

## Fair Trade Shopping, Books, Films, and Music *Girl Determined, Burma* December 2012

### Fair Trade Shopping



This month's Fair Trade recommendations are for products created by women in the refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border. The oppressive military regime in Burma wreaked havoc on the country for decades, and forced many to flee to neighboring Thailand for safety. The Burmese army has particularly targeted the Karen and Karenni minority ethnic groups because of their struggle for regional autonomy.

Women's Education for Advancement and Empowerment (WEAVE - <http://bit.ly/Qhk5zc>) is a community-based non-profit organization founded in 1990 to empower women through health education, literacy, income generation, and human rights and leadership training. WEAVE programs address the needs of more than 300 Karen and Karenni women in the Mae Sot and Mae Sariang refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border.

WEAVE's income generation program provides these women with the training to further develop their craft skills and to generate critical income for the health and education needs of their families. As a member of the Fair Trade Federation, WEAVE helps market traditional Burmese embroidery and weaving at a price that ensures fair wages for refugee women. In addition, WEAVE's Women Capacity Development project promotes women-led project management so that participants learn self-sufficiency and economic independence.



In the camps, female refugees, many of whom have suffered sexual violence at the hands of Burmese soldiers, face the incredibly difficult task of providing for both themselves and their families inside the camps, with little opportunity to earn an income. WEAVE collaborates with local and international groups to implement programs that address health and women's issues in the camps, and creates opportunities for women to make and sell crafts. By promoting crafts production, WEAVE provides women with a sense of security as well as a means of connecting to their heritage.

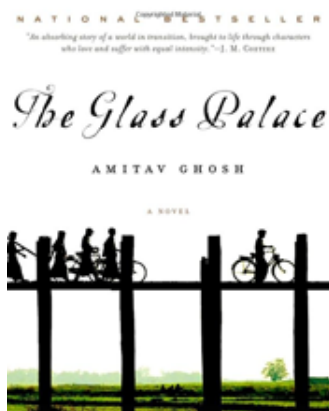
Order any of the 100% cotton scarves pictured on this page for only \$40 from Global Goods Partners - <http://bit.ly/U3YDf4>



## Recommended Books – Fiction

(Note – this month's book and film recommendations were all provided by Girl Determined)

**The Glass Palace** by Amitav Ghosh (Random House, 2002) - <http://amzn.to/UYtwAF>



Ghosh's epic novel of Burma and Malaya over a span of 115 years is the kind of "sweep of history" that readers can appreciate and even love despite its demands. Ghosh (*The Calcutta Chromosome*; *Shadow Lines*) is a beguiling and endlessly resourceful storyteller. Inspired by tales handed down to him by his father and uncle, Ghosh vividly brings to life the history of Burma and Malaya over a century of momentous change in this teeming, multigenerational saga.

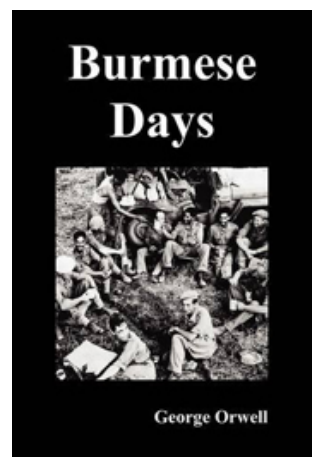
The story opens in Burma during the British invasion of 1885, as Rajkumar, a poor boy lifted on the tides of political and social chaos, befriends Dolly, a young woman in the court of the Burmese Queen. When soldiers force the royal family out of the Glass Palace and into exile, Rajkumar cannot forget Dolly. Years later, as a rich man, he goes in search of her.

"Ghosh ranges from the condescension of the British colonialists to the repression of the current Myanmar (Burmese) regime in a style that suggests E.M. Forster as well as James Michener." -David W. Henderson, Eckerd College Library

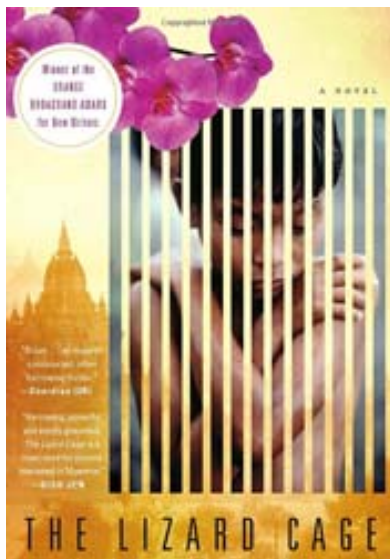
**Burmese Days** by George Orwell (Oxford Press, 1934) - <http://amzn.to/S29mqf>

Set in the waning days of the British colonial empire in Burma, Orwell uses his characteristic imagery to tell the story of a handful of Englishmen living in a settlement in Burma who congregate in the European Club, drink whiskey, and argue over an impending order to admit a token Asian. It is an insightful view of the relationship between the colonial structures alongside those of individual colonists and the Burmese people they work with and live alongside.

There's a joke in Burma (now Myanmar) that Orwell wrote not one novel about the country, but three: *Burmese Days*, *Animal Farm* and *1984*. The first takes place during the British colonial days, while the latter two more closely reflect the situation there today. (See 'Finding George Orwell in Burma', below.)



**The Lizard Cage** by Karen Connelly (Nan A. Talese, 2007) - <http://amzn.to/TVi8s4>



Beautifully written and taking us into an exotic land, Karen Connelly's debut novel *The Lizard Cage* is a celebration of the resilience of the human spirit. Teza, the novel's protagonist, once electrified the people of Burma with his protest songs against the dictatorship.

Arrested by the Burmese secret police in the days of mass protest, he is seven years into a twenty-year sentence in solitary confinement. Cut off from his family and contact with other prisoners, he applies his acute intelligence, Buddhist patience, and humor to find meaning in the interminable days, and searches for news in every being and object that is grudgingly allowed into his cell.

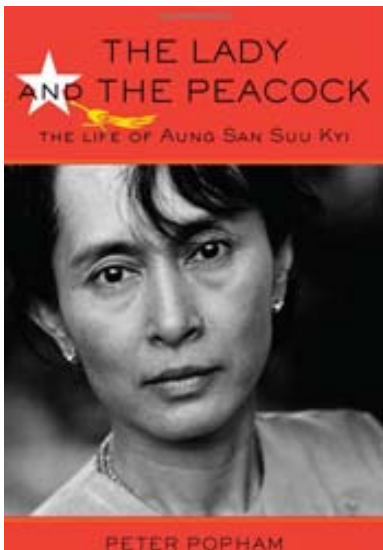
Despite his isolation, Teza has a profound influence on the people around him. His very existence challenges the brutal authority of the jailers, and his steadfast spirit inspires radical change.

"Connelly's novel combines a thriller-like pace with finely etched portraits that show how each character takes control of his own freedom." – *Publisher's Weekly*

## Recommended Books – Non-Fiction

**The Lady and the Peacock: The Life of Aung San Suu Kyi** by Peter Popham (The Experiment, March 2012)

<http://amzn.to/XNO1at>



Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi—known to the world as an icon for democracy and nonviolent dissent in oppressed Burma, and to her followers as simply “The Lady”—has recently returned to international headlines. This major new biography offers essential reading at a moment when Burma, after decades of stagnation, is once again in flux. It begins with the life of her father and growing up in India, and follows her through to the present day. The book offers insight into the experiences that brought her to represent her people in a longstanding struggle for freedom.

Peter Popham distills five years of research—including covert trips to Burma, meetings with Suu Kyi and her friends and family, and extracts from the unpublished diaries of her co-campaigner and former confidante Ma Thanegi—into this vivid portrait of Aung San Suu Kyi, illuminating her public successes and private sorrows, her intellect and enduring sense of humor, her commitment to peaceful revolution, and the extreme price she has paid for it.

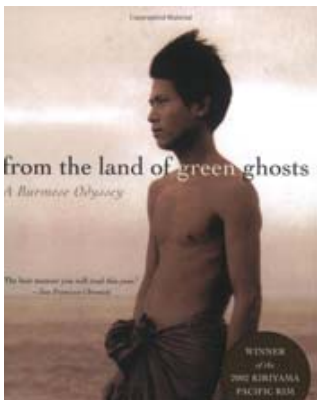
“A masterly narration of the life of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi . . . She makes one proud to be human in her company. What a gift to our world and what a splendid telling of it in this book. We are deeply indebted to Peter Popham for such a superb account.” —*Archbishop Desmond Tutu*

**Finding George Orwell in Burma** by Emma Larkin (Penguin Books, 2006) - <http://amzn.to/10Mmu79>

Larkin (a pseudonym), an American journalist based in Bangkok, believes that it was George Orwell's stint as an imperial policeman in British-ruled Burma during the 1920s that turned him into a writer of conscience. To prove her theory and assess what imprint if any he left on the culture, she bravely journeyed throughout the brutally totalitarian state to visit the places Orwell lived and worked. A meticulous observer, she captures the masked spirit of a people monitored by military spies and constantly threatened with incarceration and torture. As her risky conversations with Burmese intellectuals, writers, teashop waiters, and students reveal, censorship is severe, yet Burma remains a profoundly literary country as people harbor secret libraries and talk passionately about books. Writing with admirable suppleness and understatement, Larkin reports that Orwell is known as a prophet in Burma, so closely do *Animal Farm* and *1984* reflect what has happened in this beautiful yet tragically oppressed land. Her quest for the past illuminates the grim present in this true-life Orwellian world. - *Donna Seaman, Booklist*



**From the Land of Green Ghosts: A Burmese Odyssey** by Pascal Khoo Thwe (Harper Perennial, 2003) - <http://amzn.to/R8aRqk>

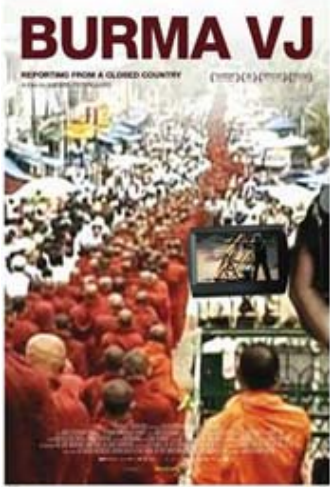


Khoo Thwe, born in 1967, debuts with a remarkable portrait of his childhood in Phekhon among the Padaung people, a sub-tribe of the Karenni (known for what outsiders call ‘giraffe women’ because of their necks being elongated by rings). Khoo Thwe enters Mandalay University during the years when thousands of student activists were killed or imprisoned by the government. A charismatic student organizer, he is forced in 1988 to flee with fellow students to the jungles on the border of Thailand. While a student, the author, working as a waiter, met John Casey, a Cambridge don who organized a miraculous rescue of the young man. It is a heartbreaking tale told with lyricism, affection and insight.

“The best memoir you will read this year.” (San Francisco Chronicle)

## Recommended Films

**Burma VJ** (2008 – 85 minutes) *Rent from Netflix* - <http://nflx.it/UkBGGL>



When, in September 2007, peaceful Buddhist monks led a massive uprising against Burma's military regime, Burma suddenly returned to the world stage. Foreign TV crews were banned from entering the country. "Joshua," a young video journalist of 27, and his crew worked undercover to counter the military regimes propaganda and keep the world informed about the state of affairs inside the closed country. It was their footage that kept the revolution alive on TV screens all over the world. Amidst marching monks, brutal police officers, and shooting military, they embark on their dangerous mission and work around the clock to keep the world informed. The regime quickly understands the power of the camera and the reporters are constantly chased by government intelligence agents who look at the media saboteurs as the biggest prey they can get. During the turbulent days of September, Joshua finds himself on an emotional rollercoaster between hope and despair, as he frantically tries to keep track of his reporters in the streets while the great uprising unfolds and comes to its tragic end. *(Read about Win Maw, video journalist and musician who was imprisoned following this filming, under 'Music' on the next page.)*

2010 Academy Award Nominee – Best Documentary Feature

**The Lady** (2012 – 133 minutes) *Watch the Trailer* - <http://amzn.to/TciHe8>

The eponymous lady is Aung San Suu Kyi, the brave, charismatic Burmese dissident and non-violent proponent of democracy, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991. The deeply moving film unfolds in flashback from 1998, when her husband, the Oxford don Michael Aris, is diagnosed with terminal cancer but refused a visa for a final reunion in Rangoon by the vindictive military government that had been holding her under house arrest. There are vivid scenes of life in Burma, but the movie is essentially about the love between Suu Kyi and Michael and the exemplary courage, resolution, and dedication to democracy they showed over the years in the face of a totalitarian regime nearly as mad as North Korea's. Michelle Yeoh and David Thewlis are impressive. Review by Philip French / The Observer



**Beyond Rangoon** (1995 – 100 minutes) *Rent from Netflix* - <http://nflx.it/TmAAtw>



American doctor Laura Bowman (Patricia Arquette) regards her life as having ended after the tragic loss of her husband and son. Her sister (Frances McDormand) has persuaded her to come along on a sightseeing tour of Burma. The trip leaves Laura numb until, impulsively venturing into the night alone, she becomes witness to a crisis moment in history: the beginning of the military dictatorship's violent crackdown on the rising democracy movement. The sight of Aung San Suu Kyi, the dissidents' inspirational leader, facing down a wall of armed soldiers with only the power of serene self-possession inspires Laura (an amazing scene - and it really did happen). *Beyond Rangoon* abounds in memorable encounters - with individuals variously supportive and terrifying, and with locations and situations where hope and catastrophe trade off like valences of the same energy. - *Richard T. Jameson /amazon*

**Noteworthy Films from the 1950s - The Bridge on the River Kwai** - <http://nflx.it/10MSPe7>, a British WWII film, is fictional, but the central events are real and give insight into the relationships between foreign armies occupying and fighting in foreign lands. **The Burmese Harp** - <http://nflx.it/Tip8N4> takes place during the end of the WWII and the Japanese occupation of parts of the country. The story uncovers the cruelty of war, the value of music and the sanctity of prayer and meditation.

## Recommended Music



### Birmanie - Burma: Traditional Music (Air Mail Music Collection)

Listen to Samples - <http://amzn.to/XO9Jv3>

Traditional music from Burma is melodious and generally without harmony. Many instruments are played in a musical scale consisting of seven tones, each associated with an animal that is said to be the producer of the tone. Each tone can be played raised, lowered or natural (corresponding to sharp, flat or natural), resulting a possible twenty-one combinations. The pat waing drum circle, for example, consists of twenty-one drums, one tuned to each tone in each possible combination, and the *saing saya* (maestro) sits in the middle using various parts of his hands to strike the drums in order to produce a melody. The *Kyi Waing* is the gong circle strung up in the same fashion and the gongs are struck with a knobbed stick and in accompaniment to the pat waing.

Win Maw has been an inspirational guitarist and songwriter in Myanmar for decades, continuing to make music even in his prison cell. He was arrested in November 2007 after shooting footage of the September 2007 monk-led uprising that featured in the Oscar-nominated documentary *Burma VJ*. The video journalist spent more than four years in jail before his release in January 2012, having already survived a six-year term between 1996 and 2002 for penning anti-regime songs. In an interview with the Democratic Voice of Burma shortly after his release, he tells about his recent spell in prison, a time in which he was able to pursue music and build allegiances with other inmates.



Read the full interview here - <http://bit.ly/Ydc1fn>



Here is a Win Maw song in English, 'Freedom from Fear', inspired by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's famous speech. It was uploaded to YouTube in September 2007 during Burma's Saffron Revolution by an anonymous group of musicians in China - <http://bit.ly/QhiPft>

Submitted by Lynn O'Connell and Marcie Christensen, DFW volunteer researchers & members