the author’s collection.
Figure 46 Artist unknown, “Burmese Dancing Girl”, c.1900. Printed postcard reproduction. From the author’s collection.
Figure 47 Yangoods, “Enchantress” collection hand clutch, 2017, printed image on canvas and leather purse. From the author’s collection.
Figure 48 Yangoods, Hand clutch from their “Pop” series, 2017, printed image on canvas and leather purse. From the author’s collection.

Translation: Myanmar


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