



CHAPTER V

SPIRITUAL-CULTURAL UNITY AND CAPITAL RELOCATION TO PYINMANA NAYPYIDAW

In order to enrich and enhance the image of military regime in the Burmese context, Myanmar's ruling government has continuously used the legacy of traditional history to build national pride and imitated the model of Burmese monarchs to symbolize its absolute power and cultural destiny. The military leaders also strongly believe in astrology and have attempted to convince people about a promised prosperity. Spiritual and cultural 'purification' has become a political project of the ruling regime intrinsically tied in with the quest for cultural unity, national security and sovereignty. The state classifies culture-related tasks into four sectors. These include 'tasks to uplift the dynamism of patriotic spirit uplift national prestige and integrity and preserve the cultural heritage' which will contribute towards national consolidation.¹ Additionally, the SLORC/SPDC has employed a "Tatmadaw (military)-led xenophobic nationalism as the ideological cement binding the state together."²

In this regard, a capital is perceived as a symbol of national spirit and cultural centrality with an important role in building the pride of the Burmese nation, and uplifting the image of current military rulers as the charismatic and powerful leaders. Shifting the capital to Napyidaw is one of various cultural activities which have continued after the military junta's ascendancy to power. Senior General Than Shwe, in a speech on 7 April, 1999, said that "Union spirit is very important for the nation.....When all nationals were united (led by the Burmese race), our nation was great. In retrospect, it can vividly be seen that during Pagan, Toungoo and Konbaung

¹ Rattanaorn Pongpattana, *Buddhism and Political Legitimation in Burma (1988-2003)*, MA Thesis, Southeast Asian Studies, Graduate School, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand, Academic Year 2004, p.22.

² Quoted in David Steinberg, "Democracy, Power, and Economy in Myanmar: Donor Dilemmas," *Asian Survey*, 1991.

periods, we were able to win the regard of our neighbors. That is why we find the value of Union spirit incomparably great ... If Union spirit weakens, national unity will be adversely affected and sovereignty can be lost. Constant efforts must thus be made to vitalize Union spirit for the perpetuation and prosperity of our country.”³As a consequence, capital relocation from Yangon to Naypyidaw is significant for the SPDC in terms of social and cultural targets and can be seen as a mega project for building the Union spirit of Myanmar. There are three interesting adoptions and adaptations about the capital relocation to Naypyidaw in the context of spiritual and cultural unity.

5.1 The Adoption and Adaptation of Ancient Royal Traditions

Significantly, it is since 1988 that many religious activities and ancient royal traditions began to be revived, soon after the coup and the SLORC’s ascendancy to power. Such activities visibly resemble those practiced by Burmese kings, and are therefore seen as associated with the kingly manifestation of right and power.⁴

In fact, royal traditions had been exploited by leaders in the post-colonial period. In 1951, U Nu announced the holding of the Sixth Great Buddhist Council to correct and maintain Buddhist texts. This tradition aimed to enhance U Nu’s legitimacy by comparison to the fifth Buddhist Council held by King Mindon. General Ne Win constructed Maha Wizaya Pagoda, situated on a hill facing Shwedagon Pagoda. According to Tin Maung Maung, this was reminiscent of the traditional practice of Dhammaraja pardons for convicted criminals on auspicious occasions.⁵ Furthermore, when the pagoda was completed in 1986, the *hti* or sacred umbrella was hoisted to its pinnacle, an activity traditionally performed by Burmese monarchs to manifest their absolute power.

³Ministry of Information, *Myanmar Today*, May, 2001, Volume 4, No. 2, p. 1.

⁴Rattanaporn Pongpattana, *Buddhism and Political Legitimation in Burma (1988-2003)*, p.1.

⁵Tin Maung Maung Than, *Sangha Reforms and Renewal of Sasana in Myanmar: Historical Trends and Contemporary Practice*, in Trevor Ling (ed.), *Buddhist Trends in Southeast Asia*, Institution of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 1993, p. 37.

However, the actions of U Nu and Ne Win could not be competed with those of the SLORC/SPDC.⁶ The military junta claims its duty as the protector of the national religion and tries to encourage nationalism and historical pride among Myanmar citizens. Large sums of money have to be spent in the preservation of the ancient cultural heritage for the purpose of enhancing pride in one's nationality.⁷ Many royal traditions have been deployed and utilized by the government not only to legitimize its right to rule but also to build Burmese cultural and spiritual unity by looking back to a glorious past.

During 1988-2003, the current government reconstructed Pagan, which was the first Burmese capital of a successfully integrated country under one leadership. There were many projects to reconstruct and renovate religious and monarchical edifices in ancient Burmese capitals. These, for instance, include: "Resurrection of Hanthawady Palace Hill, renovation of Pyathadagyi Pagoda in Pagan, excavation of Pagan City Wall and Moat, Reconstruction of Inwa (Ava) City Wall, Reconstruction of inner wall and stockade near the Myanan Sankyaw palace, excavation of the Myaygon Palace site at Pagan etc."⁸

In 1999, SPDC copied the style of Burmese monarchs by hoisting an umbrella on the spire of Shwedagon Pagoda like kings Shinbyushin and Mindon. In 2000, the ruling junta built a grand marble Buddha image, "Min Dhamma" which symbolized monarchical power, similar to the practices of kings in the Konbaung dynasty such as kings Bagyidaw and Mindon Min. Interestingly, during 2001-2003, the government officially claimed that they had discovered and acquired three white elephants. This is similar to the status of kings Bayinnaung, Alaungpaya and Shinbyusin as lords of the white elephant. In Burmese worldview, the white elephant is a symbol of universal monarch and brings peace, stability and prosperity to the nation. The current regime

⁶ Rattanaporn Pongpattana, *Buddhism and Political Legitimation in Burma (1988-2003)*, p. 1.

⁷ Nawratha, *Destiny of the Nation*, The News and Periodicals Enterprise by U Hla Kyin under Exemption No. (286), 1995, p. 143-145.

⁸ Hugh Macdougall, *From the Rangoon: The New Light of Myanmar*, Centre for East Asian and Pacific Studies, University of Illinois, 1996 (Mimeographed), p. 29.

has invoked the tradition by naming its most recently found white elephant, “Yaza Gaha Thiri Pissaya Gaza Yaza”, which means “Royal Elephant That Bestows Grace upon the Nation” in ancient Pali.⁹



Picture 10

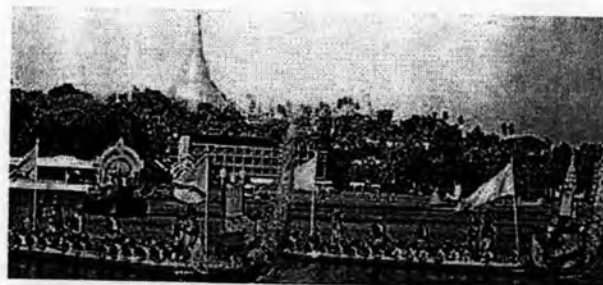


Picture 11

Picture 10-11 Senior General Than Shwe in Brahman costume was hoisting the *hti* on the Spire of Shwehtidaw Pagoda, Mon State (in 2001)

Available from: www.myanmar.gov.mm

The SLORC/SPDC repeatedly refers to the glorious past of the Burmese empires and has used royal traditions to symbolize its absolute power and build the historical pride of the Burmese nation. Moving the capital from Yangon to Naypyidaw is a significant attempt to turn back to traditional roots, in imitation of Burmese kings who relocated their royal capitals. The reconstruction and renovation of ancient palaces and capitals reflect the attention that the SPDC has paid to the capital as a symbol of national spirit and cultural heritage.



Picture 12 Ancient Royal Barges Ceremony Recovered by SPDC

Available from: www.myanmar.gov.mm

⁹ Rattanaporn Pongpattana, *Buddhism and Political Legitimation in Burma (1988-2003)*, p.70.

Shifting the capital to Naypyidaw is the most salient point in the use of royal traditions in order to unite the Burmese spirit and cultural identity. Religious and royal activities of the past continued in the post-colonial period and dramatically increased during the period of SLORC/SPDC. The political system of a military dictatorship in Myanmar today shares similar characteristics with the ancient monarchical systems in terms of leader's absolute command and power manifestation. In these circumstances, moving the capital to Naypyidaw is an imitation of an ancient tradition practiced by Burmese rulers over the centuries.

Military leaders in SLORC/SPDC have claimed to be the reincarnation of various Burmese kings; for example, General Saw Maung thinks of himself as King Kyanzittha of Pagan¹⁰ while some sources say that Senior General Than Shwe is inclined to act like king Bodawpaya of the Konbaung period. In this respect, it is possible that Than Shwe is consciously following traditional history and believes that moving the capital to Pyinmana represents an ancient practice. "Perhaps the new "royal city" of Naypyidaw is Than Shwe's attempt at formalizing a new dynasty."¹¹ Additionally, "the move to Naypyidaw represents an attempt to relocate Burmese identity from one imposed by foreign invaders (Rangoon), to one that reflects a correct understanding (according to the generals) of the country's history."¹²

In terms of geography, the ruling junta is following the policy of Burmese monarchs, especially of the Toungoo and Konbaung dynasties, of moving the capital back to the dry zone, or ancestral home of the Burmese people and the traditional heartland of Burmese culture. Pyinmana is situated in the upper Sittang basin like ancient Toungoo, the spiritual stronghold where Burmese military state recovered and evolved into a powerful kingdom after the fall of the first Burmese empire. It is also conceivable that the ruling junta wants to establish the historical military pride of the Tatmadaw; in moving the capital to the Sittang valley, the Burmese military can recover

¹⁰ Author's interview with Professor Guy Lubeigt (French specialist in Burmese Buddhism) at Southeast Asian Studies Centre, Chulalongkorn University, February 2007.

¹¹ Quoted in Aung Saw, *Behold A New Empire*, Irrawaddy, October 2006, Vol. 14 No. 10, p. 24.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.25.

and enhance a patriotic spirit among the soldiers in the armed forces. Hence, Pinyinana is a symbol of Burmese tradition and military spiritual encouragement at the same time.

More interestingly, the move to Naypyidaw shares some characteristics in terms of traditions with the move from Ava to Amarapura by King Bodawpaya. This king established Amarapura as his royal capital and seven days later, he returned to Ava to remove all of his subjects and servants to the new capital. "Thus were these miserable inhabitants compelled to quite their home with all its comforts and faced with serious fevers and the stagnant waters in the new dusty capital."¹³ In the same manner, Than Shwe officially established Naypyidaw as his royal capital on 6 November and five days later, returned to Yangon to relocate his servants, bureaucrats and some Burmese people back to the new capital. "Ministers, directors, officials and staff of government ministries were ordered to leave their families behind for an indefinite length of time. Those who resigned or refused to go face jail sentences ranging from three to five years."¹⁴ There are also rumors that some groups of ordinary people were forced to walk from Yangon to Naypyidaw like subjects of Burmese monarchs in the past.¹⁵ When these people and bureaucrats arrived at the new dusty capital, they faced with problems with living conditions such as the stagnant waters and unfinished accommodation.

The current capital relocation, especially in the process and ceremonies therefore appears to be influenced to some degree by ancient royal traditions. It represents the government's attempts to turn back to cultural roots for building historical pride and charismatic image of military leader (Than Shwe) like powerful Burmese monarch. Moving to Naypyidaw is not only a reflection of Burmese identity, but also the manifestation of SPDC's absolute power in national politics. Moreover, transferring a

¹³ Vincenzo Sangermano, *The Burmese Empire A Hundred Years Ago*, Orchid Press, Bangkok, 1995, p. 68.

¹⁴ Quoted in Myint Shwe, 'The Move to Pinyinana', Bangkok Post, 4 December 2005, Available from: http://www.bangkokpost.com/Perspective/04Dec2005_pers01.php

¹⁵ Author's interview with Professor Guy Lubeigt, February 2007.

capital is an action where the Burmese rulers (past kings and present government) would first look to the past for lessons in keeping the spiritual and cultural security.

5.2 The Adoption and Adaptation of Astrology

Astrology has always played an important role in Burmese society and political culture. Burmese monarchs were strong believers in Theravada Buddhism, Hindu cosmology and mystical Brahman astrologers. All the Burmese kings, though being Theravada Buddhists, consistently consulted their Brahman astrologers, i.e. the Indian Brahman “white Huyar” and the Burmese Brahman “brown Huyar”, on affairs of state, the supernatural and the royal family.¹⁶

General Ne Win was renowned for his faith in astrology, numerology and other occult beliefs. His lucky number was nine, so the Burmese currency was expanded on the advice of his astrologer to include 45 kyat and 90 kyat notes, multiples of the magic numeral.¹⁷ The rationale is also that both digits add up to nine: $4+5=9$ and $9+0=9$.¹⁸ He is reputed to have once told his aircraft pilot to circle Rangoon nine times, while he rode in the aircraft on a wooden horse credited with the power of warding off ill fortune.¹⁹ Ne Win’s successors, the current regime, are also obsessed with astrology and numbers. Even when plotting a coup, the conspirators consulted astrologers—the present junta seized power on the 18th day of September, 1988, a date supposedly advised by astrologers.²⁰

¹⁶ Maung Chan, *Burma Capital Moves to Pyinmana, WHY?*, 11 November 2005, Available from: <http://www.peacehall.com/news/gb/english/2005/11/200511110401.shtml>

¹⁷ Khin Maung Soe, *World Cup punters keep Burma’s astrologers busy*, July 2006, Available from: <http://www.irrawaddy.org/aviewer.asp?a=5941&z=107>

¹⁸ Bertil Lintner, *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm, 1999, p. 339.

¹⁹ Khin Maung Soe, *World Cup punters keep Burma’s astrologers busy*, July 2006, Available from: <http://www.irrawaddy.org/aviewer.asp?a=5941&z=107>

²⁰ Ibid.

Astrology plays a crucial role in the junta's politics. The junta has appointed a committee of astrologers to help draft policies and decide on what date a festival is held.²¹ "Former prime minister and military intelligence chief Gen. Khin Nyunt fared no better with his chief astrologer, Bodaw Than Hla, who clearly didn't predict that in 2004 his client would be toppled from power, given a 44-year suspended prison sentence and placed under house arrest."²²

Senior General Than Shwe rules with the help of astrologers and is in turn ruled by those of his wife, Kyaing Kyaing, who was reportedly told by one sage that her husband was the reincarnation of a Burmese king.²³ On 26 and 27 August, 2005, Mars was approaching its nearest point to Earth. The "royal" astrologer told General Than Swe that the ruler would meet catastrophe or somebody would usurp the throne. General Than Swe asked the fortune-teller in panic for advice. So the astrologer told him to ward off evil ("yeddayah chay" in Burmese) by spreading a rumor far and wide that (the sale of) millions of gold is out ("Than-ne-chi-Shwe-yaung-htwet-pyi" in Burmese), in other words, "Than Shwe is out". Than Shwe means in Burmese "millions of gold". In this way the critical period would pass and the evil or the pretender would disappear, declared the "royal" astrologer.²⁴

²¹ Maung Chan, *Burma Capital Moves to Pyinmana, WHY?*, 11 November 2005, Available from: <http://www.peacehall.com/news/gb/english/2005/11/200511110401.shtml>

²² Quoted in Khin Maung Soe, *World Cup punters keep Burma's astrologers busy*, Available from: <http://www.irrawaddy.org/aviewer.asp?a=5941&z=107>

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ See in <http://www.peacehall.com/news/gb/english/2005/11/200511110401.shtml>

Capital relocation in Burma was influenced by the advice of royal astrologers, for example, the move from Ava to Amarapura in the reign of King Bodawpaya and the relocation from Amarapura back to Ava by King Bagyidaw. Many people in Myanmar still strongly believe in ancient sooth-saying and attribute the current capital relocation to Than Shwe's faith in astrologers, who recently began predicting that his government would fall if he did not quickly set up a new capital. The astrologers have warned that Than Shwe's star is in decline and will reach its nadir in April (some sources say in February). The only way the ruling general can save the regime, according to their predictions, is to move the capital from Yangon.²⁵

Interestingly, astrological factors can also be linked to natural disasters. Yangon has been affected by earthquakes and the tsunami on December 26, 2004. The tidal wave destroyed over 600 houses in 29 villages, leaving 3,460 people homeless in five divisions and states -- Tanintharyi, Yangon, Bago, Ayeyawaddy, and Rakhine state.²⁶ Moreover, the important Mawdinson Pagoda in Ayeyawaddy Division (closed to Yangon Division) was heavily damaged by the earthquake that caused the tsunami, which also took place at the full moon day of Nadaw a Buddhist religious day in Burmese culture. This phenomenon was perceived by the Burmese people as a bad omen. According to the Burmese worldview, earthquakes and other natural disasters, solar and lunar eclipses, even white elephants are often linked with ominous and fortuitous events. In this circumstance, "Burmese soothsayers saw the Sumatra earthquake as a bad omen and a harbinger of political upheaval, perhaps a change of government. The current year* will certainly be a crucial one for the regime."²⁷

²⁵ Richard C. Paddock, *Abrupt relocation of Burma capital linked to astrology*, Los Angeles Times, 1 January 2006, Available from: <http://www.boston.com/news/world/asia/articles/2006/01/01.shtml>

²⁶ Xinhua, *Myanmar, Chinese experts to study earthquake belt of extinct volcanoes*, 22 January 2005, Available from: http://english.people.com.cn/200501/22/eng20050122_171549.html

* The year 2005 according to the source below

²⁷ Quoted in Aung Zaw, *So What's in Store for Burma in 2005?*, January 2005, Available from: <http://www.irrawaddy.org/aviewer.asp?a=4335&z=102>

In this regard, it is possible that the ruling junta is significantly concerned about bad omens from natural disasters and perceives natural phenomena as the cause of political turmoil and upheaval. "In May 1930, a major earthquake rocked Pegu and Yangon Divisions, leaving hundreds dead. In the same year there was a nation-wide uprising against British colonial rule. In July 1975, a powerful earthquake struck ancient Pagan town. That year saw the ruthless suppression of an uprising by workers and students. In August 1988, an earthquake measuring 6.8 on the Richter scale, and with its epicenter on the India-Burma border, rocked parts of the country. That was the year of the popular uprising that toppled the government that had ruled Burma for 26 years."²⁹ Thus, natural phenomena can be linked to astrological factors as bad omens which more or less make the ruling government feel insecure about having the seat of power in Yangon.³⁰

The adoption and adaptation of astrology can be seen in the process of transferring the capital. Than Shwe selected an auspicious time for leaving the capital, at 6:37 am on 6 November, and opening 11 ministries at 11 a.m. on 11 November (the 11th month). This suggests astrologers have had a hand in the process. It is believed that Than Shwe's lucky number is six and a holy number for a new capital is eleven. On that day, "another convoy of 1,100 military trucks left the same junction town carrying 11 military battalions and 11 government ministries from Yangon to Pyinmana. Many Burmese believe the journeys were astrologically set by Gen Than Shwe. The 75-year-old ruler will govern the new capital from a lavish 110-room palace on top of a hill."³¹ In addition, the government held an Armed Forces Day ceremony on March 27, 2006 at its new capital, Pyinmana. The place used for the ceremony was 11 kilometers from Pyinmana and after the ceremony; Than Shwe officially established his royal capital in that location, namely Naypyidaw.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ It is also said that the new capital would be named Yanlon, which translates as 'secure from strife' according to astrological advice

³¹ Quoted in Myint Shwe, *The Move to Pyinmana*, Bangkok Post, 4 December 2005, Available from: http://www.bangkokpost.com/Perspective/04Dec2005_pers01.php

The influence of astrology is significant in Burmese spiritual beliefs and cultural identity. Superstitious belief systems and Buddhist cosmology are perceived as the main pillars of Burmese society. In this regard, moving a capital is a royal tradition deeply influenced by astrologers who act as soothsayers and ritual makers. From a Burmese perspective, astrological advice will provide a holy atmosphere to the ceremonies, ensure good omens for the nation and can convince people about the prosperity to come. Therefore, the capital relocation from Yangon to Naypyidaw is affected to some degree by astrological factors.*

5.3 The Adoption and Adaptation of Anti-Colonialism

The ruling military junta and most Burmese people are very sensitive about issues of cultural identity and colonialism. They have never trusted westerners and British colonialism remains a bitter experience. British colonial policy was based upon the colonial power's determining role in keeping the country together with its many different ethnic groups; but from a Burmese perspective, the British divide and rule approach to ruling Burma sowed distrust, tension, disunity and discord among the country's ethnic groups.³² And the Burmese cultural heritage and monarchical institution were destroyed in the British occupation.

Britain had already conquered half of the kingdom in 1826 and in 1852 had taken over the trade in rice, teak, precious stones, etc. During the 1824-26 war, the British took over the great Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon and permitted their soldiers to enter while still wearing their boots - a blatant act of profanity as Buddhists remove

* Even though most people attribute the current capital relocation to astrological factors, there are no explicit evidences because most information comes from gossips and rumors and the author personally believes that the move to Pyinmana is affected to some degree by astrological factor. It is an additional factor to decorate and fulfill the process and ceremonies of capital relocation rather than the real important factor.

³² U Myint, *Dispelling the Colonial Myth*, 14 October 2003, Available from: <http://www.irrawaddy.org/com/2003/com47.html>

their footwear when entering religious areas and their home as a mark of respect.³³ In 1852 the British again attacked the fortified pagoda and their soldiers swept across the countryside, ransacking pagodas for their gold and silver Buddha statues. In 1886, the palace in Mandalay was renamed Fort Dufferin, and became the Upper Burma Club for British officers.³⁴ Since then, the symbol of kingship and Burmese historical pride were totally destroyed.

The current government and most Burmans still perceive the intrusion of colonialism into their lives. They saw the British as a threat not just against their culture and religion, but also against the unity and integrity of the national spirit and identity. Myanmar military rulers view western influences as a fundamental threat to Burmese social values. This attitude is rooted in the experience of colonial rule, but appears to have grown due to recent development in Thailand, for example, "which too many Burmese provides a forbidding example of the cultural decay and social dislocation caused by the spread of decadent Western values. The rejection of foreign cultures has taken on extreme dimensions within the military leadership because cultural 'purification' has become a political project intrinsically tied in with the quest for national unity and sovereignty."³⁵

The ruling military leaders have enormous pride in Burmese culture and have tried to sustain it while other states have become internationalized. In the post Cold war period, the ruling junta has continuously claimed that Burmese culture and spirit are under attack from the process of westernization and the current junta also views globalization as the emergence of neo-colonialism which has threaten Burmese culture like British colonialism in the past. The SLORC/SPDC, after seizing power, claimed its duty as the protector of national sovereignty and has continuously conducted an 'anti-colonialism' policy to preserve national pride and cultural roots.

³³ Mikael Gravers, *Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma: An Essay on the Historical Practice of Power*, Biddles Ltd, Guildford and King's Lynn, UK, 1999, p. 8.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

³⁵ Quoted in Morten B. Pedersen, *International Policy on Burma: Coercion, Persuasion, or Cooperation? Assessing The Claims*, p.222.

In these circumstances, moving the capital to Naypyidaw can be perceived as the government's paranoia of western colonialism and the adoption and adaptation of xenophobic nationalism as the ideological instrument binding the state together. Capital relocation is not an unusual phenomenon and as occurred in other former colonial states, for example, Tanzania, Malawi and Nigeria. Yangon is a "colonial" capital which is peripherally located, on the coast - logical for an outward-looking, export-oriented colonial administration. It has a "regional" rather than a "national" character because it is not located in the dry zone which is recognized as the ancestral place where the Burmese state originated and evolved. It tends to be centre of foreign, European investment and was established by foreigner to benefit the international trade of British intruders. Furthermore, the colonial associations of Yangon are sometimes felt to be galling to the current military government. The capital city is necessarily perceived as a symbol of independent national pride but in this context, Yangon is a British colonial legacy.

Yangon was imposed as capital by and for outside economic and political interests. It had no autochthonous religious, historical or cultural basis for being anointed the centre of Burma's culture (except Shwedagon Pagoda), and has been a constant reminder of the country's colonial experience. Fittingly, it has lasted only 57 years as capital.³⁶ The relocation to Pyinmana is a return to Burma's historical, religious, cultural (and therefore, psychological) roots, "which had been rudely interrupted by colonial Britain and is only now correcting itself."³⁷

In the post Cold war era, the urban landscape of Yangon has been extensively transformed by the power of modernization, westernization and industrialization. The influence of a free trade economy and modern culture has dramatically decayed Burmese cultural identity and social values in Yangon. Not so long ago, Burmese

³⁶ Michael Aung-Thwin, *From Rangoon to Pyinmana, It's not fear of a US invasion, it's simply a return to the location of the traditional, pre-colonial seat of power*, Available from <http://www.burmanet.org/news/2005/11/28/bangkok-post-from-rangoon-to-pyinmana>.

³⁷ Ibid.

people took pride in remaining loyal to traditional dress styles, in contrast to westernizing trends in neighboring countries. But global fashions attract growing numbers of the younger generation who can afford them, so much so that college authorities have imposed a mandatory dress code on university students, requiring them to wear traditional Myanmar longyis or be barred from campus.³⁷The urban characteristics of Yangon are still dominated by colonial-era buildings while the modern skyscrapers such as luxury hotels, condominiums, upscale suburban developments and shopping centers are constructed throughout the city. So, Yangon in the 21st Century is a place combining the legacy of British colonialism and the emergence of neo-colonialism, and is losing its historical and cultural significance. In this respect, moving a capital to Pynmana is an important anti-colonialist project to recover Burmese national pride and keep Burmese cultural identity in the context of globalization.



Picture 13: British Colonial Building in Yangon

Source: www.summitconsulting.com



Picture 14: Modern Skyscrapers in Yangon

Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yangon>

5.4 Conclusion

The capital relocation is driven to some degree by socio-cultural factors to strengthen conformity to the military's world view and to associate the military with historical patriotic icons. Moreover, it is influenced by a historical legacy which has been passed from generation to generation. The ruling leaders also want to fulfill the process of transferring a capital through holy ceremonies based on auspicious moments.

³⁷ Aye Aye Win, "New Dress Code for Burmese Students," The Irrawaddy online, 29 July 2004, Available from www.irrawaddy.org.

As a result, the military junta has adopted and adapted ancient royal traditions, astrological principles and a policy of anti-western colonialism to build historical and national pride and uplift the image of the current government as comparable to Burmese monarchical institutions in the past.