

Shaping the Rule of Law in Myanmar: What role do Intermediaries play in Development Assistance?

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This paper will present preliminary data from PhD field studies in Myanmar exploring the role of intermediaries in rule of law development. When development assistance is an intervention into a dynamic system with its own hidden power struggles and complexities, how do international actors manage to navigate such system? Who do they seek advice from and why? These questions become particularly interesting in the Myanmar setting where there is widespread skepticism towards donors and the government is struggling to make sense of international development actors' objectives.

By drawing on theoretical insights from political anthropology of brokers and intermediaries together with Merry's (2006) concept of *vernacularisation* and findings from development anthropology through the work of Lewis and Mosse (2006), Bierschenk et al. (2002), and Rottenburg (2014), I will illustrate how rule of law ideas, scripts, norms, and values are filtered through intermediaries. I argue that rule of law assistance is a mediated process where actors who operate "in the middle" shape rule of law development outcomes. These mediated processes of rule of law making are generally non-transparent and may be consequential for donors and host countries.

International actors operating informally in Myanmar have for decades contributed to the creation of rule of law intermediaries who are connected to each other through political- and friendship networks. They are the key points of communication between international and national or local actors and will infuse translations and messages with their own values. In many cases, international organisations will not have a good understanding of what type of intermediate activities these actors perform, while the intermediaries themselves often refer to such as a key aspect of their work. This suggests that international actors lack a deeper understanding for local complexities and that national actors want to keep up an appearance of understanding international actors' objectives.