



Looking forward to a week of #Reviews

written by Judith Beyer
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During my recent [fieldwork in Myanmar](#), I fell in love with books all over again. Myanmar is a country where everyone reads all the time, and with pleasure. The book shops in downtown Yangon, the former capital of the country and still its largest city, have specialized on producing look-alike copies of original publications.



Typical bookstore in downtown Yangon, Myanmar (Photo by Judith Beyer)

During the military dictatorship that lasted for over five decades, this had been a favorite strategy to ensure that the limited number of Western books in the country and those few that were smuggled in by tourists or other visitors, reached a wide audience. Now, since the country has “opened up” and a new government came into power, the ban on Western “propaganda” publications has been lifted, but the practice of reproducing original books by copying them and selling them in the local bookstores remained.

This is open access policy Myanmar-style.

Browsing through the bookstores is always an adventure: George Orwell, James Scott, and the latest edited volume by anthropologists working on Myanmar next to legal codes from British India, Burmese folk tales and an ever-increasing number of glossy coffee-table books portraying the magnificence of this country and its people. The local publication market is expanding and thriving, too, after



the state has loosened its grip on media (as long as you don't criticize the army). Next to books, the number of Myanmar-language newspapers is growing, too, and people enjoy reading political cartoons more than ever.



Next to books, the people of Myanmar have a predilection for political cartoons (Photo by Judith Beyer)

While challenges remain in terms of funding publications and making them available also in rural areas of the country, people's love for books is remarkable. Thus, I came back to Allegra all inspired and am looking forward to this week where we feature a new reviews publication every day. We are starting with [Heike Drotbohm's review of *The Color of Modernity*](#) by Barbara Weinstein today. On Tuesday, we will feature [Katy Gardner and David Lewis' *Anthropology and Development*](#), reviewed by Arba Bekteshi. On Wednesday, Anna Neumann reviews [Dan Berber's *Captive Nation*](#).

I hope you enjoy our selection of books – being able to read what you want is a pleasure; but it is also a privilege, as the people of Myanmar know who have been deprived of it for a long time.