



Figure 6.1. Feeding the guests during a *shinbyu*, Gawgyi, 2017. © Stéphen Huard.

6

THE WORTH OF THE BIG MEN

If a man has led a good life, not quarreled with neighbours ... he may be one of the informal group of *lugyi lugaun* [who] chiefly give advice, moralize, and express the agreed-on folk wisdom ... The *lugyi* do not set style; they do not necessarily move anyone to emulation, and they have no power, only the recognized right to use moral suasion ... One of the reasons these men are elderly people is that they do not overstep the vague but delicate line that separates individual responsibilities.

—Manning Nash, *The Golden Road to Modernity*

Guarding Village Affairs

In contrast to Nash's analysis, which saw in the *lugyi* 'elders' without influence, I argue that they do have an authority, that of asserting a common good by taking care of village affairs.¹ This means that the *lugyi* I met during my fieldwork were not of the same kind as those Nash encountered. They have changed the meaning attached to this status and morality has become central in politics. Some sixty years had passed and the question is how such men came to the forefront in Gawgyi's political landscape. In Chapter 3, on the rise of village affairs, we saw that the transition from U Win the Infamous to U Htay the Worthy crystallized a rupture in local politics. State violence and its partial disconnection from farmers in Gawgyi were echoed by the recalibration of village leaders' engagement from official positions to village affairs on the model of previous men of power (the last men of *hpon*). The management of local affairs was monopolized by the villagers, drawing from a more traditional form of collective sociality called *luhmuyay*. During my fieldwork, I frequently saw these men circulating in the village and they were always present during ceremonies. Ko Kyaw was often

Endnotes for this chapter begin on page 200.

among them, but he was the headman, not yet a *lugyi*, and his navigation was of a different kind. Progressively, I realized that by making village affairs a space of engagement where the worth of the people is evaluated, the *lugyi* were producing a political order as guardians of Gawgyi affairs.

The question of the worth of the *lugyi* is thus about the nature of social relations in Gawgyi and the history of contemporary central Myanmar: what place for village space and morality in the making of power and authority? This chapter takes up this question by analysing the making of the worth of the *lugyi* from the perspective of pragmatic sociology. Power and authority have previously been analysed in this region of Burma/Myanmar in at least two ways. First, some of the studies focusing on Burmese Buddhism have shown how meritorious activity produces a social order. For instance, the ‘field of merit’ theory (Schober 1989) defends the idea that obtaining merit through donation increases power (Lehman 1984). In a more secularist register, we saw how power relations have been analysed in terms of patronage – understood as the dominant model of politics in central Burma/Myanmar – where the individual charisma, the *hpon*, is key to the political alliance (Nash 1965). The point is not to oppose these analyses, but to conceive them as different idioms used to describe certain configurations of power which are reproduced and challenged by how people engage with each other. A person can thus be great by his donations or by his charisma. My hypothesis is that the worth of the *lugyi* comes from another form, namely an engagement in village affairs where the notion of the common good is at stake.

The term *lugyi* is polysemic. It can be used to talk about media personalities, elderly people in general and Generals in particular. The term *lugyi* is also, and chiefly, used to talk about influential and respected people in a locality. The quality of *lugyi* can therefore refer to different scales of worth to qualify a person, such as fame, rank, charisma, or the embodiment of a common good. To say that someone is a *lugyi* can be connoted positively or negatively depending on the context, the persons targeted and the interlocutors. For example, when Ko Kyaw organized the 2016 selection, it was called ‘choosing the *lugyi*’ by the people collecting the votes. But if one asks who the *lugyi* are in Gawgyi, the list is short and the silence often heavy. Being a *lugyi* in a locality is linked to what is at stake in a ‘social space’ (Condominas 1980), whether in everyday life or during special events. It is a quality difficult to ascribe to a person, because it implies a moral evaluation and refers to the state of relations in a social and political space. More specifically, the *lugyi* we analyse are also called *lugyi lugaung* or person (*lu*) great (*gyi*) and good (*kaun*). The evaluation of the morality of individuals and the ethics attached to collective life are ubiquitous in the attribution of this qualifier. Therefore, by analysing what is at stake between the villagers we can understand how the presence of people ‘bigger’ than others is justified. To analyse this bigness amounts to qualifying it in particular, in a social space

where other scales of worth exist to qualify people, such as prestige, charisma or meritorious achievements, for example.

For Gawgyi's case, I choose to present three *lugyi* whom people describe as worthy because they each operate, in their own way, a 'process of generalizing' (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006) to promote a common good by taking care of village affairs. The other name of the *lugyi* is *ywayay okhteinhmu*, the 'guardians of village affairs', and generalizing is a process of 'taking charge of' a collective. Boltanski (2011) emphasizes that the 'process of generalizing' is a process of disseminating a particular justification (what I aim for here in terms of engagement in village affairs) in specific situations among which disputes occupy a central position. Taking care of village affairs is how the *lugyi* assert and scale a political order in specific situations during which the prevalence of other forms of engagements is overtaken by the idea of the common good. These engagements consist mostly of familial, intergenerational, neighbouring and clientelist relations actualized in a variety of transfers, and the situations we will explore are two ceremonies and a dispute. Before describing them, it should be mentioned that taking care of village affairs is a matter of social and moral evaluation, of adjusting traditional conceptions to new stakes and of scaling a political space.

First, the question of the worth of the *lugyi* refers to a double process of evaluation. On the one hand, the *lugyi* are evaluated: this status is never completely achieved. On the other hand, villagers are gauged. Because taking care of village affairs is a process of creating a scale of engagement and a collective, it results in the worth of people being measured according to their engagement in this domain. The engagement of some persons towards a collective contributes to making village affairs the form of local politics, as a space where the worth of the people is evaluated depending on their engagement towards a common good. In return, this engagement produces the worth of these men whose position reflects the way previous examples of propriety blend into current politics.

Second, the scope of village affairs combines a traditional form of collective sociality with new stakes following the recent transformation of Gawgyi's political landscape. At a sociological level, *luhmuyay*, or 'social affairs', is about taking responsibility for the welfare of a collective beyond individual and familial obligations. Minimally, it refers to the mutual aid deployed for the 'joys' (*tha-yay*) such as marriages, and for the 'griefs' (*na-yay*) such as funerals. The *luhmuyay* is a concept encompassing potentially all kinds of collective undertakings from the making of ceremonies to the resolution of disputes. Its scope changes following what is deemed important at a given time. Today, village affairs include, among other things, the organization of ceremonies (individual, family and related to the monastery), the management of the water and electricity supply systems, the rebuilding of roads, the treatment of sick persons

and dead bodies, dealing with NGOs and the issue of enlarging the village. In that sense, saying that village affairs have become the form of politics in Gawgyi refers to how the engagement in collective undertakings on the model of *luhmuyay* has been part of a moral rupture with a violent and corrupt state embodied by an Infamous headman and following an ideology of self-reliance (often called *kotukotha*, which can be transcribed as ‘rising by and defining oneself’).

Third, the rise of village affairs also reflects how the political landscape has been imagined and scaled. After following Ko Kyaw during a day in his life in Chapter 4, we saw that any understanding of the landscape in terms of administrative jurisdiction is not really workable. For instance, when he went to Tozigon for a premarital ceremony, it was a matter of *luhmuyay* as he was more a privileged witness to the engagement than a headman due to the social proximity of these two villages. In other words, Tozigon has been included within Gawgyi affairs. For instance, they help each other with ceremonies, Tozigon people rely on Gawgyi’s collective properties and monastery for such events and they call each other *yathswe-yatmyo*, meaning ‘people akin by (sharing a) dwelling’. This expression reflects a sense of mutuality and affiliation through extended kinship bonds. It is made of a combination of the word relative, or kin (*hswemyo*), with a reference to the common dwelling area (*yat*). Such an assemblage is also present in the title of village elders, *yatmiyathpa*, or ‘parents’ (*mihpa*) of the dwelling area.² It means that the traditional form of sociality produces a landscape expressed in terms of common living space and kinship. In theory the *luhmuyay* concerns everyone and covers a wide set of relations from hospitality to strangers to the funerals of neighbours. It bonds villages together or excludes them, the *yat* being to some extent the spatial scale of *luhmuyay*. This process of scaling depends on the history of the political landscape: while Tozigon has bonded with Gawgyi through their history and claim to indigeneity, Gawgyi and Myinmilaung Proper have never really developed such a relationship. On the contrary, people from Myinmilaung Proper are clearly excluded from Gawgyi affairs, which means they have to rely on themselves to organize collective life. This divide goes hand in hand with the recurrent animosity between these two settlements. The history of this socio-political landscape has shaped how local politics unfold today.

Engaging the Collective

To show that the worth of the *lugyi* stems from the fact that they take charge of village affairs, it is necessary to show how they make the village a collective. To do so, I choose to present the *lugyi* of Gawgyi through three particular situations which form the following three subsections of this chapter. It should be

borne in mind that even if they embody propriety, the *lugyi* also represent how the main farming families had monopolized village leadership. In Gawgyi, there are three men³ whom almost everyone agrees are *lugyi*: U Lin, U Maung and U Htay. Each of them has a particular role contrasting with Ko Kyaw's practice of headship.

U Lin assumes the role of 'head of bachelors' (*lubyogaung*) for all village ceremonies: he, himself a bachelor, organizes village mutual aid based on statutory groups (unmarried men and women) to carry out ceremonies such as weddings or Buddhist novitiates (*shinbyu*). The role of U Lin is analysed through the description of a *shinbyu*, the Buddhist novitiate for boys and the meritorious donation *par excellence*. Describing the making of a *shinbyu* allows us, first of all, to show the village collective at work. It also enables us to question to what extent meritorious donations contribute to the greatness of people as the multiple forms of engagement (sharing of merit, offering food, mutual help and so on) entangle and are evaluated during the ceremony. Finally, it shows the crucial role of U Lin as the organizer of the village workforce and as the living memory of donations and transactions.

U Maung is frequently 'master of ceremonies' (*beiktheikhsaya*) during premarital ceremonies in which he embodies village morality through his speeches and the conduct of rituals. His role is explored through a premarital ceremony where the families of the future spouses meet publicly. The village system of reproduction and social ordering consists in the mediation of the engagement of these families, making the 'marriage' an agreement that goes beyond the couple and intra- or inter-family relationships. U Maung, as master of ceremonies, ensures that the village morality he embodies is heard. Describing such an encounter therefore makes it possible to show how the union of families calls for a 'process of generalizing' in order to go beyond individual and family interests so that marriage is collectively sanctioned.

Finally, U Htay is the *yatmiyathpa* and in this capacity he can speak for the village. The third subsection explores how U Htay settles a conflict linked to the arrival of electricity in the village. The trajectory of this *lugyi* within Gawgyi history, his achievements and abilities allow us to better delimit the sphere of village affairs. The ways in which U Htay positions himself through familial, neighbourhood and patronage relationships and his distancing from the government reflect how he embodies and promotes a common good. In this chapter, each of these people represents a form of the common good in Gawgyi: the organization of mutual aid (U Lin), the embodiment of morality (U Maung) and the defence of village affairs (U Htay). The worth of these *lugyi* is explored through specific situations understood as trials because they put collective issues to the test of family, neighbourhood and patronage relationships while paying close attention to how transactions are performed and evaluated.

U Lin and a Shinbyu

This section first describes *the shinbyu* and then explores the making of a *shinbyu* in particular. The *shinbyu* is a Buddhist initiation ceremony and it represents the meritorious donation *par excellence* in this region. The making of a *shinbyu* shows the village collective at work and raises questions concerning how meritorious donations contribute to the worth of people. A *shinbyu* is a ceremony in which several forms of engagement (sharing of merit, offering food, mutual aid and so forth) are entangled and are constantly evaluated, and its description illustrates the crucial role of U Lin as an organizer and as a living memory of donations and transactions.

During a *shinbyu*, a young boy becomes an adult qualified for marriage by temporarily entering the monastic community (Sangha). The name of the ceremony is usually translated as ‘making the king/prince’ (Brac de La Perrière 2009b: 121), referring to how boys are made into kings in the first part of the ritual to become novices in the second. Spiro, a landmark anthropologist on the study of religion in Myanmar, describes the novitiate as the country’s most important meritorious donation ceremony.

The religious significance of the shin-byu [*sic*] is both symbolic and instrumental. Symbolically, it denotes the passage of the boy from the status of biosocial being to that of a spiritual person. No Burmese male is truly human ... unless he has worn the yellow robe ... Instrumentally, the initiation is the means *par excellence* for acquiring merit, not so much for the boy ... as for the sponsors of the ceremony, typically his parents ... The merit gained through sponsoring an initiation is so great that wealthy Burmans will frequently sponsor more than one (Spiro 1970: 234–36)

According to this account, a *shinbyu* is an achievement. Giving a *shinbyu* is crucial for parents and sons. When becoming a novice, the child compensates an obligation of gratitude towards his parents, his masters and Buddha, also called *kyayzushin* or benefactors. Brac de La Perrière has suggested that the experience of the novitiate is a trial that young boys overcome thanks to a spiritual quality:

The spiritual quality with which male children must be endowed in sufficient quantity to endure the trial of monastic life is called ‘*pon* [*sic*]. This quality is unequally distributed among people according to their karma (*kan*), that is, it proceeds from karmic rewards, according to the merit acquired in previous existences, and indicates the level reached in the cycle of rebirths ... men are [compared to women] better endowed in ‘*pon*, which indicates their degree of spiritual fulfilment and opens

to them the path of renunciation, the only way to salvation. (Brac de La Perrière 2009b: 119, my translation)

In order to show how this ritual engages Gawgyi village as a collective, the following explores the ceremony through its kitchen rather than through its ritual stages. On 3–4 February 2016, before the Buddhist Lent, a couple from the village organized a *shinbyu* for their two sons after saving money for several years. Two weeks before the ceremony, the couple met with U Lin to finalize the preparations. U Lin, a teacher at Gawgyi public school, is also *lubyogaung*, or leader of the group of single boys. In duet with a woman ‘head of the single girls’ (*abyogaung*), he is in charge of organizing the village ceremonies, such as weddings and novitiates,⁴ by mobilizing the statutory groups who will take care of preparations, welcoming guests, serving food and performing the necessary ritual acts. U Lin, however, is perceived as the main actor orienting the village workforce for ceremonies. He frequently circulates around Gawgyi and controls the village collective groups of single males and females. Present at every ceremony and recording every donation, he has become the living memory of the villagers’ meritorious acts. A key player in village life, he is the guarantor and privileged witness of the villagers’ commitment to the smooth running of the ceremonies.

During their meeting with U Lin, the couple set a provisional budget and agreed with him on the rental of the ‘common property of the village’ (*ywabon pyitsi*). This includes dishes, kitchen utensils, tables, chairs and stools, bamboo structures and plastic tarps commonly owned by the villagers and assigned by U Lin. The importance of a *shinbyu* depends on the donor. For this one, there will be a band of traditional Burmese musicians (*hsaingwaing*) coming from Mandalay who will be hosted in a large ceremonial pavilion (*man-dat*) assembled temporarily to welcome musicians, novices and guests. All this has a cost, which varies according to the duration of the *shinbyu* (from one to three days in general), the meals proposed, the number of guests, the reputation of the musicians, in addition to the rental of village things capped at 50,000 Myanmar Kyat (50 USD).⁵

A few days before the ceremony, the couple asked their close friends, family and acquaintances for help during the various stages of the ceremony. They bought some items to solicit their help. For example, cigars and tea leaf salads were offered to several villagers through young boys under the guidance of U Lin. These gifts are requests for help before, during or after the ceremony. They symbolize an engagement. On that day, Ko Kyaw and I received a cigar to help serve the guests and wash the dishes with an explicit question: ‘Do you accept this responsibility?’ In these ceremonies, Ko Kyaw is like any other villager, except that he often rents out his loudspeakers and sound system.

The day before the ceremony, the two people in charge of the kitchen for this type of event simmered the main dishes in huge pots cleaned beforehand by several unmarried girls. The latter also helped with cutting vegetables while a group of young boys brought tables and chairs. In Gawgyi, the collective organization for this type of event is well established. The only problem for U Lin is to ensure that the aid is effective. The next day, before the first guests arrived around 6am, U Lin went with the donors to the monastery to offer food (*hsunkat*) to the monks. Between 6 and 9am, most of the villagers and many guests went to the ceremony, accompanied by the rhythm of the music played by the orchestra. In front of the ceremonial pavilion, some guests, before eating and sometimes even before greeting donors, stopped at a table on which fans were stacked. These were given to them in exchange for a sum of money called ‘*aku-ngway*’ (literally ‘aid money’). The amount was recorded in a book dedicated to this purpose and carefully kept by the donor. This is an account book that lets you know who gave what. Usually, U Lin and Daw Thu, the head of the single girls, collect the aid money and distribute the fans in return. A similar practice is found at weddings.⁶ As Nash recalls, but without further analysis: ‘as in all villagewide or supravillage festivities, guests make donations to hosts, and at every wedding someone, usually the school teacher, sits in a corner with a notebook and ballpoint pen, entering the names of donors and the amounts given’ (1965: 250). Spiro added: ‘The amount of each contribution is recorded so that the delicately balanced system of reciprocity may be maintained’ ([1977] 1986: 183–84). In a *shinbyu*, the transfer of aid money is neither purely a gift nor purely a payment. This type of transfer is not found in all novitiates and not all guests necessarily give it (Huard 2021). When it is given, this financial assistance is part of a series of transfers⁷ between individuals and families. In theory, a person gives what he wants, but in practice what is given will be given back in an equal or greater amount.

In general, there are two types of meritorious donations (*ahlu*): the ‘donation without remainder’ (*akywinme ahlu*) and the ‘donation with remainder’ (*akywinshi ahlu*).⁸ The first form is very rare and is a zero-sum donation, a sort of pure gift that does not create liabilities between people and from which the giver does not expect a direct return. It mostly concerns donations for religious buildings and it is ‘best’ not to put one’s name or picture as a dedication mark on the edifice. When the donor dies, this good deed will be remembered and taken into account for her or his rebirth. The second type of donation is the most common and happens during the Buddhist novitiate, funerals and weddings, for instance. The aid money is one example, even if it does not strictly correspond to the definition of *ahlu* as a transfer that requires the mediation of monks for the production of merit (Brac de La Perrière 2009a, 2015). To some extent, people cannot escape the obligation stemming from this kind of donation because there is a

‘remainder’ which underscores the continuity of a relation between people. This kind of transfer belongs to the sphere of *luhmuyay* and bonds people. Given the relatively high number of ceremonies a person is invited to during his lifetime, these transactions involve reciprocal relationships, obligations and liabilities. Hence, also, the importance of U Lin, who is the collective memory of meritorious donations, but also of transfers made during ceremonies. These operations create or update an engagement between people. The amounts are scrupulously recorded so that, in the near or distant future, the person can give back. Such transactions also allow for a kind of collective financing of ceremonies. Thus, a *shinbyu*, the meritorious gift *par excellence*, is not really a ‘donation without remainder’ because of the sharing of merit that obliges the participants to some extent. During this ceremony a variety of transfers occur (aid money, food offerings, mutual help) and they are linked with many other local ceremonies such as weddings or funerals, where multiple transactions also take place and where villagers represent the largest number of participants.

After giving (or not giving) financial support, the guests crossed an alley where young girls offered them cigarettes and flowers before entering the pavilion where the two novices sat dressed as ‘princes in the making’ (*shinlaung*). Almost all discussions began with the formula: ‘Have you eaten?’ Once the ritual space was crossed, the guests were quickly brought to the eating area. Many people were busy around the tables, filling dishes, clearing plates, changing cutlery. The guests followed one another under the gaze of U Lin. Young boys took turns serving. Some adults organized the service, measuring the need for plates and cutlery. Behind the banquet, other men washed the dishes in turn. The atmosphere was convivial. Jokes were told. Cigarettes passed from hand to hand. Betel chews were exchanged like hotcakes. It was the same scene in the outdoor kitchen, where the men were adjusting the cooking of rice while gauging the flow of guests. A sense of camaraderie floats over these spaces if enough people help. Irritation and complaints erupt if someone doesn’t get his hands dirty. Indeed, ceremonies are occasions when villagers are evaluated: the people who help are identified, *a fortiori* among singles, and the commitment of everyone is sanctioned. The morality underlying mutual aid is only recalled in moments of crisis, such as when there is no one to help serve food.

Offering food symbolizes giving in its raw form in our context. Feeding monks, teachers or parents during rituals is usually understood as ‘an acknowledgment of gratitude and as a repayment of moral or social debt rather than as an attempt to create new obligations’ (Schober 1989: 106). Food offerings can reflect obligations (parent–child, teacher–student), create liabilities (donor–receiver) and participate in cycles of exchanges as we saw through the making of Ko Kyaw’s family and the issue of transmitting inheritance in the previous chapter. Following the theory of the field of merit, the

guests who participate in a meritorious ceremony receive a share of the merit made by the givers through their donation, but individuals evaluate the obligations associated with these transactions. This is a consubstantial ambiguity of the gift in our context. Intentions are appraised and interpretation varies depending on the pre-existing relationships and whether someone wants to create or show. In short, food donations oscillate between two poles: the disinterested nature of the Buddhist gift and the obligation arising from the gift. How people engage with each other through these transactions is thus constantly evaluated.

The Figure 6.1 shows a *shinbyu* I filmed. At one point, the main givers emphasized their position as donors by serving food to their guests themselves. However, one old lady, on the left, refused to be served directly. She withdrew her plate in a gesture stressing her wish not to be taken too far in this situation. Besides the fact that the giver and the old lady do not get along, the latter's refusal relates to a difference in status between them. The old woman descends from a family of large farmers while the donor worked as a daily labourer until quite recently. This tiny gesture thus reflects how, even under the veil of a meritorious donation, transfers are evaluated because they potentially symbolize an engagement that could impact status and hierarchies. One cannot give something, help, offer food to anyone in the same manner. The way in which transfers are evaluated is thus key in local political dynamics, be it during a *shinbyu* or when Ko Kyaw dodged the risk of being trapped at someone's house by sending one of his followers from CoC to fetch the person. Hence, the drama of offering food can symbolize a meritorious act and create liabilities (that can be refused). The multiplicity of ceremonies, transactions and offerings between people within and beyond a village and across several generations are part of the political landscape, as for the histories of transmission among families. In other words, gift giving, even formalized in a cosmology, is always contextual. The engagement of villagers towards the collective is but one form of these transfers.

After eating, the guests drank and washed their hands near large jars arranged for this purpose. Some girls and women helped provide fresh water and ironed towels. The flow of guests increased sharply around 8 in the morning. The atmosphere calmed down around 9am. The dishes were washed, the tables cleaned and the rest of the food gathered for tomorrow's banquet or sent to the elderly who had been unable to attend the ceremony. The next step was a ritual procession which took place around 11am. This procession, the length of which can be another sign of prestige, wandered through the village following the main paths from the couple's home to the monastery. The 'princes in the making' were carried on wooden structures draped in the image of elephants and Ko Kyaw was among those carrying them. The procession represents the Burmese royal order

and precedes the entry into religion, a crucial stage in the life cycle. A little later, in a more intimate stage, the close family went to the monastery with the young boys to clip their hair, help them put on the monastic robe and witness their commitment to follow Buddhist teachings as novices.

Finally, in the afternoon, monks from the monastery came to the ceremonial pavilion to celebrate the ritual of sharing merit. This ritual of consecration consists in declaring that a person shares the merit related to his gift with all existing beings in theory. To share merit is to 'make the water flow' in reference to the gesture of the donor. The latter makes a libation by pouring water into a silver plate at the same time as the monk recites the appropriate consecration formula to invite the goddess of the Earth to witness the meritorious act. The merit obtained by the donors through the donation then reflects on the people who participated according to the field of merit theory described by Schober (1989). The sharing of merit through the ritual of consecration creates obligations for those who enter the field of merit thus shared (with the guests and the persons who helped). Being in a person's field of merit is therefore a specific engagement. In other words, the ability to acquire and share merit through donations is essential to the fabric of power as it produces a hierarchy between donors and recipients. This theory therefore proposes an order of worth to evaluate people. However, we have seen how a meritorious donation is crisscrossed by tensions, diverging evaluations and by a variety of other transfers.

Overall, a *shinbyu* crystallizes and sets in motion a complex whole including at the same time various ritual devices, the activation of networks (family, neighbours, guests, monks and so on) as well as multiple transactions. It is noteworthy that a large part of these practices is possible thanks to the presence of a village collective controlled by U Lin. These collective activities, necessary for the realization of meritorious donations, are also trials. Generally speaking, the ceremony is in itself a test, or rather a set of trials gathered under the banner of 'meritorious donation'. As an essential 'rite of passage', a *shinbyu* tests the novice's spiritual capacity (*hpon*) to respond to monastic demands. This ceremony also puts to the test the status and reputation of donors and their ability to attract prestigious monks, for example. Last but not least, the ceremony puts to the test the relationships of mutual aid and the ability of U Lin to empower the village collective. The rumours circulating and gauging the more or less lavish expenditure as well as the quality of the meals, music or clothing echo the permanent evaluation to which people and ceremonies are subjected. Pretences are strongly denounced, both in private and in public. In this vein, the presence or absence of some villagers is revealing. For example, a person I knew for a long time, one of Ko Kyaw's uncles, was absent from most village ceremonies. When I asked around about this, I was told it was because this man was ashamed, not because he had made no donation but because he was more interested in his 'own affairs'

(*kokoyay*) than in ‘social affairs’ (*luhmuyay*). Nash asks this question in similar terms when he says that the lack of unity of a village

is also thought to be aggravated by two characteristics of the normal villager: (1) *ko ha ko neide*, the drive to live by and for oneself alone, and (2) *hpathi hpatha neide*, to be uninterested in others [*sic*]. It seems odd to me that these are said to cause trouble, since in a real sense they are among the honored, desired, and fostered attitudes in the ideal villager. But when cast in the political realm, there is some local appreciation of the negative consequences. If the village is peaceful, unriven by factions, led by a man of *pon*, then these traits help keep the peace and are fully desired (Nash 1965: 272)

The opposition between living by and for oneself and committing oneself to others helps to explain the absence of certain people during village ceremonies. This therefore highlights their collective nature. If avoiding ceremonies is ‘selfish’, then participating, all the more actively, is an engagement with the donor and the village. The very presence of U Lin in *Gawgyi* encourages us to understand how a *shinbyu* builds a village collective set up for a common good. The village is thus, beyond the statutory groups, functions, jobs and hierarchies, an important network of people which enables them to make donations during which the commitment towards the collective is evaluated. The organization of ceremonies is in itself a test under the watch of U Lin, who is the master of mutual aid. His worth is the result of a double responsibility: if U Lin is responsible for the ceremonies, then he can request the engagement of others for mutual aid. U Lin is thus a *lugyi*, because he invests himself in the village to make the necessary ceremonies in the life of each villager. His commitment to the collective is recognized and gives him, in part, his worth.

As for Ko Kyaw, he was on the fringe of the ceremony, being a simple villager navigating across networks of gifts, personalities, hierarchies and liabilities. He also has to display propriety and help serve the guests, for instance. The realm of village affairs, and ceremonies in particular, are a part of local politics that contrasts with government practices and yet falls within the local political landscape as they became a space of engagement.

U Maung and an Engagement Ceremony

In the chapter exploring how Ko Kyaw crafted his position as headman, we followed him during a premarital encounter in *Tozigon*. Such an event is intrinsic to village affairs and U Maung was officiating as master of ceremonies. Weddings are to some extent a collective issue, and the very presence of U Maung during

engagement ceremonies highlights how they are part of village affairs and how the worth of this man is produced.

Premarital encounters (called *apyaw* or *tintaungpwe*) have not held the same appeal for anthropologists as novitiate or marriage ceremonies. Spiro ([1977] 1986: 181) and Nash (1965: 250) describe them rather briefly as a process of gradual engagement in which the parents of the future couple meet several times to gauge each other and negotiate what will be given to the couple by each family.⁹ Spiro notes that the meeting formalizing the engagement

is a public event, held in the presence of invited guests, and always including the headman, the village elders and the kindred of the engaged couple. The expenses are defrayed by the parent of the boy, despite the fact that the ceremony is usually held in the house of the girl ... The ritual itself is brief. A master of ceremonies, usually the headman or a village elder, announces the amount and content of the dowry ... which had been agreed upon by the parents. ([1977] 1986: 181)

Spiro's description is very similar to the way marital engagements are organized in Gawgyi today, where they are known by a generic name, *say-sat-pwe*, or 'engagement ceremony'. During these ceremonies, the gift of *tintha-ngway*¹⁰ is announced and/or negotiated between the parents. Spiro initially spoke of engagement in 'psychodynamic' terms (confirmation of the boy's intention, acceptance of sexual relations, protection of the bride's honour in the event of the fiancé's death) and then proposes a comparative anthropological analysis of the Burmese dowry (ibid.: 181–209). However, in Gawgyi, a real mediation system is set up with U Maung as master of ceremonies. U Maung, by his presence and during his speeches, promotes the morality governing relations within couples, families and villages. It is therefore possible to argue that marriage goes beyond the couple and intra- or inter-family relationships and that the village is a space of reproduction and social ordering, which in no way prevents tensions and conflicts from being expressed.

Around 4pm, on 8 December 2015, I was invited by Ko Kyaw to an engagement ceremony in which 'the girl's side' was meeting 'the boy's side' in order to agree on each family's commitments to the future couple for their wedding. This meeting was the last step before the union was sealed by a wedding ceremony. The family of the bride-to-be, living in Gawgyi, received at their home the family of the future husband, coming from another village. Before their arrival, the bride's family and some of Gawgyi's single females prepared tea and cakes. The main room of the house was emptied to install tables and benches under the instructions of U Lin. Little by little, the village elders arrived, including U Maung and U Htay. The future husband, anxious, helped with the preparations.

The 'husband's side' then arrived in a compact group, composed of his parents, a few uncles and aunts, the 'official elder' and the headman of his village of residence. After a quick and courteous exchange between the two 'sides', everyone settled around the tables: one off-centre for the different elders, another to the south for the boy's side, another to the north for the girl's side and a fourth at the centre for the negotiations.

The parents of the future spouses faced each other in the company of U Maung and the headman of the bridegroom's village. Ko Kyaw stayed in the background and let U Maung manage the affair. Once tea and cakes had been served and consumed, the latter got up to speak. He began by insisting on the fundamental principles of the bonds of marriage, on the rules and duties of each spouse in a couple (the man must provide for the needs of the household, the woman must diligently manage the domestic economy, it is necessary to show mutual understanding and to avoid conflicts between spouses, with their families and their neighbours and so forth). He then listed the assets and amounts that the two families agreed to give to the future couple. The list was given to him shortly after the boy's arrival. Once his monologue was over, U Maung sat down and let whoever wanted to speak do so. The parents of each spouse remained silent at first, leaving the initiative to the boy's village headman. He was quickly cut off by the bride's mother. She asked who would pay for the wedding. Following the custom, the parents of the future husband agreed to pay for the ceremony to be held in Gawgyi. They therefore had to pay for the rental of Gawgyi's common properties on the spot. Gawgyi villagers would take care of organizing the workforce. Discussions restarted among the groups in a growing hubbub. Questions were flying. 'With what you have, you could give more, right?', 'Are we talking about an inheritance or just a wedding present?' The tension, palpable, increased. U Maung then took over with the help of the boy's village headman. They asked the parents of the future spouses to specify if what was given for marriage was to be considered as inheritance or not. Gradually, the two families reached an agreement. The room returned to calm; the agreement was stated aloud to all persons thus taken as witnesses. Before leaving Gawgyi, however, some women on the boy's side accused the bride of not being a virgin. The bodies tensed, they approached her, raising their voices, pointing at her, while she took cover behind the members of her family. The headmen and elders from both villages attempted to restore calm while getting the boy's family members out of the house and back to their motorbikes in a hurry. The wedding took place one month later.

This meeting shows how marriages are both a family affair and a village affair. A family affair because it implies a mutual evaluation of what can be given to the future spouses. Each family assesses the status, reputation and assets of the other beforehand, while evaluating its own ability to give and transmit.

Marriage is a key stage in the constitution of individuals and potentially the time when one receives one's share of inheritance (Chapter 5). The stakes are high. It is therefore a time when parents must clarify their children's entitlement to property according to their socio-economic trajectories. Parents must also reflect on how they will carry out their future parental duties (novitiates, schooling, marriage, inheritance), while taking into account their own means of subsistence and potential risks unforeseen in the future. However, the meeting is also a village affair in that the cohesion of families eases the cohesion of the village. The mechanism put in place to negotiate and witness the agreement between families is based on the idea that the village is a collective space where the morality of individuals must be recalled, and commitments sanctioned. Negotiations between families are ordered in space (the four tables), mediatized and witnessed. The witness-mediators are all the more important because they embody both morality linked to experience, and a system of proof. On the one hand, the headmen of the two villages take note of the agreement concluded in the event that a conflict emerges in the future. On the other hand, a certain number of people experienced in this type of exercise are present: the 'elders' are privileged witnesses, as are the 'official elders'. U Maung is the traditional officiant for this type of meeting. He is known for his moderation and his ability to reconcile people by stressing in his speeches the difficult, but necessary, balance in human relations. And Ko Kyaw listened. The role of the officiant is assigned to U Maung because his word is legitimate. He can give a sermon on how to direct one's life in the right way, because he has proven it in the past and still proves it today. In other words, he embodies a certain village ethic and promotes a common good (a life without conflict, balanced alliances) which strengthens, while producing, his position as a *lugyi*.

Once again, Ko Kyaw appears at the margins of this event. As headman, he is a privileged witness to this ceremony of engagement, but the performing of the ritual and the meaning associated with marriage are fields of politics that go beyond headship and belong to the political landscape.

U Htay and a Dispute

Our last *lugyi* is the most important. This is U Htay, whom I called the Worthy in Chapter 3, a former village headman who then became the 'official elder' and Ko Kyaw's brother-in-law. His trajectory and how he takes charge of village affairs show another way in which the worth of a *lugyi* is produced, at the interface between charismatic leadership and the embodiment of the common good.

U Htay's past achievements have been described in Chapter 3. Among them, we can remember how he embodied propriety on the model of the last men of *hpon* (U To Kaing and U Za Nay Ya) during a moment of moral rupture that

saw the emergence of self-reliance and the rise of village affairs as the form of Gawgyi politics. When headman, he notably embodied a shift in how headship was performed in contrast with U Win the Infamous. He also built a road connecting Gawgyi to Monywa, assembled donations for it and negotiated with villagers for them to give up part of their land. He was renowned for not taking bribes and he kept farmers' tax receipts at home in case any issues of ownership were to arise (as he experienced with the construction of a poultry zone). When he refused to compete for another mandate as headman, a political crisis unfolded in Myinmilaung tract. At that moment, he proclaimed himself 'official elder' in order to keep an eye on local politics while this status partially protected him from being pushed to become headman again. This was a first step in distancing himself from officials. Under his tenure, however, the domain of village affairs, drawing from the traditions of *luhmuyay*, expanded and nowadays includes the organization of ceremonies, the management of the water and electricity systems, the rebuilding of roads, the treatment of the sick and the dead, dealing with NGOs, managing government loans and enlarging the village, among other issues. These challenges were not totally new, and village affairs had existed to some extent since the creation of Gawgyi. What was new was the articulation of social affairs with new stakes at a moment of rupture with the state in the late 1990s and early 2000s. U Htay remained a central player in Gawgyi as guardian of village affairs, even more since he stopped being headman. His general knowledge is valued, and his understanding of Buddhist morality is called upon during conflict. He is also interested in astrology and his erudition is regularly used to name children or to guide the building of houses according to the flows of fortune and misfortune. Overall, he has chosen to take charge of village affairs by staying away from government control while emphasizing the responsibility of villagers in common affairs. This middle position, difficult to hold, makes the worth of U Htay.

The dispute explored below shows that, at the time of my fieldwork, he was the only one able to settle a conflict related to the building of Gawgyi's power grid. This case shows how conflict resolution requires the ability to supersede individual issues by invoking a common good, that is, to defend village affairs.

In the middle of the 2016 rainy season, the Monywa Township authorities announced that electricity would be delivered to villages within two miles of the city's administrative boundaries. Gawgyi was one of them. The newly elected village headman, U So from Myinmilaung, informed the villagers of this during a meeting at Gawgyi's school attended by at least one person per family. The conditions were as follows: in order to install the electric pylons, it was necessary to widen the roads of the village, to twenty feet wide for the largest and twelve for the others. Villagers should therefore clean, level and sometimes give up some of their living space to widen the paths. They should accept these conditions

unanimously or else the project risked being aborted. The project was accepted, but tensions soon arose over the areas to be ceded, the rights of passage of the living and the dead and the question of the future expansion of the village.

In theory, the village headman and the heads of ten households should have been the mediators of the project. However, the task fell to the *lugyi*, and U Htay in particular. Ko Kyaw no longer had a say in this kind of issue. Having direct access to a path is essential for every household. The houses are built and oriented according to the main roads which channel auspicious and non-auspicious flows between the auspicious gate east of Gawgyi and the inauspicious gate to the south. For example, villagers who die in the village must be evacuated from their homes by a path going through the village and leading to the cemetery. The dead body's journey must be made without passing through the enclosure of a neighbouring house so as not to disorient the dead man's 'butterfly soul' (*leippya*)¹¹ to facilitate his transmigration. The paths thus structure the village space. It is the same for the cemetery (to the southwest), the monastery (to the north) and the altar of the village *naq* (to the southeast), which are not however 'part' of the village, but which limit its extension. The widening of roads had triggered the issue of road access, especially in newly inhabited areas, as well as the question of the future expansion of Gawgyi to the southeast. Overall, U Htay dealt with each problem on a case-by-case basis during the month of August 2016. The case below is interesting because it involves our three *lugyi*. Gawgyi is roughly divided into four parts by a north-south and an east-west route. The case in question is located in the southeast quarter where a path sinks towards the houses further south from the main east-west axis. This path passes in front of the house of U Maung to finish at the gates of the houses of A and B (who do not get along) and U Lin's house is located behind them. In other words, U Lin's family members do not have direct access to a village path. They must either go through a neighbouring house or leave the village. This does not pose any problems for accessing electricity, as it would suffice to extend the power line. However, the situation is more complicated because they want the path to be extended to their living space, even if it means cutting it in half. This path could then join a future road which would skirt the village on its southeast edge, and so promote its enlargement. In addition, U Lin's family demanded this extension in order to bring their future dead to the cemetery in the best conditions. How, then, can A and B agree to cede part of their land to the village without giving the impression of having to align themselves with U Lin's wishes while overcoming the animosities between neighbours?

The village headman was warned of the case but did not wish to intercede, knowing all too well that his instructions would not be listened to. For Ko Kyaw, it was an example of how hard it can be to 'perform' headmanship, as the authority of a headman cannot easily overcome how people want to deal

with their own affairs. As for U Maung, who was close to the people involved, he preferred not to intervene in order to avoid any accusation of taking sides. For the road to be extended and widened, each of the three families (A, B and U Lin) must give up some of their land. This is not a problem for U Lin who wants to alienate a little of his housing space to have access to a path. But he can't be judge and jury. For A and B, who disagree on the portion to be given, the situation is different. A can only give two to three feet, because her house adjoins the edge of their modest living space. B, having a larger area, should then give at least ten feet. To convince the protagonists of the need to expand the path, one must be able to assert something legitimate, something that neither U Maung nor U Lin can do in this case. One has to be outside and above the game to be able to settle this consensually so that the village can gain access to electricity. Describing an intra-village conflict (a story of insults between neighbours), Nash relates how such an agreement was reached during his fieldwork:

Restoration of 'cool minds' among neighbours can only be done if a direct confrontation between the contestants is avoided. A direct confrontation means that a quarrel is pushed to the point at which somebody must clearly be the victor and somebody clearly be the vanquished ... The procedures of settling a dispute follow the dictate of making a clear issue out of the case. The process allows each person to keep his dignity, to compromise indirectly, and to indicate subscription to the norms of peaceful interaction. (Nash 1965: 83)

Nash therefore insists on the search for consensus as well as on the importance of the authority of elders and the village leader (the man of *hpon*) for solving conflicts. More precisely, making a clear issue out of the case is similar to what Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) call the 'process of generalizing': U Htay, grasping the ins and outs of the problem, took up this case. To resolve the conflict, he pleaded for the common future of the village whose extension to the south-east was being recorded. He argued with A and B – separately and without the two families confronting each other – about the need to anticipate the extension of the village, to create new paths to bring the dead to the cemetery and the need to reach a consensus so that electricity could arrive (finally) in Gawgyi. Furthermore, he promised B that the levelling of the land ceded to the village would not be at his expense, and that U Lin would be responsible for the works. The difficulty, concerning land, is related to what we described in the previous chapter, that there are potentially multiple claims on the housing area among both A and B's families. Convincing them to alienate part of it to facilitate the passage of a neighbour's dead in anticipation of

the enlargement of the village can be demanding. It requires giving credit to all potential claims and showing why this or that perspective is greater in a specific context.

U Htay's ability to reach consensus stems from his ability to overtake specific claims and assert a common interest. Guarding village affairs in that sense is a 'process of generalizing' by enforcing an idea of the common good. The common good covers a broad spectrum ranging, in this case, from the treatment of the dead to the enlargement of the village while going beyond the level of neighbourhood relations. Anticipating the extension of the village, promoting the fortune of the villagers, organizing access to electricity: these are issues affecting Gawgyi as a whole. If U Htay is legitimate to assert and embody this interest, it is because he has demonstrated his worth in the past and continues to do so. He has achieved a certain degree of independence by moving cautiously between family and neighbourhood relationships, government and clientelism. He has the qualities of the leader described by Nash, but he does not sit at the top of a clientele. The men of *hpon* are long gone, but their memory remains, and the defence of village affairs is nowadays the fragile state of local politics in Gawgyi.

Inclusion and Exclusion

This chapter has explored how the worth of the *lugyi* comes from their engagement in village affairs by promoting different forms of common good. The three persons presented here had pushed in the past decades for village affairs to be maintained and enhanced, combining more traditional forms of sociality with new stakes in order to organize collective life following previous models of propriety in the face of a violent and disengaging state. To do so, they used local institutions (head of bachelors, master of ceremonies, official elder) which are central to the domain of social affairs and upheld local ethics in situations where the worth of people is evaluated (mutual help, union of the couple, consensus in disputes). In contrast with the analyses emphasizing clientelist and meritorious hierarchy, the question of the village as a collective is key to understand power relations in Gawgyi and, *in fine*, the worth and authority of its *lugyi*. Two points must be recalled. First, the fact that the current monk and his predecessor never really achieved a degree of recognition in the village as did U Za Nay Ya, and their disengagement from villagers' affairs is important to understand why the latter also 'did by themselves'. Second, the three *lugyi* have credentials: they are all part of the main lineages of the village, they are educated and are, except for U Lin, large farmers who can take time outside of the field. Thus, even if they participated in the transformation of the local political landscape, they are still part of an ingrained hierarchy (Chapter 3).

Describing a novitiate ceremony first showed that, in addition to the ways in which people engage with each other through various transactions (meritorious, monetary, food offerings, mutual aid and so on), a *shinbyu* is also a village matter. Indeed, doing a *shinbyu* in Gawgyi requires the organization of a collective for the mutual assistance to take place and be effective. U Lin is responsible for it in the shadow of the ritual pomp. In addition, among the multiple forms of engagement occurring during a *shinbyu* (merit sharing, aid money, food offering, music, giving a son to the monastery and so forth), washing dishes, building the ceremonial pavilion, serving food and cooking are all tests that measure the involvement of people. Their engagement in collective affairs is then central to defining the village as a political space. We also saw the union of couples as a collective stake since a system of publicity and mediation sanctions the commitment of the spouses' families, a system headed by U Maung who embodies the good order of the local life to some extent.

The common good can sometimes include the issue of the treatment of the dead, the extension of the village, but also the regulation of neighbourhood relations. U Htay's ability to promote the common good is intimately linked to his past actions, through which he has demonstrated integrity and a constant commitment to the entire village. The *lugyi* are therefore village leaders of a different type than the 'man of *hpon*' described by Nash. Their worth does not depend on the quantity or number of their donations. Besides, neither patronage nor the field of merit – two forms of engagement that create hierarchy between people – fully reflect their bigness. This chapter has shown that in the hollow of the contradictions between the multiple forms of engagement lies the realm of *luhmuyay*, which, cast in Gawgyi's politics at the turn of the twenty-first century, became the domain of village affairs oriented by *lugyi*. The village issues therefore cross all the others, to different degrees, in that 'my affairs' (*kokoyay*) potentially belong to 'social affairs' (*luhmuyay*). Thus, by making village affairs a space of engagement where the worth of people is gauged according to a common good, the *lugyi* are producing a (fragile) social order dominated by masculine values. They created their role as guardians of village affairs in a specific historical context.

To some extent, there were always collective issues in each village. They are permanently re-creating the village and scaling the scope of local politics. They are not just the things that are happening in one place. Thus, saying that village affairs became the form of Gawgyi politics means that at some point in its history – the change from an Infamous headman to a Worthy one at the turn of the twenty-first century (Chapter 3) – local affairs became a domain of engagement against a backdrop of governmental violence and detachment. The posture and acts of the Infamous headman and military towards the managing of local affairs influenced how people understood worthiness and, as a

consequence, how they would engage in collective affairs (e.g. not taking or giving bribes, upholding of ceremonies, investment in schooling and so on). It produced a fragile political order where patron–client politics are always present. In this respect, my work is just an attempt to make sense of the contemporary manifestation of this specific configuration of power relations and situate it in the history of a place where a group of men were entrusted to take charge of village affairs, following the example of previous men of propriety and building on a traditional conception of sociality. Village affairs were nothing new, but their transformation as a space of engagement in relation to state violence and corruption was a novelty.

To broaden the conclusions beyond the scope of this chapter alone, three more points should be added. First, by arguing that village affairs became the form of Gawgyi politics where big men build their authority, as during the selection of the headman in 2016, the making of ceremonies and the resolution of disputes, this work shows how local politics is a matter of excluding some individuals and entrusting others (the big men) to ‘take charge’ of local affairs. In Gawgyi, it was so notably because they exemplify propriety through their engagement towards the collective, but in many other places, such as in Myinmilaung Proper or many villages of the Ayeyarwady Delta, such engagement occurs at the margins.

Second, Gawgyi *lugyi*, no matter how legitimate they may be, still represent the elite sitting at the top of a local hierarchy that has transformed during the past century, as we saw in Chapter 2. They are not the same kind of patron that colonizers and scholars imagined as the natural chief of the countryside, but rather descendants of large families of peasants who monopolized village leadership and remained influential by investing in inheritance politics. As we will see in Chapter 7, the voices of villagers are channelled, delegated and often excluded through, to and by this type of leader who is entrusted to ‘take care’ of collective affairs.

Third, where does the headman sit in this picture? He is in a rather ambiguous position. Even if the official role of headship did not change much throughout the twentieth century, Ko Kyaw is in a different position than U Nyunt, the first headman of Myinmilaung tract, or U To Kaing for instance. He had to deal with other kinds of leaders (past headmen, current *lugyi*, township officials, monks and so on) and stakes, and the scope of his authority was constrained by the fashioning of the local polity. He navigated a different political landscape than the *lugyi*, as they chose to remain distant from the state. Ko Kyaw did not only operate in and for Myinmilaung tract. That was not the sole arena for him. He also had to craft his position in a landscape built in the past decades, a landscape delineated by the making of collective affairs, the evaluation of propriety and expressed through a sense of belonging.

Notes

1. An earlier version of this chapter appeared in ‘La grandeur des lu-gyi: Affaires villageoises et formes d’engagement dans le centre du Myanmar’, *Péninsule* 79(2) (2019).
2. So far, I have referred to the latter as ‘official elders’ as one person is recognized by the state for each tract as a traditional institution. But there is often more than one *yatmyathpa* and often they are *lugyi*.
3. Other people are called more or less great depending on the context of enunciation. Daw Than, an elderly widowed woman, was the only woman *lugyi*, without it being possible to put her in the same rank as U Lin, U Htay and U Maung because she was a *lugyi* due to her character, her lucidity and her ‘natural’ authority without taking charge of village interests in a public way. The chief cooks for ceremonies, the healer, the ‘master of the lower ways’ and the medium of the cult of the *naq* are also great figures.
4. The ceremonies in question are in a practical way called ‘meritorious donation’ (*ahlu*) because they always contain a form of donation, whether it is directed towards the monks and the monastery or not. For example, marriage does not necessarily include an intervention by monks, and therefore does not fall within the definition of a donation (*ahlu*) in its narrow sense. However, in practice, many people are fed at weddings, which makes it a form of donation in the broad sense as long as the offering of food produces merit.
5. The money will go to the village fund held by U Lin, which will be used to renew the utensils, tables, chairs and tarpaulins needed for the ceremonies.
6. At weddings, what is given is called *lethpwe* (‘union of hands’), a term that covers, in the restricted sense, gifts in kind made by the guests as well as by the parents of the spouses for the establishment of the couple. In a broad sense, the *lethpwe* refers to gifts symbolizing a marital union and can therefore integrate what is given in cash under the name of aid money. Robinne (2000) specifies that the sums paid during a *shinbyu* can be given back to the monastery as a donation.
7. These transfers of goods and services can be more or less formalized and cover a wide range, including, for example, matrimonial services, assistance for the construction of the ceremonial palace or the services of guests during ceremonies, assistance during funeral vigils, the construction or repair of houses, services rendered during agricultural work and so forth.
8. On the notion of ‘remainder’ in Myanmar cosmology, notably concerning how personal names are calculated and the role of the remainder as a notion of randomness or freedom which minimizes the belief in karmic predestination, cf. Robinne (1998).
9. For Nash, the first visit, at the boy’s parents’ initiative, was called *kyaung lande* [*sic*], ‘opening the road’ (1965: 250). Spiro associates it with *sei sat gyin*, ‘being connected’ (Spiro [1977] 1986: 181).
10. A literal translation of *tintha-ngway* could be: the ‘wealth placed (on the couple) for their enjoyment’. This gift is also called *hkinwin pyitsi* or the ‘properties (given) to enter (the relation) in good terms’.
11. *Leippya* is a vital principle; it is the subject of many rites that mark the life cycles of an individual, including birth, early childhood and death. For a clarification about the butterfly soul, cf. Brac de La Perrière (1989) and Robinne (2000).