

**“Understanding Myanmar’s Development”:
Research Fellowship Program 2013-2014**

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

The kinds of projects we are interested in funding --

1. Research projects must be concerned with the *social* and *cultural* aspects of changes underway in contemporary Myanmar. This fellowship is to support *social science research*, not natural science. To give an example:

- We will *not* consider a project to study changing pH-balance in a river as a consequence of fertilizer run-off. However, we *would* be interested in a project on how a particular rural community is responding to changing environmental conditions in their area.

2. We prefer small-scale, community- or village-based studies. Small-scale studies are feasible for an independent researcher working in a limited (12-month) time frame. If you choose your research site well, it is possible to design a small-scale study that will yield valuable information about large and significant issues facing the country.

3. We seek applicants who will be actively involved in conducting field research: observing a community, interviewing people, conducting focus group discussions and administering surveys. We expect that *most* of the data will be collected by the research fellow, not by hired research assistants. We support “hands-on” research, not research “at a distance.” Field research can be supplemented by library and web-based research.

4. This fellowship is for *research* projects, not development projects. For example, we will not consider a proposal that seeks funding to build a rainwater collection system, or develop a model organic farm, or upgrade a computer network (even if that network will be used for research purposes). These may be worthy projects, but they are not “research” because they are not concerned with the pursuit of research questions.

Some possible topics --

Your proposed research project should have something to do with the current social, political, economic and environmental changes occurring in Myanmar. The following list provides some examples to stimulate your thinking. Other topics are also possible. Note that all of these topics can be focused with reference to a specific locality, community or situation. We prefer well-focused research projects.

Social and economic development

- Community organization and social change
- Landscape transformation and cultural heritage preservation
- Religion and development: monasteries and humanitarian aid
- Monastic education in contemporary Myanmar
- Spirit mediums and popular religion in contemporary Myanmar
- Women's participation in decision making
- Family structure and change in rural communities
- Child laborers in urban Myanmar: what are their lives like?
- Fishing communities and the changing economy
- Cottage industries and the market economy
- Labor migration and its impact on family life in [*place*].
- Migrant remittances and rural economy: a case study from [*name location*].
- Labor laws and practices
- Returning Myanmar diaspora and their impact on society
- Impact of new road construction on social-economic life
- Traditional performance genres in modern society
- Transmission of cultural knowledge
- Culture tourism and eco-tourism

Agrarian transformation, environment and climate change

- Local institutions and forest management in [*name of location*]
- Customary land use, local knowledge and sustainable development
- Land tenure issues and the social-economic impact of landlessness
- Social mechanisms for managing debt in rural communities
- Agricultural intensification, cash crops and their impact on local livelihoods
- Local initiatives for alternative agriculture (organic produce, seed-saving, etc.)
- Farmers' cooperatives
- How do rural people respond to droughts and floods?
- Community responses to biodiversity protection in a Protected Area (PA)
- Extractive industries and local communities
- Small-scale rural electrification efforts: what kinds of programs are working?
- Gender relations and resource management

Health and health care systems

- Health care systems in rural communities
- The role of traditional healers in health care
- Pharmacies' role in the health-care system
- Dentistry and oral health care
- Health-seeking behavior among [*specific groups*]
- Medical pluralism
- Community responses to... [*specific diseases: leprosy/ HIV-AIDS/ mental illnesses*]
- Trauma and social suffering
- Access to clean water and sanitation
- Food, nutrition and changing consumption behaviors

Media and society

- Basic computer and inter-net training in rural Myanmar
- Information flows and mobile phones
- Social media and social networks in Myanmar.
- Satellites and transnational media
- Ethnic-minority language print and broadcast media
- Images of ethnic minorities in the media
- Writers as public intellectuals
- Public spaces and public expression

Components of a Research Proposal --

1. Research Problem. At the beginning of your proposal, you need to explain *the significance of your project*. Why is your topic something that we need to know more about? Why is it important?

Sometimes proposal-writers are confused by the word “problem. Partly, it is a reference *social* problems: like the problem of urban poverty, or the problem of farmers with unsustainable debt, or the problem of deteriorating natural resources. However, the phrase “research problem” can also refer to an *intellectual problem* – for example, if you want to compare agricultural market reforms in Myanmar with agricultural policies and practices in another country (like Cambodia). Sometimes a “research problem” refers to a new “angle” for looking at a situation: for example if you want to consider the role of *gender* in a particular situation. Put most simply: a “research problem” is *an important issue that needs to be better understood*.

When you discuss your “research problem,” you provide background information about your topic and you explain to your reader why the research you are proposing will be important and valuable.

2. Research question(s). In this section, you express your research project in the form of one or more clearly worded *questions*. What exactly do you want to learn with your study? Note that while your “research problem” is fairly general description of your topic, your “research questions” should be quite focused and specific.

3. Research objectives. These are your specific goals in carrying out your project. They are closely related to research questions.

4. Methods. In your methods section, you should also explain about your chosen research site and the methods you will use to gather your data, such as observation, interviewing, focus group discussions and surveys. Different kinds of projects and

questions require different kinds of methods. If you are accepted to the fellowship program, we will discuss research methodology in more detail, but for now, tell us how you imagine your project will be carried out.

5. Plan. It is important to design a project that can be completed in a 12-month time frame. If your project is too grand and ambitious in scope, it won't be feasible. By writing your plan or schedule, you show us that you are thinking in a practical way about how the project can be completed.

**** Take heart.** Writing a research proposal is a complex process. Researchers usually write many versions of their proposal and continue revising even after their research is underway. The proposal you submit with your application will give us a sense of your readiness to undertake a year-long research project. If you are admitted into the program, you will be asked to revise the proposal again following the suggestions of your advisors at Chiang Mai University.

Proposals should be about 1800-2000 words in length (max 2500 words, excluding references).

Proposals must be written by the applicant, not by a supervisor or colleague.