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## CHAPTER 1: PROFILE

### Introduction

Lying between the Tropic of Cancer and the equator, this kite-shaped country of approximately 55 million people shares land borders with Bangladesh to the west, India to the northwest, China to the northeast, Laos to the east, and Thailand to the southeast. The Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal form the southern and southwestern borders.<sup>1, 2, 3</sup>

Ruled from 1962 until 2011 by a brutal and repressive military junta, Burma retreated into one of the most closed and isolated states in the world.<sup>4</sup> But 2010 elections installed a nominally civilian government that has introduced some political and economic reforms and reopened Burma to the world.<sup>5, 6</sup>



© Hella Delicious  
View from Tayok Pye

Burma is culturally diverse and home to over 100 ethnic groups.<sup>7, 8, 9</sup> Most of these groups have been in Burma since the end of the first millennium C.E.<sup>10</sup> Retaining their ethnic identities and speaking many languages, groups have largely remained in the areas to which they originally migrated.<sup>11</sup> Relations among ethnic groups have often been troubled and violent. These continue to plague modern Burma as it seeks to unite as a nation and end ethnic violence.<sup>12, 13, 14</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Burma: Geography," in *The World Factbook*, 2 January 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html#>

<sup>2</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Myanmar: Land," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/400119/Myanmar>

<sup>3</sup> Robert Lee Hadden, "The Geology of Burma (Myanmar): An Annotated Bibliography of Burma's Geology, Geography and Earth Science" (bibliography, Topographic Engineering Center, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alexandria, VA, September 2008), 8, <http://www.tec.army.mil/Burma/BurmaWater.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> BBC, "Burma Profile," 5 February 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-12990563>

<sup>5</sup> "Myanmar," *New York Times*, 30 November 2012, <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/myanmar/index.html>

<sup>6</sup> BBC, "Burma Profile," 5 February 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-12990563>

<sup>7</sup> Donald M. Seekins, "Introduction," in *The A to Z of Burma (Myanmar)* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 6.

<sup>8</sup> Hannah Beech, "A Closer Look at Burma's Ethnic Minorities," *Time*, 30 January 2009, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1874981,00.html>

<sup>9</sup> Chizom Ekeh and Martin Smith, "Minorities in Burma," Minority Rights Group International, 30 October 2007, <http://www.minorityrights.org/3546/briefing-papers/minorities-in-burma.html>

<sup>10</sup> Chizom Ekeh and Martin Smith, "Minorities in Burma," Minority Rights Group International, 30 October 2007, <http://www.minorityrights.org/3546/briefing-papers/minorities-in-burma.html>

<sup>11</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Myanmar: People," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/400119/Myanmar/52569/Plant-and-animal-life#toc52572>

<sup>12</sup> Asia Portal, "The Ethnic Crises in Burma/Myanmar: 2010 and Beyond Dilemmas and Opportunities for the International Community," 11 June 2010, <http://infocus.asiaportal.info/2010/06/11/blogs-in-focus-2010-june-the-ethnic-crises-burmamyanmar-2010-and-beyond-dilemmas-opportunities-inter/>

<sup>13</sup> The New Light of Myanmar, "No Problems Unsolvably with Mutual Trust, Understanding and Empathy: President," 6 January 2013, <http://www.networkmyanmar.org/images/stories/PDF14/NLM06012013.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Renaud Egretau, "Burma's Civil Wars," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, December 2012, <http://mondediplo.com/2012/12/08burma>

## Geographic Divisions

Burma, slightly smaller than the state of Texas, is the westernmost and largest of the mainland nations of Southeast Asia.<sup>15, 16</sup> Its coastline extends from the Bangladeshi border in the northwest down the Malay Peninsula to its border with Thailand in the southeast. Southern Burma consists mainly of the western slopes of the Tenasserim Mountain Range, which forms the northern base of the Malay Peninsula. Northern or “Upper Burma,” is dominated by the broad Irrawaddy Valley, a vast central basin.<sup>17</sup> A “rugged horseshoe” of mountains surrounds the central valley, which runs north to south.<sup>18</sup>



© Hella Delicious  
Chin Hills

The five main geographic divisions in the country are the Western Mountains, the Northern Mountains, the Shan Plateau in the east, the Central Basin and Lowlands, and the Coastal Strip.<sup>19</sup>

### *Western Mountains*

The Western Mountains, averaging 1,829 m (6,000 ft) in elevation, run in a north-south direction along Burma’s western border from the Northern Mountains to the coast.<sup>20, 21</sup> The upper half of the region, which includes the Patkai Range, Naga Hills, and Chin Hills, forms the border with India. The lower half of the Western Mountains, formed by the Arakan Mountain Range, runs along the Bay of Bengal.<sup>22</sup> The Arakan Mountain Range, starting at the Chin Hills and running along the coastline to the Arakan (Rakhine) Peninsula, protect the central region from the southwestern monsoon rains, creating a semi-desert landscape called the Dry Zone.<sup>23, 24, 25</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “Burma: Geography,” in *The World Factbook*, 5 February 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html#>

<sup>16</sup> Donald M. Seekins, “Chapter 1: Introduction,” in *The A to Z of Burma (Myanmar)* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 2.

<sup>17</sup> Geographia, “Burma (Myanmar),” n.d., <http://www.geographia.com/myanmar/>

<sup>18</sup> Josef Silverstein, “Chapter One: Sources of Burmese Political Culture,” in *Burma: Military Rule and the Politics of Stagnation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 3.

<sup>19</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Myanmar: Land,” 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/400119/Myanmar>

<sup>20</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Myanmar: Land,” 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/400119/Myanmar>

<sup>21</sup> Carl Grundy-Warr, “Geography and Climate,” in *World and Its Peoples: Myanmar and Thailand* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2008), 586.

<sup>22</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Myanmar: Land,” 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/400119/Myanmar>

<sup>23</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Rakhine Mountains,” 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/31961/Rakhine-Mountains>

<sup>24</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, “Environment and Wildlife,” in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd., December 2011), 322.

<sup>25</sup> Saw Myat Yin, “Chapter 2: Geography, History and Politics,” in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Corporation, 2011), 9.

### *Northern Mountains*

The Northern Mountains lie entirely within Kachin State in the northernmost reaches of Burma and form a boundary with China. Included in the range is the nation's highest peak, Hkakabo Razi, at 5,881 m (19,295 ft).<sup>26</sup> Some of Asia's most significant rivers originate in the Northern Mountains including the Irrawaddy, the Salween, Mekong, and China's Yangtze.<sup>27, 28</sup> Steep gorges cut by these major rivers characterize the region which is home to some of the major mineral sources including jade and other precious metals that are mined in the region.<sup>29</sup> Subtropical vegetation and terraced rice paddies line the region's deep valleys.<sup>30</sup>

### *Shan Plateau*

Occupying the eastern Shan State, this plateau ranges between 750 m (2,461 ft) and 1,200 m (3,937 ft) in elevation.<sup>31</sup> The area is filled with deep valleys and gorges cut by rivers that flow through the region.<sup>32, 33</sup> The plateau originates in China, extends west to the Sittang River and merges in the north with Burma's Northern Mountains. To the south, it joins with the Dawna Range and the Tenasserim Mountains of Burma's Malay Peninsula.<sup>34</sup> The regional climate is tropical with three seasons: a humid dry season (March through May); a wet season (June through September); and the cool season (October through February).<sup>35</sup>



© Hella Delicious  
Shan Plateau

<sup>26</sup> United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization, "Forestry Country Profiles: Geographic Division," 28 May 2012, <http://www.fao.org/forestry/18310/en/mmr/>

<sup>27</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Myanmar: Land," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/400119/Myanmar>

<sup>28</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 2: Geography, History and Politics," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Corporation, 2011), 8.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Lee Hadden, "The Geology of Burma (Myanmar): An Annotated Bibliography of Burma's Geology, Geography and Earth Science" (bibliography, Topographic Engineering Center, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alexandria, VA, September 2008), 6–7, <http://www.tec.army.mil/Burma/BurmaWater.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> Francis Doral, Clare Griffiths, and Brian Bell, eds., "Land of Rice and Rivers," in *Insight Guide: Burma* (Maspeth, NY: Langenscheidt Publishers Ind., 2005), 47.

<sup>31</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Shan Plateau," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/538407/Shan-Plateau>

<sup>32</sup> Carl Grundy-Warr, "Geography and Climate," in *World and Its Peoples: Myanmar and Thailand* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2008), 589.

<sup>33</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Shan Plateau," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/538407/Shan-Plateau>

<sup>34</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Myanmar: Land," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/400119/Myanmar>

<sup>35</sup> Carl Grundy-Warr, "Geography and Climate," in *World and Its Peoples: Myanmar and Thailand* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2008), 589.

### *Central Basin and Lowlands*

Extending from the Northern Mountains to the delta region, between the Arakan Mountain Range and the Shan Plateau, is the Central Basin and Lowlands. This area's fertile valleys are formed by the rich alluvial deposits of the Irrawaddy and Sittang Rivers.<sup>36</sup> The Bago Mountains separate the Irrawaddy Valley and the Sittang Valley.<sup>37</sup> The delta area is uniformly flat, never reaching an elevation of more than 18 m (59 ft).<sup>38</sup> A line of extinct volcanic peaks, located in the basin, includes the largest of the eroded volcanic cones, Popa Hill (1,518 m/4,980 ft).<sup>39</sup> The region includes three major hydrocarbon basins along with Burma's major oil fields.<sup>40</sup>



© Scott Edmunds  
Popa hill

### *Coastal Strip*

Burma has an extensive coast bounded by a multitude of islands. The upper half of the coast, the Arakan Coastal Plain, lies between the Bay of Bengal to the west and the Arakan Mountain Range to the east. This alluvial coast boasts rich farmland.<sup>41</sup> The coast winds east to the Irrawaddy and Sittang deltas. South of the deltas is Burma's lower coast, the Tenasserim Coastal Plain. This narrow strip of land, ranging from 48 km (30 mi) to 90 km (56 mi) in width, forms part of the border with Thailand on the Malay Peninsula. The coast is bordered by the Andaman Sea to the west and the Tenasserim Mountains to the east.<sup>42, 43</sup>

## **Climate**

Burma sits in the monsoon belt, but its climate and rainfall varies considerably because of topographic features. The Tropic of Cancer divides Burma into two climatic zones. The southern

<sup>36</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Myanmar: Land," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/400119/Myanmar>

<sup>37</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Myanmar: Land," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/400119/Myanmar>

<sup>38</sup> Robert Lee Hadden, "The Geology of Burma (Myanmar): An Annotated Bibliography of Burma's Geology, Geography and Earth Science" (bibliography, Topographic Engineering Center, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alexandria, VA, September 2008), 7, <http://www.tec.army.mil/Burma/BurmaWater.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> Robert Lee Hadden, "The Geology of Burma (Myanmar): An Annotated Bibliography of Burma's Geology, Geography and Earth Science" (bibliography, Topographic Engineering Center, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alexandria, VA, September 2008), 7–8, <http://www.tec.army.mil/Burma/BurmaWater.pdf>

<sup>40</sup> Fortitude Energy, "Myanmar General Information," April 2012, [http://www.fortitudeenergy.ca/uploads/Summary\\_Document- Myanmar Central Basin- April 2012.pdf](http://www.fortitudeenergy.ca/uploads/Summary_Document-Myanmar_Central_Basin- April 2012.pdf)

<sup>41</sup> United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization, "Forestry Country Profiles: Geographic Division," 28 May 2012, <http://www.fao.org/forestry/country/18310/en/mmr/>

<sup>42</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Tenasserim," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/587139/Tenasserim>

<sup>43</sup> Carl Grundy-Warr, "Geography and Climate," in *World and Its Peoples: Myanmar and Thailand* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2008), 589.

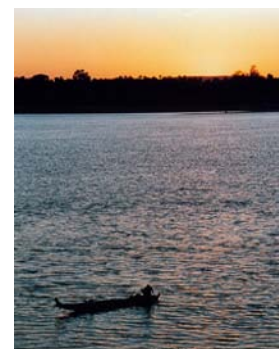
two-thirds of the nation is largely tropical while the northern third is sub-tropical with a more temperate climate.<sup>44</sup>

Seasonal monsoons are the major factor affecting climate and create three distinct seasons. The hot dry season extends from March to May. Throughout much of the country, temperatures average in the 30s°C (low 90s°F). Temperatures around Rangoon are only slightly cooler ranging from 24 to 36°C (75 to 97°F).<sup>45, 46</sup> The rainy season is around late May to October. During this time, temperatures in Rangoon average around 29°C (84°F). The cool, dry season occurs between November and February with average temperatures around 20°C (68°F) in Mandalay and slightly warmer in Rangoon at 25°C (77°F).<sup>47, 48</sup>



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Ayeyarwady

Rainfall averages, by themselves, mean little in Burma due to topographic variations. In the Dry Zone, rainfall can register less than 72 cm (28in) a year. The region lies in the “rain shadow” of the Arakan Mountains, which form a natural barrier between the Dry Zone and the Bay of Bengal.<sup>49</sup> The rest of the country experiences heavy rainfall, almost all of which occurs during the summer. The Arakan and Tenasserim coastal regions receive up to 500 cm (196 in) of rain a year. On average, annual rainfall ranges from 150–250 cm (59–99 in) in the Irrawaddy Delta and between 100–200 cm (40–79 in) in the eastern highlands and the north.<sup>50, 51</sup>



© Arian Zwegers  
Chindwin River

## Major Rivers

### *The Chindwin River*

The Chindwin rises in the far north, near the border with India and flows southwest for 840 km (522 mi).<sup>52</sup> The upper part dissects successive mountain ranges covered in jungle. The lower reaches of

<sup>44</sup> Robert Lee Hadden, “The Geology of Burma (Myanmar): An Annotated Bibliography of Burma’s Geology, Geography and Earth Science” (bibliography, Topographic Engineering Center, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alexandria, VA, September 2008), 10, <http://www.tec.army.mil/Burma/BurmaWater.pdf>

<sup>45</sup> Donald M. Seekins, “Chapter 1: Introduction,” in *The A to Z of Burma (Myanmar)* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 3.

<sup>46</sup> Robert Lee Hadden, “The Geology of Burma (Myanmar): An Annotated Bibliography of Burma’s Geology, Geography and Earth Science” (bibliography, Topographic Engineering Center, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alexandria, VA, September 2008), 9, <http://www.tec.army.mil/Burma/BurmaWater.pdf>

<sup>47</sup> Donald M. Seekins, “Introduction,” in *The A to Z of Burma (Myanmar)* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 3.

<sup>48</sup> Robert Lee Hadden, “The Geology of Burma (Myanmar): An Annotated Bibliography of Burma’s Geology, Geography and Earth Science” (bibliography, Topographic Engineering Center, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alexandria, VA, September 2008), 9, <http://www.tec.army.mil/Burma/BurmaWater.pdf>

<sup>49</sup> Richard M. Cooler, “The Art and Culture of Burma,” Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Northern Illinois University, n.d., [http://www.seasite.niu.edu/Burmese/Cooler/Intro/BurmaArt\\_Intro.htm](http://www.seasite.niu.edu/Burmese/Cooler/Intro/BurmaArt_Intro.htm)

<sup>50</sup> Reggie Ba-Pe, “Profile of Burma,” 1988, [http://members.tripod.com/Rbape/Bur\\_prof.htm](http://members.tripod.com/Rbape/Bur_prof.htm)

<sup>51</sup> Robert Lee Hadden, “The Geology of Burma (Myanmar): An Annotated Bibliography of Burma’s Geology, Geography and Earth Science” (bibliography, Topographic Engineering Center, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alexandria, VA, September 2008), 9, <http://www.tec.army.mil/Burma/BurmaWater.pdf>

<sup>52</sup> Myanmar, “The Chindwin River,” 2012, <http://www.myanmar.net/myanmar/chindwin-river.htm>

the river can span several miles in width yet may have an average depth of only three feet during the dry season. During the rainy season (June to November), the Chindwin is navigable for more than 644 km (400 mi) upstream. It ultimately joins the Irrawaddy above Pagan.<sup>53</sup>

### *The Irrawaddy (Ayeyarwady) River*

The Irrawaddy covers a distance of 2,170 km (1,350 mi) and flows entirely within Burma.<sup>54</sup> Navigable for the majority of its length, it is the country's most important transportation artery.<sup>55</sup> It follows a southerly route from its headwaters in the northern mountains. After it is joined by the Chindwin, its primary tributary, the Irrawaddy widens to as much as 6.5 km (4 mi). The Irrawaddy Delta begins about 225 km (140 mi) inland where the river branches into many tributaries. These tributaries carry mountain silt deposits, which fertilize one of the richest rice-producing areas in the world. The river ultimately empties into the Andaman Sea.<sup>56, 57</sup>

### *The Sittang River*

The 418 km (260 mi) long Sittang River flows from the western edge of the Shan Plateau to the Gulf of Martaban. Its basin is geographically cut off from the Irrawaddy by a mountain range. The river is not navigable because of a strong tidal bore and swift currents, although it is used to float timber downriver. The Sittang does not carry as much silt as the Irrawaddy and its basin, which drains Burma's eastern districts, is considerably less fertile.<sup>58, 59, 60, 61</sup>

### *The Salween*

The Salween's headwaters rise in China before crossing into Burma, where the river passes through the Shan States, the Karen Hills, and Tenasserim before flowing out into the Gulf of Martaban. The 2,415 km (1,500 mi) river traverses the deep gorges, hills, and tablelands of the Shan Plateau forming 161



© International Rivers  
Salween River

<sup>53</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Chindwin River," 2013, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/112284/Chindwin-River>

<sup>54</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Irrawaddy River," 2013, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/294719/Irrawaddy-River>

<sup>55</sup> Jan Becka, *Historical Dictionary of Myanmar* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1995), 34.

<sup>56</sup> How Stuff Works, "The Irrawaddy River," 2013, <http://geography.howstuffworks.com/asia/the-irrawaddy-river.htm>

<sup>57</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Irrawaddy River," 2013, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/294719/Irrawaddy-River>

<sup>58</sup> Kent G. Budge, "Sittang River," *The Pacific War Online Encyclopedia*, 2011, [http://pwencycl.kgbudge.com/S/i/Sittang\\_River.htm](http://pwencycl.kgbudge.com/S/i/Sittang_River.htm)

<sup>59</sup> Robert Lee Hadden, "The Geology of Burma (Myanmar): An Annotated Bibliography of Burma's Geology, Geography and Earth Science" (bibliography, Topographic Engineering Center, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alexandria, VA, September 2008), 12, <http://www.tec.army.mil/Burma/BurmaWater.pdf>

<sup>60</sup> Shelby Tucker, "Chapter Two: Geography and Ethnicity," in *Burma: The Curse of Independence* (London & Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2001), 8.

<sup>61</sup> Robert Lee Hadden, "The Geology of Burma (Myanmar): An Annotated Bibliography of Burma's Geology, Geography and Earth Science" (bibliography, Topographic Engineering Center, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alexandria, VA, September 2008), 12–13, <http://www.tec.army.mil/Burma/BurmaWater.pdf>

km (100 mi) of the border with Thailand.<sup>62, 63</sup> The force of the rapids prevent navigation 161 km (100 mi) north of the coast. The river has little commercial significance but does maintain political and military importance. The Salween creates a barrier for the peoples of the region, keeping them cut off from outside influence.<sup>64, 65</sup> The main economic activity on the river is floating timber and logs from the southeastern sections of Burma to the sea.<sup>66, 67</sup> Dams proposed for the river are meeting with major resistance as environmental groups call on the government to suspend proposed plans to build several dams along the river's course.<sup>68, 69</sup>

## Major Cities

### Rangoon

Rangoon, renamed Yangon in 1989, is situated in the Irrawaddy Delta. It is home to approximately 4.1 million people.<sup>70, 71</sup> Rangoon, an administrative capital of colonial Burma, became the national capital after independence in 1948. In 2006, Naypyidaw became Burma's new capital.<sup>72, 73</sup> Rangoon was originally a settlement that grew up around the city's famous landmark, Shwedagon Pagoda, the nation's holiest site.<sup>74, 75</sup> Upgraded to a town named Dagon by the Mons and later renamed Rangoon, its thriving shipbuilding industry reflected its status as an active port by the 19th century. Although the administrative functions of the government are in the capital of Naypyidaw, Rangoon remains the nation's trade



© Michael Coghlan  
Rangoon view

<sup>62</sup> Carl Grundy-Warr, "Geography and Climate," in *World and Its Peoples: Myanmar and Thailand* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2008), 580.

<sup>63</sup> Robert Lee Hadden, "The Geology of Burma (Myanmar): An Annotated Bibliography of Burma's Geology, Geography and Earth Science" (bibliography, Topographic Engineering Center, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alexandria, VA, September 2008), 12, <http://www.tec.army.mil/Burma/BurmaWater.pdf>

<sup>64</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Salween River," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/520121/Salween-River>

<sup>65</sup> Shelby Tucker, "Chapter Two: Geography and Ethnicity," in *Burma: The Curse of Independence* (London & Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2001), 8.

<sup>66</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Salween River," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/520121/Salween-River>

<sup>67</sup> Carl Grundy-Warr, "Geography and Climate," in *World and Its Peoples: Myanmar and Thailand* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2008), 580.

<sup>68</sup> Naw Hser Kler, "Environmental Groups Call on Government to Stop Salween River Dams," *Karen News*, 10 October 2011, <http://karennews.org/2011/10/environmental-groups-call-on-government-to-stop-salween-river-dams.html/>

<sup>69</sup> Kayan Women's Union, "Drowning the Green Ghosts of Kayanland: Impacts of the Upper Paunglaung Dam in Burma" (report, 2008), 4–16, <http://www.salweenwatch.org/images/stories/downloads/publications/drowningthegreenghostsenglish.pdf>

<sup>70</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Yangon," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/651821/Yangon>

<sup>71</sup> Thomas Brinkoff, "City Population: Myanmar," 25 July 2009, <http://www.citypopulation.de/Myanmar.html>

<sup>72</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Yangon," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/651821/Yangon>

<sup>73</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, "Yangon," in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd., December 2011), 39, 43–47.

<sup>74</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Yangon," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/651821/Yangon>

<sup>75</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, "Yangon," in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd., December 2011), 39, 43–47.

center accounting for more than 80% of foreign commerce. Rice, teak, and metal ores constitute the main exports.<sup>76, 77</sup>

### *Mandalay*

Mandalay, founded in 1857, is Burma's cultural capital and second-largest city with a population of 960,000.<sup>78, 79</sup>

Mandalay served as the Burmese royal capital from 1861 until the British conquest in 1885.<sup>80, 81</sup> Today, it is the intellectual center of its monastic community (*sangha*).<sup>82</sup> The most influential Buddhist universities in the country are located in and around the city which is said to have been visited by Buddha himself.<sup>83, 84, 85</sup> Mandalay is a major commercial center with tea packing, silk weaving, jade cutting silverware, and goldware industries.<sup>86, 87, 88</sup>



Courtesy of Wikimedia  
Mandalay Palace

### *Mawlamyine*

This southeastern city of approximately 220,000 people is an important port on the Gulf of Martaban near the Salween river's mouth.<sup>89, 90</sup> About three-quarters of the population is ethnic Mon. It was the capital of British Burma from 1827 until 1852.<sup>91</sup> Ancient pagodas dot the hills surrounding the town. The city is home to an important diesel electric plant, Mawlamyine

<sup>76</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Yangon," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/651821/Yangon>

<sup>77</sup> Francis Doral, Clare Griffiths, and Brian Bell, eds., "Yangon," in *Insight Guide: Burma* (Maspeth, NY: Langenscheidt Publishers Ind., 2005), 119–123.

<sup>78</sup> Thomas Brinkoff, "City Population: Myanmar," 25 July 2009, <http://www.citypopulation.de/Myanmar.html>

<sup>79</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Mandalay," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/361552/Mandalay>

<sup>80</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, "Mandalay and Around," in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd., December 2011), 201.

<sup>81</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Mandalay," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/361552/Mandalay>

<sup>82</sup> BBC News, International Version, "Burma Monks Not Ready to Forgive," 14 November 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7094731.stm>

<sup>83</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, "Mandalay and Around," in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd., December 2011), 201.

<sup>84</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Mandalay," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/361552/Mandalay>

<sup>85</sup> Francis Doral, Clare Griffiths, and Brian Bell, eds., "Mandalay and Environs," in *Insight Guide: Burma* (Maspeth, NY: Langenscheidt Publishers Ind., 2005), 173.

<sup>86</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, "Mandalay and Around," in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd., December 2011), 201.

<sup>87</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Mandalay," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/361552/Mandalay>

<sup>88</sup> Francis Doral, Clare Griffiths, and Brian Bell, eds., "Mandalay and Environs," in *Insight Guide: Burma* (Maspeth, NY: Langenscheidt Publishers Ind., 2005), 173.

<sup>89</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Mawlamyine," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/394523/Mawlamyine>

<sup>90</sup> Thomas Brinkoff, "City Population: Myanmar," 25 July 2009, <http://www.citypopulation.de/Myanmar.html>

<sup>91</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, "Southeastern Myanmar," in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd., December 2011), 96.

College, a teacher-training center and a large regional hospital. It also has a solar-powered plant that extracts salt from seawater.<sup>92</sup>

### *Naypyidaw*

In 2005, the ruling military junta abruptly announced that the capital was being relocated from colonial Rangoon on the coast to an area of malaria-infested jungle 400 km (249 mi) inland.<sup>93</sup> Naypyidaw became the nation's official capital in March 2006.<sup>94</sup> Halfway between Mandalay and Rangoon, the city has a population of 418,000.<sup>95</sup> Most of the government officials have relocated to the new capital but most of the foreign missions remain in Rangoon.<sup>96</sup> The city, unlike other regions of the country, enjoys an uninterrupted supply of electricity 24 hours a day.<sup>97, 98</sup>



© DiverDave / wikipedia.org  
Uppatasanti pagoda of Naypyidaw

## **History**

### *Pre-Colonial History*

Human migration into present-day Burma began perhaps 11,000 years ago.<sup>99</sup> The Mon, from eastern India, migrated before the first century B.C.E.<sup>100</sup> Around the first century B.C.E., came the Pyu, from the Tibetan plateau.<sup>101</sup> The Shans from the Yunnan region of China, arrived in the seventh century C.E. followed by the Burmans in the eighth century.<sup>102, 103, 104</sup>

<sup>92</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Mawlamyine," 2012,

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/394523/Mawlamyine>

<sup>93</sup> Justin Huggler, "Milton Keynes? No, Burma's New Capital," *Global Protests*, 28 March 2007,

[http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agg/free/imf/burma/2007/0328milton\\_keynes.html](http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agg/free/imf/burma/2007/0328milton_keynes.html)

<sup>94</sup> *New York Times*, "Myanmar's New Capital: Remote, Lavish and Off Limits," 23 June 2008,

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/23/world/asia/23iht-myanmar.4.13919850.html?pagewanted=all>

<sup>95</sup> Thomas Brinkoff, "City Population: Myanmar," 25 July 2009, <http://www.citypopulation.de/Myanmar.html>

<sup>96</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, "Bagan and Central Myanmar," in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd., December 2011), 139.

<sup>97</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Nay Pyi Taw," 2012,

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1219871/Nay-Pyi-Taw>

<sup>98</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, "Bagan and Central Myanmar," in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd., December 2011), 139.

<sup>99</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Myanmar," 2012,

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/400119/Myanmar/214472/History>

<sup>100</sup> Josef Silverstein, "Chapter One: The Peoples of Burma," in *Burmese Politics: The Dilemma of National Unity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1980), 14.

<sup>101</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, "History," in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd., December 2011), 295.

<sup>102</sup> Josef Silverstein, "Chapter One: The Peoples of Burma," in *Burmese Politics: The Dilemma of National Unity*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1980), 8.

<sup>103</sup> Donald M. Seekins, *The A to Z of Burma (Myanmar)* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 403.

<sup>104</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Myanmar: The Advent of the Burmans at Pagan," 2012,

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/400119/Myanmar/52593/The-Mon>

In 1044 C.E., the first Burman Empire was founded by King Anawrahta who defeated the Mon and united the country.<sup>105</sup> The empire flourished until it was defeated by the Mongols in 1287.<sup>106, 107, 108</sup> The country disintegrated into several smaller states allowing the Shan to fill the power vacuum for nearly 200 years.<sup>109, 110</sup> By 1486, the Burmans were back in control dominating northern and southern Burma.<sup>111, 112</sup> The Burmans continued their reign until they were defeated by the British in the third Anglo-Burmese War in 1885. In 1886, Burma officially became a part of British India.<sup>113, 114, 115</sup>



### *British Colonial Rule (1885–1948)*

Burma chafed under the yoke of British rule and by the 1900s, nationalism was resurging.<sup>116</sup> In the 1930s, a group of university students, led by Aung San, was calling for full Burmese independence.<sup>117, 118</sup> In 1937, Burma became an independent colony separate from British India.<sup>119, 120</sup> Nationalists continued to press for full independence even as World War II broke out. The British issued an arrest warrant for Aung San and other nationalists who left the

<sup>105</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Myanmar: The Unification of Myanmar,” 2012,

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/400119/Myanmar/52596/The-unification-of-Myanmar>

<sup>106</sup> Shelby Tucker, “Chapter Two: Geography and Ethnicity,” in *Burma: The Curse of Independence* (London & Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2001), 13.

<sup>107</sup> Francis Doral, Clare Griffiths, and Brian Bell, eds., “From Earliest Times,” in *Insight Guide: Burma* (Maspeth, NY: Langenscheidt Publishers Ind., 2005), 22–23.

<sup>108</sup> Richard Cooler, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Northern Illinois University, “Chapter III: The Pagan Period: Burma’s Classic Age – 11th to 14th Centuries,” n.d.,

[http://www.seasite.niu.edu/burmese/Cooler/Chapter\\_3/Part1/pagan\\_period\\_1.htm](http://www.seasite.niu.edu/burmese/Cooler/Chapter_3/Part1/pagan_period_1.htm)

<sup>109</sup> Josef Silverstein, “Chapter One: Sources of Burmese Political Culture,” in *Burma: Military Rule and the Politics of Stagnation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 5.

<sup>110</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Myanmar: The Unification of Myanmar,” 2012,

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/400119/Myanmar/52596/The-unification-of-Myanmar>

<sup>111</sup> Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Burma,” July 2009,

<http://www.state.gov/outofdate/bgn/burma/106321.htm>

<sup>112</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Myanmar: The Toungoo Dynasty,” 2012,

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/400119/Myanmar/52600/The-Toungoo-dynasty-1531-1752>

<sup>113</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Myanmar: The Alaungpaya Dynasty, 1752–1885,” 2012,

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/400119/Myanmar/52600/The-Toungoo-dynasty-1531-1752>

<sup>114</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Anglo-Burmese Wars,” 2012,

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/24993/Anglo-Burmese-Wars>

<sup>115</sup> Francis Doral, Clare Griffiths, and Brian Bell, eds., “The Loss of Independence,” in *Insight Guide: Burma* (Maspeth, NY: Langenscheidt Publishers Ind., 2005), 27.

<sup>116</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, “History,” in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd., December 2011), 298.

<sup>117</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Myanmar: The Emergence of Nationalism,” 2012,

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/400119/Myanmar>

<sup>118</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, “History,” in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd., December 2011), 298.

<sup>119</sup> Jan Becka, “Introduction,” in *Historical Dictionary of Myanmar* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1995), 4.

<sup>120</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Myanmar: The Emergence of Nationalism,” 2012,

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/400119/Myanmar>

country.<sup>121, 122, 123</sup> After receiving training from the Japanese military, they returned to Burma to lead the Burmese National Army against the British. In early 1945, Aung San became disillusioned with the Japanese and organized an anti-Japanese resistance movement, finally throwing support to the British.<sup>124</sup> In 1947, the British granted Burma its independence and later that year, Aung San became a cabinet member in the transitional government. Before the constitution was completed, Aung San and several other cabinet members were assassinated. U Nu, Aung San's protégé, formed a new cabinet and, in January 1948, Burma became a fully independent republic.<sup>125, 126, 127</sup>

### *The Union of Burma (1948–2004)*

The first years of independence were plagued with violence. At least five ethnic groups waged war against the new state. Premier U Nu asked General Ne Win, head of the army, to take temporary control of the government to quell the growing ethnic insurgency. The civilian government was restored after the 1960 elections but, in 1962, General Ne Win led a military coup which ousted the government and suspended the constitution.<sup>128, 129</sup>



Courtesy of Wikimedia  
Burma's Independence day

By September 1973, Ne Win had been named president.<sup>130</sup> In the following years, economic conditions worsened sparking violent protests in 1988. An estimated one million Burmese poured into the streets of Rangoon and Mandalay, demanding an end to military rule.<sup>131</sup> Ne Win declared martial law and the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) superseded the constitutional government. Saw Maung became the leader of the ruling military junta.<sup>132, 133</sup>

<sup>121</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Myanmar: World War II and After," 2012,

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/400119/Myanmar>

<sup>122</sup> Francis Doral, Clare Griffiths, and Brian Bell, eds., "The Loss of Independence," in *Insight Guide: Burma* (Maspeth, NY: Langenscheidt Publishers Ind., 2005), 28–29.

<sup>123</sup> Donald M. Seekins, "Introduction," in *The A to Z of Burma (Myanmar)* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 22–24.

<sup>124</sup> Ademola Adeleke, "The Strings of Neutralism: Burma and the Colombo Plan," *Pacific Affairs* 76, no. 4 (Winter 203/2004): 3, <http://www.pacificaffairs.ubc.ca/files/2011/09/adeleke.pdf>

<sup>125</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Myanmar: World War II and After," 2012,

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/400119/Myanmar>

<sup>126</sup> Francis Doral, Clare Griffiths, and Brian Bell, eds., "Independence and Military Rule," in *Insight Guide: Burma* (Maspeth, NY: Langenscheidt Publishers Ind., 2005), 35–37.

<sup>127</sup> Donald M. Seekins, "Introduction," in *The A to Z of Burma (Myanmar)* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 25–28.

<sup>128</sup> Francis Doral, Clare Griffiths, and Brian Bell, eds., "Independence and Military Rule," in *Insight Guide: Burma* (Maspeth, NY: Langenscheidt Publishers Ind., 2005), 37–38.

<sup>129</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Myanmar: Since Independence," 2012,

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/400119/Myanmar>

<sup>130</sup> Francis Doral, Clare Griffiths, and Brian Bell, eds., "Independence and Military Rule," in *Insight Guide: Burma* (Maspeth, NY: Langenscheidt Publishers Ind., 2005), 37–38.

<sup>131</sup> Josh Kurlantzick, "Burma Blues," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 27 September 2007,

<http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=19600&prog=zch.zgp&proj=zsa>

<sup>132</sup> Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Burma," December 2007, <http://www.state.gov/outofdate/bgn/burma/88022.htm>

Confident it would win, SLORC held multi-party elections in May 1990, and the voting process was judged to be free and fair.<sup>134</sup> The big winner was Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of Aung Sun, whose National League for Democracy won decisively. The military invalidated the election and imprisoned Aung San Suu Kyi and many other activists.<sup>135, 136, 137</sup> In 1990, the junta renamed the country Myanmar before giving itself a new name in 1997, changing from SLORC to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC).<sup>138, 139, 140</sup>

### *Recent History*

In September 2007, anger over rising costs again sparked demonstrations. The SPDC acted swiftly to put down the protests and arrest the leaders, some of whom had been involved in the “democracy summer.” The movement’s leadership, however, transferred to the monastic community, which organized a much larger protest movement known as the Saffron Revolution.<sup>141, 142</sup> In response, the junta applied greater force and was able to quell the monk-led demonstrations, earning another round of international condemnation.<sup>143</sup>



Courtesy of Wikimedia  
President Obama visiting

In February 2008, the National Assembly completed a draft of a new constitution and held national elections in May. Widely viewed as a flawed election, the new constitution was approved.<sup>144, 145, 146</sup> In 2010, Aung San Suu Kyi was released after years under house arrest

<sup>133</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, “Myanmar: Myanmar Since 1988,” 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/400119/Myanmar>

<sup>134</sup> Brian Joseph, “What’s Happening in Burma,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 19 October 2007.

<sup>135</sup> Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Burma,” 3 August 2011, <http://www.state.gov/outofdate/bgn/burma/189439.htm>

<sup>136</sup> Francis Doral, Clare Griffiths, and Brian Bell, eds., “Independence and Military Rule,” in *Insight Guide: Burma* (Maspeth, NY: Langenscheidt Publishers Ind., 2005), 39.

<sup>137</sup> Donald M. Seekins, “Introduction,” in *The A to Z of Burma (Myanmar)* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 44–45.

<sup>138</sup> The junta proposed the name change in 1989, but it was not formally adopted until 1990. Although the United Nations recognized the name change, the United States did not. A statement by the British foreign office noted that the opposition movement in Burma did not accept the junta’s right to change the country’s name. See BBC, “Should It Be Burma or Myanmar?” 26 September 2007, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/magazine/7013943.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/7013943.stm)

<sup>139</sup> Bridget Welsh, “Elections vs. ‘Selections’ in Southeast Asia” (SAISPHERE, The Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, Washington, DC, 2007), <http://legacy2.sais-jhu.edu/pressroom/publications/saisphere/2007/welsh.htm>

<sup>140</sup> Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Burma,” 3 August 2011, <http://www.state.gov/outofdate/bgn/burma/189439.htm>

<sup>141</sup> Michael Charney, “Burma: The History Behind the Protests,” *New Statesman*, 6 September 2007, <http://www.newstatesman.com/world-affairs/2007/09/military-regime-burma-history>

<sup>142</sup> Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Burma,” 3 August 2011, <http://www.state.gov/outofdate/bgn/burma/189439.htm>

<sup>143</sup> Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Burma,” 3 August 2011, <http://www.state.gov/outofdate/bgn/burma/189439.htm>

<sup>144</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Vote to Nowhere: The May 2008 Constitutional Referendum in Burma: International Response to the Referendum,” May 2008, [http://www.hrw.org/reports/2008/burma0508/6.htm#\\_Toc197150522](http://www.hrw.org/reports/2008/burma0508/6.htm#_Toc197150522)

although at least 2,100 other political prisoners remained in detention. In November of that year, Burma held its first elections in more than 20 years. Widely hailed as a sham that heavily favored the military, the junta won 75% of the parliamentary seats. Aung San Suu Kyi won a seat and praised attempts at reform. Civilian President Thein Sein took office in April 2011.<sup>147</sup>

Burma has continued on a path of cautious reforms to open up the country. President Obama visited Burma in late 2012 praising and encouraging government reforms.<sup>148, 149, 150, 151</sup> Achieving democratization will not be easy. President Thein Sein's government is watched over by the military, which remains the most powerful force in the nation. Armed ethnic conflict continues and threatens future economic progress on which the nation's stability depends. Nevertheless, there is a sense of cautious optimism about Burma's prospects.<sup>152, 153, 154</sup>

## Government

Burma's nominally civilian parliamentary government assumed power in 2011.<sup>155</sup> The head of state is the president who, along with two vice presidents, is selected by the parliament. The president has the power to appoint ministers, the attorney, the chief justice and to call parliamentary sessions. The president is not responsible to parliament or the courts so long as his actions are constitutional.<sup>156</sup>



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Rangoon City Hall

The military retains a powerful governmental role. The Commander-in-Chief of the Defense Service appoints three generals to fill the positions of

<sup>145</sup> Amnesty International, "Defend the Three Freedoms in Myanmar," September 2010, <http://www.amnestyusa.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/myanmarelections.pdf>

<sup>146</sup> Andrew Gilmore, "Myanmar Constitutional Referendum Erases 1990 Opposition Triumph: Junta," *The Jurist*, 3 June 2008, <http://jurist.org/paperchase/2008/06/myanmar-constitutional-referendum.php>

<sup>147</sup> Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Burma," 3 August 2011, <http://www.state.gov/outofdate/bgn/burma/189439.htm>

<sup>148</sup> Murray Hiebert and Tracy Quek, "Will Myanmar's Reforms Prompt Lifting of U.S. Sanctions?" Center for Strategic and International Studies, 14 February 2012, <http://csis.org/publication/will-myanmars-reforms-prompt-lifting-us-sanctions>

<sup>149</sup> Chloe Arensberg, "Unheard of Becomes Real as Obama Visits Burma," CBS News, 19 November 2012, [http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-202\\_162-57551647/unheard-of-becomes-real-as-obama-visits-burma/](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-202_162-57551647/unheard-of-becomes-real-as-obama-visits-burma/)

<sup>150</sup> Jack Healy and Dan Adler, "Aung San Suu Kyi and the Power of Unity," CNN, 2 October 2012, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/10/02/opinion/healey-adler-myanmar/index.html>

<sup>151</sup> Steven Lee Myers and Thomas Fuller, "U.S. Moves Toward Normalizing Relations with Myanmar," *New York Times*, 4 April 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/05/world/asia/myanmar-sanctions.html>

<sup>152</sup> Matt Sullivan, "The Future of Burma: An Interview with Dr. Michael Green," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, 11 December 2012, <http://journal.georgetown.edu/2012/12/11/the-future-of-burma-an-interview-with-dr-michael-green/>

<sup>153</sup> *The Economist*, "Brave New World: A Reformed Myanmar Could Have a Big Effect on Its Neighbours," 2 June 2012, <http://www.economist.com/node/21556293>

<sup>154</sup> "Burma Future Looks Bright but No Guarantees," *The Irrawaddy*, 7 May 2012, <http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/3706>

<sup>155</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Burma: Government," in *The World Factbook*, 2 January 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

<sup>156</sup> Martin Petty, "Factbox—Myanmar's New Political Structure," Reuters, 31 January 2011, <http://in.reuters.com/article/2011/01/31/idINIndia-54526820110131>

Minister of Defense, Minister of the Interior, and Minister of Border Affairs. Military personnel occupy 5 of the 11 positions on the National Defense and Security Council. The chief of the armed forces may, with presidential agreement, assume sovereign power, declare a state of emergency power, and assume all legislative, judicial, and executive powers.<sup>157</sup>

The parliament is a bicameral legislature. The lower house, The House of Representatives, may have no more than 440 members of which 330 are directly elected. The upper house, The House of Nationalities, may have no more than 224 members, of which 168 are directly elected. At least one-quarter of the legislative seats are reserved for military personnel who are selected by the Chief of Defense Services.<sup>158, 159</sup> The judicial branch, which does not operate independently from the executive branch, is composed of a supreme court, a constitutional tribunal, and lower courts.<sup>160, 161</sup>

## Media

Reporters without Borders ranks Burma at the bottom of its list for freedom of the press.<sup>162</sup> Since the election of the new government, some regulations have eased. In August 2012, censorship for political and religious print media was lifted.<sup>163</sup> Significant restrictions, however, remain. Private daily newspapers are still banned leaving only state-run papers. Journalists operate in fear of running afoul of the government under vaguely written laws.<sup>164</sup>

A mere 1% of the people have access to and use the internet. Most access the internet through cybercafés which are expensive. Owners must keep browsing records of their patrons and submit them to the government each month. Connection speeds are so slow that it can take up to 90 minutes to open a single webpage.<sup>165</sup> Foreigners are allowed to bring one laptop into the country, but it must be declared at the point of entry. It is illegal to own an unregistered modem.<sup>166</sup> Mobile phone use is also limited (approximately 5% subscribers) and concentrated in urban areas. Internet access through mobile devices is limited.<sup>167</sup>

<sup>157</sup> Martin Petty, "Factbox—Myanmar's New Political Structure," Reuters, 31 January 2011, <http://in.reuters.com/article/2011/01/31/idINIndia-54526820110131>

<sup>158</sup> Dawei Development Company Limited, "Myanmar Government Structure," 2013, <http://daweidevelopment.com/index.php/en/myanmar-overview/myanmar-government-structure>

<sup>159</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Burma: Government," in *The World Factbook*, 2 January 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

<sup>160</sup> Dawei Development Company Limited, "Myanmar Government Structure," 2013, <http://daweidevelopment.com/index.php/en/myanmar-overview/myanmar-government-structure>

<sup>161</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Burma: Government," in *The World Factbook*, 2 January 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

<sup>162</sup> Reporters Without Borders, "Burma," November 2011, <http://en.rsf.org/report-burma.53.html>

<sup>163</sup> Reporters Without Borders, "Cautious Welcome for Announced Lifting of Pre-Publication Censorship," 20 August 2012, <http://en.rsf.org/burma-cautious-welcome-for-announced-20-08-2012.43246.html>

<sup>164</sup> Aung Hla Tun, "Myanmar Government Abolishes Direct Media Censorship," Reuters, 20 August 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/08/20/us-myanmar-censorship-idUSBRE87J06N20120820>

<sup>165</sup> Freedom House, "Burma: Freedom on the Net 2012," 2012, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2012/burma>

<sup>166</sup> Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Burma (Myanmar) Country Specific Information: Special Circumstances," 29 June 2011, [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1077.html#special\\_circumstance](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1077.html#special_circumstance)

<sup>167</sup> Freedom House, "Burma: Freedom on the Net 2012," 2012, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2012/burma>

## Economy

Burma is one of the poorest nations in the world despite its significant reserves of oil, natural gas, timber, minerals, and precious gemstones.<sup>168, 169</sup> Although some experts say Burma has the potential to be the next “Asian Tiger,” the country faces serious challenges including poor infrastructure, lack of foreign investment, rampant corruption, and an unskilled labor force.<sup>170, 171, 172</sup> Agriculture remains the backbone of the economy employing 70% of the Burmese labor force and accounting for nearly 40% of GDP.<sup>173, 174, 175</sup> The industrial sector accounts for approximately 19% of GDP and employs about 7% of the Burmese labor force.<sup>176</sup> In recent years, however, the sector has grown only marginally and without a huge investment in infrastructure, including electricity and transportation, is unlikely to develop in the near term.<sup>177, 178, 179</sup> Tourism is a promising sector. As Burma opens up to international visitors, tourists are flocking to the nation. The government is investing money in its expanding tourism industry.<sup>180, 181, 182</sup>



© Richard-dicky / wikipedia.org  
Rice cultivation

<sup>168</sup> Carin Hall, “Myanmar—An Emerging Natural Resources Powerhouse,” Energy Digital, 21 October 2012, [http://www.energydigital.com/global\\_mining/myanmar-an-emerging-natural-resources-powerhouse](http://www.energydigital.com/global_mining/myanmar-an-emerging-natural-resources-powerhouse)

<sup>169</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “Burma: Economy,” in *The World Factbook*, 2 January 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

<sup>170</sup> Jared Bissinger, “Think Again: Burma’s Economy,” *Foreign Policy*, 18 September 2012, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/09/18/think\\_again\\_burma\\_s\\_economy](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/09/18/think_again_burma_s_economy)

<sup>171</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “Burma: Economy,” in *The World Factbook*, 2 January 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

<sup>172</sup> Michael Schuman, “Will Burma Become Asia’s Next Economic Tiger?” *Time*, 22 August 2012, <http://business.time.com/2012/08/22/will-burma-become-asias-next-economic-tiger/>

<sup>173</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “Burma: Economy,” in *The World Factbook*, 2 January 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

<sup>174</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), “Myanmar and FAO Achievements and Success Stories” (research report, May 2011), 1, <http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/rap/files/epublications/MyanmaredocFINAL.pdf>

<sup>175</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “Burma: Geography,” in *The World Factbook*, 2 January 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

<sup>176</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “Burma: Economy,” in *The World Factbook*, 2 January 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

<sup>177</sup> Economy Watch, “Myanmar Economic Structure,” 17 March 2010, [http://www.economywatch.com/world\\_economy/myanmar/structure-of-economy.html](http://www.economywatch.com/world_economy/myanmar/structure-of-economy.html)

<sup>178</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “Burma: Economy,” in *The World Factbook*, 2 January 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

<sup>179</sup> Energy Market Authority, “ADB Report: Capital Needed to Unlock Wealth of Opportunities in Myanmar’s Energy Sector,” Singapore International Energy Week, 13 December 2012, <http://siew.sg/energy-perspectives/renewable-energy/adb-report-capital-needed-unlock-wealth-opportunities-myanmars->

<sup>180</sup> Economy Watch, “Myanmar Economic Structure,” 17 March 2010, [http://www.economywatch.com/world\\_economy/myanmar/structure-of-economy.html](http://www.economywatch.com/world_economy/myanmar/structure-of-economy.html)

<sup>181</sup> “Burma Developing Master Tourism Plan,” Mizzima News, 4 October 2012, <http://www.mizzima.com/business/8166-burma-developing-master-tourism-plan.html>

<sup>182</sup> Parag Khanna, “From Burma to Myanmar: Land of Rising Expectations,” CNN, 3 January 2013, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/01/02/opinion/myanmar-khanna/index.html>

## Ethnic Groups

### *Burman (Bamars)*

The largest group by far is the Burman, sometimes referred to as the Bamar ethnic group, who comprise 68% of the population.<sup>183, 184, 185</sup> Originating in the Himalayas more than 1,000 years ago, their language is from the Tibeto-Burman family. Concentrated largely in the Irrawaddy River Valley and along the coastal strips, the Burman are overwhelmingly Theravada Buddhists.<sup>186, 187</sup>



© Dietmar Temps  
Burman man

Education is highly valued, and literacy among the Burman is high.<sup>188, 189</sup> Much of their culture involves rituals and rites of passage including the *shinbyu* ceremony marking a young boy's service as a novice monk.<sup>190</sup> Burman families often have at least five children and most live in extended families that include four generations. Upon marriage, men commonly live with the woman's family. This reduces problems with in-laws since men are generally out of the house working all day, thus limiting contact with the mother-in-law. If the couple lived with the husband's family, a woman would be home with her mother-in-law nearly all day. The Burman have respect for and are expected to care for the elderly.<sup>191</sup>

Although women occupy a lower status in Theravada Buddhism, men and women have equal rights in matters of property, marriage, and divorce. The husband turns his entire paycheck over to his wife who is in charge of all family household finances. Women have played active roles in society, particularly in business. Although women generally have not held positions of political power, one notable exception is Aung San Suu Kyi, head of the opposition party and member of parliament.<sup>192, 193</sup>

<sup>183</sup> The political term "Burmese" refers to all the people of Burma, whereas the term "Burman" identifies just the ethnic group. See Donald M. Seekins, *The A to Z of Burma (Myanmar)* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 129–130.

<sup>184</sup> IRIN, "Briefing: Myanmar's Ethnic Problems," 29 March 2012, <http://www.irinnews.org/report/95195/Briefing-Myanmar-s-ethnic-problems>

<sup>185</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Burma: People and Society," in *The World Factbook*, 19 December 2012, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

<sup>186</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Myanmar: People," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/400119/Myanmar/52569/Plant-and-animal-life#toc52572>

<sup>187</sup> Oxford Burma Alliance, "Ethnic Nationalities of Burma: Bamar (Burman)," n.d., <http://www.oxfordburmaalliance.org/ethnic-groups.html>

<sup>188</sup> Myanmar Image, "Bamar: Dominant Ethnic Group of Myanmar," n.d., <http://myanmar-image.com/myanmar/races1/bamar/>

<sup>189</sup> Edith Mirante, "Burman: Education," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 178.

<sup>190</sup> Edith Mirante, "Burman: Religion," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 176.

<sup>191</sup> Edith Mirante, "Burman: Family Life," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 178.

<sup>192</sup> Myanmar Image, "Bamar: Dominant Ethnic Group of Myanmar," n.d., <http://myanmar-image.com/myanmar/races1/bamar/>

## Shan

The Shan, Burma's largest minority ethnic group comprising 9% of the population, are found in Burma's Shan State.<sup>194, 195</sup> Their native tongue is a tonal language from the Tai language group.<sup>196</sup> Like the Burmans, they are Buddhists, although their practices are infused with animism.<sup>197</sup> Most Shan are lowland-dwelling rice farmers and livestock breeders. Many are traders traveling from village to village peddling good, much of which has been illegally imported from neighboring countries.<sup>198</sup>



The Shan are a monogamous group that generally lives in nuclear family settings. The typical Burmese Shan family has six children.<sup>199</sup> In traditional Shan culture, men and women were viewed as equals but within their Buddhist religion, women occupy a lower status. Shan women were politically active until the military junta took power. Many, however, have taken an active role in security rights for the minority Shan, especially for women. Many women continue to take active roles outside their homes, especially in business.<sup>200</sup>

Under British colonial authority, Shan princes negotiated agreements with the British which allowed them to continue to rule their traditional lands.<sup>201, 202</sup> Following independence, the Shan became increasingly disillusioned by what they saw as a Burman attempt to destroy Shan culture and often engaged in armed conflict with the Burmese government. Armed militias formed to protect the Shan states. Today, the Shan Army-South remains a major armed threat to the current government.<sup>203, 204, 205</sup>

<sup>193</sup> Edith Mirante, "Burman: Gender Issues," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 180.

<sup>194</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Burma: People and Society," in *The World Factbook*, 19 December 2012, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

<sup>195</sup> Edith Mirante, "Shans: Work," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 4, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 870.

<sup>196</sup> Edith Mirante, "Shans: Language," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 4, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 866.

<sup>197</sup> Edith Mirante, "Shans: Religion," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 4, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 866-867.

<sup>198</sup> Edith Mirante, "Shans: Introduction," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 4, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 866.

<sup>199</sup> Edith Mirante, "Shans: Family Life," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 4, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 868-869.

<sup>200</sup> Edith Mirante, "Shans: Gender Issues," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 4, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 870.

<sup>201</sup> Sita Sao Ying, "The Tradition of Democracy in the Shan State," *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 13 no. 4 (Winter 1989), <http://www.culturalsurvival.org/ourpublications/csqa/article/the-tradition-democracy-shan-state>

<sup>202</sup> Edith Mirante, "Shans: Introduction," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 4, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 866.

<sup>203</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Shan," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/538388/Shan#>

<sup>204</sup> Edith Mirante, "Shans: Introduction," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 4, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 866.

<sup>205</sup> Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment, Southeast Asia, "Non-state Armed Groups," 10 January 2012.

## Karen

The Karen, Burma's second-largest minority group, arrived in Burma approximately 2,500 years ago, settling in the Irrawaddy River Valley.<sup>206, 207</sup> The region was the end point in the Karen's multi-staged migration from what is present-day Mongolia in the 6th or 7th century.<sup>208</sup> Among the major subgroups are the Pwo Karens who are concentrated in the deltas of Burma, the Sagw Karen who live in the mountains, the Karennis (Kayah), Pa-Os, and Kayans who are concentrated in the Shan and Karenni states.<sup>209, 210</sup> Many people are familiar with the Padung, a subgroup of the Karen, sometimes known as the "giraffe people" because of the custom of women wearing heavy brass coils around their necks.<sup>211</sup> Enslaved by the Mons and Burmans, Karens retreated to remote areas to avoid continued oppression.<sup>212, 213</sup>



© Jameson Wu  
Karen family

The Karens are a matrilineal monogamous group in which adultery is taboo. They tend to marry for life and have an average of between three and four children.<sup>214, 215</sup> About 70% are Buddhists or animists and the rest are Christians.<sup>216</sup> During the British colonial period, they were the group most loyal to British missionaries and colonialists.<sup>217</sup> The British filled the ranks of the police and military with Karens who were acclaimed guerilla fighters for the Allies during World War

<sup>206</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Burma: People and Society," in *The World Factbook*, 19 December 2012, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

<sup>207</sup> Shirley Lorraine Worland, "Displaced and Misplaced or Just Displaced: Christian Displaced Karen Identity after Sixty Years of War in Burma" (thesis, School of Social Work and Human Services, University of Queensland, Queensland, Australia, March 2010), 8, [http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs09/Shirley\\_Worland-PhD-red.pdf](http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs09/Shirley_Worland-PhD-red.pdf)

<sup>208</sup> Edith Mirante, "Karens: Introduction," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 467.

<sup>209</sup> IRIN, "Briefing: Myanmar's Ethnic Problems," 29 March 2012, <http://www.irinnews.org/report/95195/Briefing-Myanmar-s-ethnic-problems>

<sup>210</sup> Edith Mirante, "Karens: Introduction," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 467.

<sup>211</sup> Ray Waddington, "The Karen," Peoplesoftheworld.org, 2002, <http://www.peoplesoftheworld.org/text?people=Karen>

<sup>212</sup> Shirley Lorraine Worland, "Displaced and Misplaced or Just Displaced: Christian Displaced Karen Identity after Sixty Years of War in Burma" (thesis, School of Social Work and Human Services, University of Queensland, Queensland, Australia, March 2010), 8, [http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs09/Shirley\\_Worland-PhD-red.pdf](http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs09/Shirley_Worland-PhD-red.pdf)

<sup>213</sup> Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment, Southeast Asia, "Non-state Armed Groups," 10 January 2012.

<sup>214</sup> Edith Mirante, "Karens: Family Life," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 470.

<sup>215</sup> Centers for Disease Control, "Chapter 2: Overview of Karen Culture," in *Promoting Cultural Sensitivity: A Practical Guide for Tuberculosis Programs That Provide Services to Persons From Burma* (Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010), 21, <http://www.cdc.gov/tb/publications/guidestoolkits/ethnographicguides/burma/chapters/chapter2.pdf>

<sup>216</sup> Centers for Disease Control, "Chapter 2: Overview of Karen Culture," in *Promoting Cultural Sensitivity: A Practical Guide for Tuberculosis Programs That Provide Services to Persons From Burma* (Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010), 23, <http://www.cdc.gov/tb/publications/guidestoolkits/ethnographicguides/burma/chapters/chapter2.pdf>

<sup>217</sup> Shelby Tucker, "Chapter Two: Geography and Ethnicity," in *Burma: The Curse of Independence* (Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2001), 15.

II (WWII).<sup>218, 219</sup> Today, most Karens make their living growing rice, fishing or working in the mines.<sup>220</sup>

The Karen National Liberation Army and the Karenni Army still operate. The Karen are one of the few ethnic groups that have not signed a peace accord and continue to fight for their independence. They pose no significant threat to the federal government but do wage low-level guerilla war.<sup>221</sup>

### *The Mon*

The Mon, comprising about 2% of Burma's population, are related to the Khmer of Cambodia.<sup>222</sup> Their Mon-Khmer dialect is distantly related to some Indian languages. The current government policy discouraging learning the Mon language has resulted in many Mon being able to speak only Burmese.<sup>223</sup> Among the original inhabitants of present-day Thailand, the Mon are located in southern Burma in Mon State.<sup>224, 225</sup> The Mon are Theravada Buddhists and most villages have a pagoda as well as a monastery, which also serves as a school.<sup>226, 227</sup>

The suppression of the Mon language by the Burmese government has fueled considerable resentment. Efforts to create an autonomous Mon region led to the creation of the Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA) and one of the nation's longest running insurgencies. The MNLA signed a cease-fire agreement with the government in 1995, but it fell apart in 2010. The group has refused to heed government demands to disarm. Therefore, the government has ended all attempts at communication.<sup>228</sup> Mon society suffers from other problems including drug-addiction and a high rate of HIV/AIDs infections resulting from intravenous heroin use.<sup>229</sup>

<sup>218</sup> Edith Mirante, "Karens: Introduction," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 467.

<sup>219</sup> Donald M. Seekins, *The A to Z of Burma (Myanmar)* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 248–249.

<sup>220</sup> Edith Mirante, "Karens: Work," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 471.

<sup>221</sup> Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment, Southeast Asia, "Non-state Armed Groups," 10 January 2012.

<sup>222</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Burma: People and Society," in *The World Factbook*, 19 December 2012, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

<sup>223</sup> Edith Mirante, "Mons: Language," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 4, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 670.

<sup>224</sup> IRIN, "Briefing: Myanmar's Ethnic Problems," 29 March 2012, <http://www.irinnews.org/report/95195/Briefing-Myanmar-s-ethnic-problems>

<sup>225</sup> Edith Mirante, "Mons: Introduction," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 4, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 669.

<sup>226</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Mon," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/388675/Mon#>

<sup>227</sup> Edith Mirante, "Mons: Religion," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 4, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 670.

<sup>228</sup> Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism, "Groups-Asia-Active, Myanmar: Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA), 6 March 2012.

<sup>229</sup> Edith Mirante, "Mons: Social Problems," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 4, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 673.

## *The Chin*

The Chin constitute 2.5% of the population. They live in Chin State in the sparsely populated Western Mountains of northern Burma. Although subgroups speak various dialects, the language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family.<sup>230, 231</sup>

Traditionally animists, the Chin were overwhelmingly converted to Christianity during the British colonial period.

Approximately 90% of Chin are Christians and most are Baptists.<sup>232, 233, 234, 235</sup>



© DANIEL JULIE  
Chin women

The majority of Chin live a rugged lifestyle as nomadic (swidden) farmers moving each year to new plots of land. They often transport goods on their backs and shoulders since few people own horses or carts. In this patriarchal group, women are the main source of agricultural labor as well as responsible for household duties. The Chin generally weave their own clothes and fabricate their own utensils from bamboo.<sup>236</sup> Families are large with an average of five children. Women live with their husbands' family. Sons are supposed to care for parents in their old age with the major responsibilities falling to the daughter-in-law.<sup>237</sup>

## *The Kachin*

The Kachin, comprising about 1.5% of the population, are an ethnic group composed of seven tribes living in the Northern Mountains.<sup>238, 239</sup> The tribes, who migrated from China, speak a version of the Tibeto-Burman language. Approximately two-thirds are Christians and the remaining one-third are Buddhists or animists. Spirits (or *nats*) are important not only to the animists but even among the Buddhist and Christian population who worship *nat* spirits.<sup>240</sup>

<sup>230</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Burma: People and Society," in *The World Factbook*, 19 December 2012, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

<sup>231</sup> Edith Mirante, "Chin," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 202.

<sup>232</sup> IRIN, "In Brief: Chins Denied Religious Freedom in Myanmar," 5 September 2012, <http://www.irinnews.org/report/96244/In-Brief-Chins-denied-religious-freedom-in-Myanmar>

<sup>233</sup> Edith Mirante, "Chin: Religion," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 203.

<sup>234</sup> Chin Human Rights Organization, "Burma/Myanmar" (paper, 2011), 1, [http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs09/CHRO\\_UPR\\_submission\\_Myanmar.pdf](http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs09/CHRO_UPR_submission_Myanmar.pdf)

<sup>235</sup> Benedict Rogers, "Zing Cung, General-Secretary of the National Democratic (NDF) and Vice Chairman of the Chin National Front (CNF)," *Chinland Guardian*, 2011, <http://www.chinlandguardian.com/interviews/interviews/413-zing-cung-general-secretary-of-the-national-democratic-front-ndf-and-vice-chairman-of-the-chin-national-front-cnf.html>

<sup>236</sup> Edith Mirante, "Chin," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 204, 206, 207.

<sup>237</sup> Edith Mirante, "Chin: Family Life," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 205.

<sup>238</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Burma: People and Society," in *The World Factbook*, 19 December 2012, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

<sup>239</sup> Edith Mirante, "Kachins: Introduction," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 442.

<sup>240</sup> Edith Mirante, "Kachins: Religion," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 443.

The Kachin trace their descent only through their fathers. They, unlike most groups in Burma, use family names.<sup>241</sup> Most Kachin marry in their teens or early twenties and have six or more children. The Kachin clan system establishes rules for who can marry whom. Most of the population is engaged in farming but joining the military has long been a valued tradition.<sup>242, 243</sup> Many Kachin were among the military ranks of both the British and Burmese armies and, today, many have enlisted in the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) which operates in both Kachin and Shan states.<sup>244, 245</sup> The KIA is one of the strongest militant groups in the nation and has recently formed alliances with other insurgent groups in the region. The KIA has thus far rejected appeals from the government for a ceasefire and continues to inflict casualties and disrupt peace talks in the region.<sup>246, 247</sup>

### *The Rakhine*

The Rakhine, descendants of the Pyu people and early Indians, live in the coastal regions of western Burma in Rakhine State. Their language is a dialect of Burmese. They are overwhelmingly Buddhists and every male child becomes a monk, although for some their service may last only a few days. Families are large, often with five or more children. Most Rakhine are farmers, fisherman, or traders.<sup>248</sup>



© Hella Delicious  
Rakhine woman and baby

Ethnic tensions between the Buddhist Rakhine and the Muslim Rohingya in Rakhine State began to grow in the 1930s. Following independence, both groups formed insurgent groups to battle the new government and tensions between the two groups increased.<sup>249</sup> The ethnic divisions have erupted into violence. More than 100,000 people had been displaced and hundreds more killed by the end of 2012.<sup>250, 251</sup>

<sup>241</sup> Donald M. Seekins, *The A to Z of Burma (Myanmar)* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 239.

<sup>242</sup> Edith Mirante, "Kachins: Work," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 445.

<sup>243</sup> Donald M. Seekins, *The A to Z of Burma (Myanmar)* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 236–237.

<sup>244</sup> Edith Mirante, "Kachins: Work," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 445.

<sup>245</sup> Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism, "Groups-Asia-Active, Myanmar: Kachin Independence Army," 7 September 2012.

<sup>246</sup> Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism, "Groups-Asia-Active, Myanmar: Kachin Independence Army," 7 September 2012.

<sup>247</sup> Donald M. Seekins, *The A to Z of Burma (Myanmar)* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 239.

<sup>248</sup> Edith Mirante, "Rakhines," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 4, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 832–834.

<sup>249</sup> Edith Mirante, "Rakhines," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 4, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 832.

<sup>250</sup> BBC News, "Displaced and Divided in Burma's Rakhine," 9 November 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-20264279>

<sup>251</sup> *The Economist*, "Unforgiving History: Why Buddhists and Muslims in Rakhine State in Myanmar Are at Each Others' Throats," 3 November 2012, <http://www.economist.com/news/asia/21565638-why-buddhists-and-muslims-rakhine-state-myanmar-are-each-others%E2%80%99throats-unforgiving>

## Chapter 1 Assessment

1. Burma is approximately the size of Texas.

**True**

Burma, slightly smaller than the state of Texas, is the westernmost and largest of the mainland nations of Southeast Asia.

2. Burma has two distinct seasons.

**False**

Seasonal monsoons are the major factor affecting climate and create three distinct seasons: the humid dry season extends from March to May; the rainy season is from June through September; and the cool, dry season occurs between October and February.

3. Rangoon is the capital of Burma.

**False**

Rangoon was Burma's capital from 1948 until 2006 when Naypyidaw became Burma's new capital.

4. Burma became a fully independent nation in 1948.

**True**

In 1947, the British granted Burma its independence. In January 1948, Burma became a fully independent republic.

5. Burma's ethnic groups have largely been assimilated in recent decades.

**False**

Burma is culturally diverse and home to over 100 ethnic groups. Retaining their ethnic identities and speaking many languages, the groups have largely remained in the areas to which they originally migrated.

## CHAPTER 2: RELIGION

### Introduction

In Burma, 89% of the population is Buddhist, but among the Burman, nearly 100% are adherents of Theravada Buddhism.<sup>252, 253</sup> The Mon first adopted Theravada Buddhism, the oldest and most conservative form of the religion, around the third century B.C.E. By the ninth century C.E., the religion had spread to the northern areas of Burma where it combined with other religious forms including Mahayana and Tantric Buddhism. By the 11th century, the Bamar king, Anawrahta, made Theravada Buddhism the official state religion. Elements of other religious forms, including the worship of spirit gods, infused Buddhist practices.<sup>254, 255, 256</sup>



© Agustin Polanco  
Prayers at Shwedagon Pagoda

Buddhism is woven into the daily lives and culture of most Burman. Monks are a common sight throughout the nation. Shrines and pagodas dot the landscape, and most people clasp their hands and bow their heads when passing one.<sup>257</sup> The government recognizes numerous Buddhist holidays as national public holidays.<sup>258</sup> Although Buddhism is often regarded as a tolerant religion, the overwhelmingly Burman government and military have been accused of trying to force ethnic groups to convert and of quashing their cultures.<sup>259, 260, 261</sup>

<sup>252</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Burma: People and Society," in *The World Factbook*, 2 January 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

<sup>253</sup> Edith Mirante, "Burman: Religion," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 176.

<sup>254</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, "Religion and Belief," in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty, Ltd, 2011), 338–339.

<sup>255</sup> Asian Studies Center, Michigan State University, "Burma—Religion," 2013, [http://asia.isp.msu.edu/wbwoa/southeast\\_asia/burma/religion.htm](http://asia.isp.msu.edu/wbwoa/southeast_asia/burma/religion.htm)

<sup>256</sup> D. Guha, "Buddhism and Burma," *The Light of the Dharma* IX, no. 4 (1963), <http://www.thisismyanmar.com/nibbana/bsmburma.htm>

<sup>257</sup> Asian Studies Center, Michigan State University, "Burma—Religion," 2013, [http://asia.isp.msu.edu/wbwoa/southeast\\_asia/burma/religion.htm](http://asia.isp.msu.edu/wbwoa/southeast_asia/burma/religion.htm)

<sup>258</sup> Q++ Studio, "Bank and Public Holidays for Myanmar," 2013, [http://www.qppstudio.net/publicholidays2013/myanmar\\_formerly\\_burma\\_.htm](http://www.qppstudio.net/publicholidays2013/myanmar_formerly_burma_.htm)

<sup>259</sup> Hannah Beech, "A Closer Look at Burma's Ethnic Minorities," *Time*, 30 January 2009, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1874981,00.html>

<sup>260</sup> AFP, "Myanmar Christians Forced to Convert to Buddhism: Rights Group," *International Herald Tribune*, 5 September 2012, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/431776/myanmar-christians-forced-to-convert-to-buddhism-rights-group/>

<sup>261</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Burma: 2011 Report on International Religious Freedom," 30 July 2012, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2011/eap/192615.htm>

## Religions

### *Theravada Buddhism*

Theravada Buddhism stresses spirituality, self-enlightenment, the importance of pure thoughts and deeds, and the importance of a monastic life. The major tenet is that nothing in the world is permanent, and attachment to temporary things brings only sorrow and misery.<sup>262</sup>

Theravada Buddhism does not believe in one omnipotent creator of the Universe. For a Theravada Buddhist, the ultimate goal is to leave behind the cycle of pain and suffering (*samsara*) on earth and enter nirvana (*nibbana*). An individual released from the cycle of *samsara* will never be reborn but will live in a perpetual state of bliss.<sup>263, 264</sup>



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Old Buddhist temples in Bagan

Buddha taught that the pain and suffering of life could be escaped by reaching a state of enlightenment or nirvana. Meditation represents the way to enlightenment. Each individual must find and travel his/her own path to enlightenment without the help of a supernatural god. Followers are admonished not to take things that are not freely given; to avoid lying, idle chat, and gossip; and to refrain from hurting any living thing. They are also prohibited from drinking and using drugs. Monks are forbidden to eat after noon and may not handle money.<sup>265, 266, 267</sup>

### *Indigenous Religion*

Before Buddhism arrived in Burma, the people practiced spirit (*nat*) worship, but today only about 1% of the population count themselves as *nat* worshippers.<sup>268, 269</sup> Animists worshiped nature spirits called *nats* who represent natural forces including, water, wind, rocks, and trees. *Nats* could be forces for both good and evil. King Anawrahta consciously incorporated *nats* into Buddhism and declared them monk's helpers. Today, statues of *nats* are often found in Buddhist temples.<sup>270, 271</sup>

<sup>262</sup> Jeffrey Hays, "Buddhism," factsanddetails.com, March 2012, <http://factsanddetails.com/world.php?itemid=1336&catid=55&subcatid=355>

<sup>263</sup> BBC, "Thervada Buddhism," 10 February 2002, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/buddhism/subdivisions/theravada\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/buddhism/subdivisions/theravada_1.shtml)

<sup>264</sup> Patheos, "Religion Library: Theravada Buddhism," 2013, <http://www.patheos.com/Library/Theravada-Buddhism.html>

<sup>265</sup> BBC, "Thervada Buddhism," 10 February 2002, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/buddhism/subdivisions/theravada\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/buddhism/subdivisions/theravada_1.shtml)

<sup>266</sup> John T. Bullitt, "What Is Theravada Buddhism?," accesstoinsight.org, 2013, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/bullitt/theravada.html>

<sup>267</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, "Religion and Belief," in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty, Ltd, 2011), 339.

<sup>268</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, "Burma: July–December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report," 13 September 2011, [http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2010\\_5/168349.htm](http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2010_5/168349.htm)

<sup>269</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Burma: People and Society," in *The World Factbook*, 19 December 2012, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

<sup>270</sup> Asian Studies Center, "Burma: Religion," Michigan State University, 2013, [http://asia.isp.msu.edu/wbwoa/southeast\\_asia/burma/religion.htm](http://asia.isp.msu.edu/wbwoa/southeast_asia/burma/religion.htm)

*Nats* are the spirits of humans who suffered some great tragedy or unnatural death but have not been released from this earthly world. The spirits appealed to a Burmese king who granted each one a territory to rule. Although the specific individual *nats* change, their number remains constant at 37.<sup>272, 273</sup> All are ghosts or spirits of heroes except the chief *nat*, *Thagyamin Nat*. Shrines to each of the 37 *nats* can be found on top of Mount Popa, their spiritual home, in central Burma.<sup>274, 275, 276</sup>

Many Burmese have a household shrine where offerings are left in an unhusked coconut.<sup>277</sup> Ceremonies are officiated by shamans who combine music, dance, and trances to communicate with the spirits. Many such ceremonies are conducted by female shamans in private homes. The most important *nat* ritual occurs each year in the town of Taungbyon for six days around the time of the full moon in August.<sup>278, 279</sup>

## Religion and Government

Although Buddhism is not the official state religion, the Burmese government, comprised almost exclusively of Burmans, strongly favors Buddhists and actively promotes Theravada Buddhism among ethnic minorities. This apparent favoritism has created religious tensions between Buddhists, Christians, and Muslims.<sup>280, 281, 282</sup>



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Monk reading

Restrictions of religious freedom, by the government and Constitution

<sup>271</sup> Micha F. Lindemans, “Nats,” *Encyclopedia Mythica*, 28 September 2008,

<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/n/nats.html>

<sup>272</sup> Sarah M. Bekker, “Talent for Trance: Dancing for the Spirits in Burma,” in *Tradition and Modernity in Myanmar*, Uta Gärtner and Jends Lorenz, eds. (Berlin: Verlag Münster Publishers, 1994), 288.

<sup>273</sup> Donald M. Seekins, *The A to Z of Burma (Myanmar)* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 327–328.

<sup>274</sup> Asian Studies Center, “Burma: Religion,” Michigan State University, 2013,

[http://asia.isp.msu.edu/wbwoa/southeast\\_asia/burma/religion.htm](http://asia.isp.msu.edu/wbwoa/southeast_asia/burma/religion.htm)

<sup>275</sup> Micha F. Lindemans, “Nats,” *Encyclopedia Mythica*, 28 September 2008,

<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/n/nats.html>

<sup>276</sup> Evelina Rioukhina, “Legend of the Mount Popa,” UNSpecial.org, March 2003,

[http://www.unspecial.org/UNS616/UNS\\_616\\_T11.html](http://www.unspecial.org/UNS616/UNS_616_T11.html)

<sup>277</sup> Donald M. Seekins, *The A to Z of Burma (Myanmar)* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 328.

<sup>278</sup> Asian Studies Center, “Burma: Religion,” Michigan State University, 2013,

[http://asia.isp.msu.edu/wbwoa/southeast\\_asia/burma/religion.htm](http://asia.isp.msu.edu/wbwoa/southeast_asia/burma/religion.htm)

<sup>279</sup> Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière, “Chapter 4: The Taungbyon Festival: Locality and Nation-Confronting in the Cult of the 37 Lords,” in *Burma at the Turn of the 21st Century*, ed. Monique Skidmore (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), 65–66, 69–74.

<sup>280</sup> Lalit Jha, “Burmese Govt Fosters Religious Intolerance: US Official,” *The Irrawaddy*, 13 September 2012,

<http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/13902>

<sup>281</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, “Burma: 2011 Report on International Religious Freedom,” 30 July 2012, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2011/eap/192615.htm>

<sup>282</sup> Global Security, “Burma Insurgency,” 29 August 2012,

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/burma.htm>

of Burma, affect not just non-Buddhist minorities but every religious group.<sup>283</sup> All religious organizations are monitored by the government and must obtain permission before holding large-scale public events. Buddhist monks are restricted in their attempts to fight for human rights and political freedom. Many who were arrested in the protests of 2007 remain incarcerated. The government continues to control the Buddhist clergy and has imposed a code of conduct subject to criminal penalties. Imprisoned monks may be defrocked and prohibited from following elements of the monastic code. The law prohibits Buddhist monks and nuns from running for public office and voting in national elections.<sup>284, 285</sup>

Buddhist doctrine is evident in the state-mandated public school curriculum. Although non-Buddhists can opt out of classes, they must recite Buddhist prayers daily.<sup>286</sup> Several Buddhist holidays are recognized by the state as national holidays.<sup>287</sup>

### **Influence of Religion on Daily Life**

The philosophical foundations of Theravada Buddhism among the Burman are evident in all aspects of daily life. Buddhism gives the Burman a sense of fatality and inevitability that creates resilience before hardship. Some seek the advice of fortune tellers who can suggest certain rituals that may increase their good fortune. Burman show respect to elders and rarely challenge authority.<sup>288</sup>

Worship is a part of everyday life in Burma, and the first daily ritual is prayer. The family altar displays their family's Buddha image, as well as flowers and candles. Tiny cups containing small portions of food and water are placed on the shrine in the morning and removed at noon. This ritual draws focus to the teachings of the Buddha while demonstrating love and respect. Theravada Buddhists believe that the enlightened nature of the Buddha is their own true nature, which they have not yet been able to fully attain. So when they pray, it is to that deepest part of themselves. Buddha is not a god and cannot respond to prayers or petitions. Yet many Burmese nonetheless pray regularly to Buddha for continued good health, wealth, success, and happiness.<sup>289, 290, 291</sup>



© vive le vélo  
Nuns collecting alms

<sup>283</sup> Burma Library, "Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar (2008)" (copy of the constitution, 2008), 9, 151–152, [http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs5/Myanmar\\_Constitution-2008-en.pdf](http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs5/Myanmar_Constitution-2008-en.pdf)

<sup>284</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Burma: 2011 Report on International Religious Freedom," 30 July 2012, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2011/eap/192615.htm>

<sup>285</sup> Burma Library, "Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar (2008)" (copy of the constitution, 2008), 157, [http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs5/Myanmar\\_Constitution-2008-en.pdf](http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs5/Myanmar_Constitution-2008-en.pdf)

<sup>286</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Burma: 2011 Report on International Religious Freedom," 30 July 2012, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2011/eap/192615.htm>

<sup>287</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Burma: 2011 Report on International Religious Freedom," 30 July 2012, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2011/eap/192615.htm>

<sup>288</sup> Khin Win Thanegi, "The Influence of Theravada Buddhism on Myanmar Society" (paper, International Conference on "Religion, Conflict and Development," Southeast Asian Studies, Passau University, Germany, 25–27 June 2007), 5, [http://www.phil.uni-passau.de/fileadmin/group\\_upload/45/pdf/conferences/paper\\_mathanegi.pdf](http://www.phil.uni-passau.de/fileadmin/group_upload/45/pdf/conferences/paper_mathanegi.pdf)

<sup>289</sup> Asian Studies Center, Windows on Asia, Michigan State University, "Religion in Burma," 2013, <http://asia.msu.edu/seasia/Burma/religion.html>

**Exchange 1: When do you pray?**

Soldier:	When do you pray?	beh daw soo dawn jaam?
Local:	We pray at noon.	nee leh ma soo dawn jaa ba meh

Although women may become Buddhist nuns, female clergy do not have the same prestige as male monks, since nuns do not perform ceremonies for laypeople. As a result, fewer females than males enter the clergy. Virtually all men join the monastery at least once during their lives. Their stay can be a few days or a lifetime. A family earns great merit when a son joins a monastery. This rite of passage, known as novitiation (*shinbyu*), typically occurs between March and May. It involves shaving the head, putting on a robe, parading around dressed as princes and declaring one's faith in the teachings (*dhamma*) of Buddha. To gain merit, those who do not have sons of their own often recommend other people's sons join a monastery.<sup>292, 293, 294, 295</sup>

**Religion and Gender**

Buddhism teaches that men and women are equal and that they pursue the same path to nirvana.<sup>296</sup> Women, however, cannot reach nirvana until they have been reincarnated as a man.<sup>297</sup>

Women enjoy a relatively high status in Buddhist societies, and Burma is no exception. Women have the right to inherit property, own land, and pursue an education. They enjoy equal rights in terms of marriage and divorce.<sup>298, 299, 300</sup>



© Dietmar Temps  
Monks and novices studying

<sup>290</sup> Khin Win Thanegi, "The Influence of Theravada Buddhism on Myanmar Society," (paper, International Conference on "Religion, Conflict and Development," Southeast Asian Studies, Passau University, Germany, 25–27 June 2007), 5–6, [http://www.phil.uni-passau.de/fileadmin/group\\_upload/45/pdf/conferences/paper\\_mathanegi.pdf](http://www.phil.uni-passau.de/fileadmin/group_upload/45/pdf/conferences/paper_mathanegi.pdf)

<sup>291</sup> Sandy Barron et al., "The Burmans," in *Refugees from Burma: Their Backgrounds and Refugee Experiences*, eds. Donald A. Ranard and Sandy Barron (Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics, June 2007), 8, <http://www.culturalorientation.net/content/download/1338/7825/version/2/file/refugeesfromburma.pdf>

<sup>292</sup> Daw Khin Myo Chit, "An Important Family Ritual," MyanmarDotCom.com, 2000, <http://www.myanmarDotCom.com/NMDCF12Season.aspx?mon=4>

<sup>293</sup> Asian Studies Center, Michigan State University, "Religion in Burma," 2013, <http://asia.msu.edu/seasia/Burma/religion.html>

<sup>294</sup> Edith Mirante, "Burman: Rites of Passage," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 177.

<sup>295</sup> Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, Government of Myanmar, "Festival Calendar in Myanmar," 2004, <http://www.myanmarTourism.org/festivals.htm>

<sup>296</sup> Lynn Wright, "Culturescope Resources: Belief Systems," Society and Culture Association, n.d., [http://scansw.com.au/sc\\_pages/sc\\_belief/sc\\_wright\\_buddhism.html](http://scansw.com.au/sc_pages/sc_belief/sc_wright_buddhism.html)

<sup>297</sup> Jeffrey Hays, "Buddhist Morality," factsanddetails.com, March 2011, <http://factsanddetails.com/world.php?itemid=1331&subcatid=355>

<sup>298</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, "Women in Myanmar," in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty, Ltd, 2011), 313.

<sup>299</sup> Than Than Nwe, "Gendered Spaces: Women in Burmese Society," *Transformations* 6 (February 2003): 11, [http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue\\_06/pdf/nwe.pdf](http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue_06/pdf/nwe.pdf)

<sup>300</sup> "Myanmar: Family," CultureGrams Online Edition, ProQuest, 2012.

In practice, however, within Theravada Buddhism, most females occupy a lower status. Because women cannot be monks and cannot achieve nirvana, the birth of a female child receives less celebration. Some shrines are forbidden to women.<sup>301, 302, 303, 304</sup>

Burman women take primary responsibility for the home including overseeing the family budget. Husbands generally turn over their entire paycheck to the wife. Daughters are not regarded as a financial liability because there is no tradition of marriage dowries.<sup>305, 306</sup> Although few Burman women hold positions of political power, they play an active part in education and healthcare, run businesses and work alongside their husbands.<sup>307, 308</sup>

## Religious Holidays and Festivals

The Burmese keep track of time with three calendars. The traditional Burmese 8-day, 12-month calendar, which began 638 years after the Christian era, is based on both the sun and the moon. For holidays, Burmese use the Buddhist lunar calendar, which is the same as the general lunar calendar except that it begins from the time of Buddha's Enlightenment around 543 B.C.E. Burmese newspapers and official documents are dated by the Burmese calendar, but western dates are often added.<sup>309</sup> Therefore, depending on which calendar one is consulting, the year could be 2012, 2556, or 1374.<sup>310, 311, 312, 313</sup>



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Central stupa of Shwedagon Pagoda

<sup>301</sup> Than Than Nwe, "Gendered Spaces: Women in Burmese Society," *Transformations* 6 (February 2003):7, 9–10, [http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue\\_06/pdf/nwe.pdf](http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue_06/pdf/nwe.pdf)

<sup>302</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 3: Myanmar," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 38–39.

<sup>303</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, "Women in Myanmar," in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty, Ltd, 2011), 313.

<sup>304</sup> Than Than Nwe, "Gendered Spaces: Women in Burmese Society," *Transformations* 6 (February 2003):8–9, [http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue\\_06/pdf/nwe.pdf](http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue_06/pdf/nwe.pdf)

<sup>305</sup> Than Than Nwe, "Gendered Spaces: Women in Burmese Society," *Transformations* 6 (February 2003): 7, 9–10, [http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue\\_06/pdf/nwe.pdf](http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue_06/pdf/nwe.pdf)

<sup>306</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 3: Myanmar," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 38–39.

<sup>307</sup> Edith Mirante, "Burman: Gender Issues," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 180.

<sup>308</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, "Women in Myanmar," in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty, Ltd, 2011), 313.

<sup>309</sup> Donald M. Seekins, *The A to Z of Burma (Myanmar)* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 472.

<sup>310</sup> Cool Emerald, "Myanmar Calendar," 2013, <http://myanmar-calendar.cool-emerald.com/>

<sup>311</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 7: Culture and Travel," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 177.

<sup>312</sup> Donald M. Seekins, *The A to Z of Burma (Myanmar)* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 472.

<sup>313</sup> University of Wyoming, "Time and Worship," n.d., <http://uwacadweb.uwyo.edu/religionet/er/buddhism/btime.htm>

### *Buddhist Holidays and Festivals*

The Burman celebrate one major religious holiday: the Tazaungmone Light Festival in November (17 November 2013). Streets and homes are brightly lit, and the people give the monks new robes on the eve of the full moon. Teams of young women compete in weaving contests to make robes for the monks. During the Khatein ceremony, the robes, food, and other offerings are made to the monks.<sup>314, 315, 316</sup> Another tradition is eating a bitter maezali salad, which is believed to keep one free of disease.<sup>317</sup>

Throughout the country, there are numerous Buddhist festivals. Buddhists celebrate one major festival in each of the 12 lunar-calendar months.<sup>318</sup> The Shwedagon Festival falls in February or March, the largest pagoda festival of the year. It is considered an auspicious day for building new pagodas. There is an overnight weaving contest for yellow robes for monks.<sup>319, 320</sup> Buddha's birthday (*Kason*) falls on a full moon in April or May. It is known as a thrice-blessed holiday that celebrates Buddha's birth, the day of his enlightenment and his experience of *nibbana*. On this day, Buddhists join a procession to the local pagoda and pour water on the Sacred Bo Tree.<sup>321, 322, 323</sup>

### *Waso*

This holiday falls in July and ends in October, corresponding to the rainy season. It marks the beginning of the Buddhist Lenten season. Monks, who undergo *shinbyu* at this time, are required to remain in one temple. Laypeople donate new robes for members of the monastic community to wear during this period. Flowers are placed at the feet of Buddhist statues by laypeople to demonstrate devotion, which is also shown through adherence to a more disciplined lifestyle. This may include giving up drink or fasting one day a week. It is intended as a period of self-reflection for all Buddhist Burmese.<sup>324, 325</sup> Another October holiday, the Thadingyut Festival of

<sup>314</sup> Myanmar Typical Exploration Tours, "Myanmar Month & Its Activities: Tazaungmone," 2010, <http://www.myanmarmtetours.com/tazaungmone.htm>

<sup>315</sup> Edith Mirante, "Burman: Major Holidays," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 177.

<sup>316</sup> Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, Government of Myanmar, "Festival Calendar in Myanmar," 2004, <http://www.myanmar-tourism.org/festivals.htm>

<sup>317</sup> MT & K Tourism Company, "March-Tabaung," 2010, [http://www.traveltomyanmar.com/tazaungmone\\_festival.htm](http://www.traveltomyanmar.com/tazaungmone_festival.htm)

<sup>318</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 8: Culture and Travel," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 169.

<sup>319</sup> Myanmars, "Shwedagon Pagoda Festival," 2012, <http://www.myanmars.net/myanmar-culture/shwedagon-pagoda-festival.htm>

<sup>320</sup> Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, Government of Myanmar, "Festival Calendar in Myanmar," 2004, <http://www.myanmar-tourism.org/festivals.htm>

<sup>321</sup> Associated Press, "Buddha's Birthday Marked in Myanmar," saultstar.com, 8 May 2010, <http://www.saultstar.com/2010/05/08/buddhas-birthday-marked-in-myanmar>

<sup>322</sup> Myanmar-Kinderhilfe, "Festivals and National Holidays 2012," n.d., [http://www.myanmar-kinderhilfe.org/Festivals\\_National\\_Holidays\\_2012.pdf](http://www.myanmar-kinderhilfe.org/Festivals_National_Holidays_2012.pdf)

<sup>323</sup> Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, Government of Myanmar, "Festival Calendar in Myanmar," 2004, <http://www.myanmar-tourism.org/festivals.htm>

<sup>324</sup> Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of Myanmar, "Waso Festival," 2013, [http://www.most.gov.mm/mdytu/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=24&Itemid=2](http://www.most.gov.mm/mdytu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=24&Itemid=2)

Lights, marks the end of Buddhist Lent. In addition to lighting pagodas, houses, and public buildings, it is a time to pay homage to monks, teachers, and parents and to ask for forgiveness for whatever transgressions one has committed during the year.<sup>326, 327</sup>

### *Nat Festivals*

Many Burmese believed that *nats* (spirits) control the conditions surrounding the lives of humans, which they can destroy if not properly appeased. *Nat pwe* (spirit festivals), carnival-like events held in huts, are occasions to call out the *nat* through a *kadaw*, literally a spirit's wife.<sup>328</sup> But the *kadaw* is usually a male performer. Loud musical accompaniment reflects, in the words of someone who attended a festival, "sonic signs that the *nats* were in the house, or, more accurately, inside the bedecked and spangled bodies of Burma's incomparable spirit mediums."<sup>329</sup> One of the best known *nat pwe* is held in the town of Taungbyon north of Mandalay every summer. For six days, devotees drink, dance and sometimes experience spirit possession.<sup>330, 331</sup> The December Mount Popa Spirit Festival is held at the spiritual home of the *nats*. Lots of drinking and partying goes on at this festival, and revelers sometimes claim they are possessed by the spirits.<sup>332, 333</sup>



© Wagaung / wikipedia.org  
Nat festival

### **Places of Worship**

An estimated 500,000 shrines, pagodas and monasteries, many of them in varying stages of disrepair, are scattered throughout Burma.<sup>334</sup> Buddhist gods do not reside in pagodas, and devotees do not worship gods or pray to gods in a pagoda. Many pagodas also have a *nat* shrine where people pray to spirits for protection.<sup>335</sup>

<sup>325</sup> Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, Government of Myanmar, "Festival Calendar in Myanmar," 2004, <http://www.myanmar-tourism.org/festivals.htm>

<sup>326</sup> Travel-Myanmar, "Myanmar Festivals 2011: Festivals in October," 2010, <http://www.travel-myanmar.net/festivals2011.htm>

<sup>327</sup> Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, Government of Myanmar, "Festival Calendar in Myanmar," 2004, <http://www.myanmar-tourism.org/festivals.htm>

<sup>328</sup> Kira Salak, "Myanmar's River of Spirits," *National Geographic*, May 2006, <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/0605/feature5/>

<sup>329</sup> Erik Davies, "Burma: Account of Spirit Festival Nat Pwe," Radio Free Asia Unplugged Blog, 25 May 2007, <http://rfaunplugged.wordpress.com/2007/05/25/burma-account-of-spirit-festival-nat-pwe/>

<sup>330</sup> Nathan Southern, Review of "Nat Pwe: Burma's Carnival of Spirit Soul (2003) (film)," *New York Times*, 2010, <http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/307660/Nat-Pwe-Burma-s-Carnival-of-Spirit-Soul/overview>

<sup>331</sup> Travel-Myanmar, "Myanmar Festivals 2011: Festivals in August," 2010, <http://www.travel-myanmar.net/festivals2011.htm>

<sup>332</sup> Travel-Myanmar, "Myanmar Festivals 2011: Festivals in December," 2010, <http://www.travel-myanmar.net/festivals2011.htm>

<sup>333</sup> Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, Government of Myanmar, "Festival Calendar in Myanmar," 2004, <http://www.myanmar-tourism.org/festivals.htm>

<sup>334</sup> Richard S. Ehrlich, "Burma's Buddhists Protest," *Scoop*, 26 September 2007, <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/HL0709/S00473.htm>

<sup>335</sup> Donald M. Seekins, *The A to Z of Burma (Myanmar)* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 349–350.

**Exchange 2: May I enter the temple?**

Soldier:	May I enter the temple?	phyaa jan go wee loo ya ma?
Local:	Yes.	ya ba deh

Most pagodas in Burma are solid structures. The inner chambers of the temple (*pahto*) are regarded as holy caves.<sup>336</sup> Although often reproductions, each pagoda contains a chamber housing relics associated with the Buddha. Platforms in the major pagodas have elaborate shrines, pavilions, and devotional halls. Shopping arcades sometimes lie along the covered stairways leading to the pavilion.<sup>337</sup>



© Tanenhaus / flickr.com  
Buddha at Thanboddhay

**Exchange 3: Must I take off my shoes inside the temple?**

Soldier:	Must I take off my shoes inside the temple?	phyaa jawn leh ma pha naa cho yaam?
Local:	Yes.	hoo keh

*Shwedagon Pagoda*

The real center of Rangoon is the Shwedagon Pagoda, Burma's holiest site. Situated on Singuttar Hill, some 3 km (2 mi) from the center of Rangoon, it appears almost detached from the city. Its gilded spire rises almost 100 m (330 ft) into the sky and is visible from much of the city. The Shwedagon Pagoda has a central *stupa*, which is surrounded by a series of temples and smaller stupas. It was built to house eight locks of Buddha's hair, now stored in an underground chamber.<sup>338</sup> Buddhists are expected to pay homage here at least once in their lifetime.<sup>339</sup>



© Jonas Merian  
Shwedagon Paya at night

**Exchange 4: Do I need to cover my head?**

Soldier:	Do I need to cover my head?	Khawn choon taa ya ma?
Local:	No.	ma taa ya ba bo

<sup>336</sup> Donald M. Seekins, *The A to Z of Burma (Myanmar)* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 349–350.

<sup>337</sup> Donald M. Seekins, *The A to Z of Burma (Myanmar)* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 83.

<sup>338</sup> Sacred Sites, "Shwedagon Pagoda, Rangoon, Burma," 2010,

<http://www.sacredsites.com/asia/burma/rangoon.html>

<sup>339</sup> "Aglow in Buddha's Embrace," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 June 2009,

<http://www.buddhistchannel.tv/index.php?id=18,8255,0,0,1,0>

## Mandalay

The *Mahamuni Paya* (Great Sage Pagoda) is the holiest pilgrimage site in Mandalay.<sup>340, 341</sup> It houses the Mahamuni image, which dates to the first century C.E. The 4 m (13 ft) image of the seated Buddha, whose face is washed and teeth are brushed every morning at 4 a.m. by resident monks, was cast in bronze. Over the centuries, however, the statue has been covered by applications of gold leaf that have more than doubled its weight. The original face is all that remains visible. Visitors apply gold leaf to the area where they wish to retain good health. Only men are permitted to walk up and touch the statue; women must remain in a separate viewing area.<sup>342</sup>



© gepiblu / flickr.com  
Pilgrimage, Mahamuni Paya

## Behavior in Buildings of Worship

Visitors should remove hats and shoes before entering the main worship area. Mobile phones should be turned off and headphones removed. Avoid eating or chewing gum while inside. Shoulders should be covered, and both women and men should wear long pants.<sup>343, 344, 345</sup>

Never sit next to or touch a statue of the Buddha or the raised platform on which it sits. Visitors should always back away from the statue before turning their backs to the Buddha. Avoid pointing at items in the temple. Use the right hand, palm facing upwards, to indicate an object. Feet are never pointed toward the Buddha statue. When monks or nuns enter the temple, visitors should stand as a gesture of respect



© abrinisky / flickr.com  
Buddha at the Mahamuni Pagoda

<sup>340</sup> Constance Wilson, "Burma: Life in the 1970's and 80's: Part II - Mandalay, The Burmese Heartland," Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Northern Illinois University, n.d., <http://www.seasite.niu.edu/burmese/Culture/WilsonPages/MandalayRegion/MandalayRegion.htm>

<sup>341</sup> Asia Explorers, "Mahamuni Pagoda, Mandalay," 2013, [http://www.asiaexplorers.com/myanmar/mahamyatmuni\\_paya.htm](http://www.asiaexplorers.com/myanmar/mahamyatmuni_paya.htm)

<sup>342</sup> Victorian Web, "Scenes in Mandalay: Mahamuni Paya," 17 April 2001, <http://www.victorianweb.org/history/empire/burma/mandalay/2.html>

<sup>343</sup> Gregory Rodgers, "Visiting Buddhist Temples - Do's and Don'ts," about.com, 2013, [http://goseasia.about.com/od/travelplanning/a/visiting\\_buddhist\\_temples.htm](http://goseasia.about.com/od/travelplanning/a/visiting_buddhist_temples.htm)

<sup>344</sup> Lee Katherine, "Basic Guidelines for Temple Visits," Buddhapia, 2005, [http://eng.buddhapia.com/Service/ContentView/ETC\\_CONTENT\\_2.ASP?pk=0001448941&sub\\_pk=&class\\_cd=0002183703&top\\_menu\\_cd=0000000592&menu\\_cd=0000008412&menu\\_code=](http://eng.buddhapia.com/Service/ContentView/ETC_CONTENT_2.ASP?pk=0001448941&sub_pk=&class_cd=0002183703&top_menu_cd=0000000592&menu_cd=0000008412&menu_code=)

<sup>345</sup> Carl Olson, "Chapter 7: Stories from Buddhist Villages," in *The Different Paths of Buddhism: A Narrative and Historical Introduction* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 129.

and should not sit again until they have finished their prostrations.<sup>346, 347, 348</sup>

Women in a pagoda must not attempt to talk or shake hands with monks who may, when a woman passes, turn their back to her. If donating money to a monk, never hand it directly because monks are prohibited from handling money. Money may be given to a monk's attendant (*kappiya*) or placed in an envelope.<sup>349, 350</sup> Similarly, men should not touch nuns.<sup>351</sup> It is permissible to take pictures inside pagodas. Show respect by avoiding laughing and talking too loudly.<sup>352, 353</sup>

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<sup>346</sup> Gregory Rodgers, "Visiting Buddhist Temples - Do's and Don'ts," about.com, 2013, [http://goseasia.about.com/od/travelplanning/a/visiting\\_buddhist\\_temples.htm](http://goseasia.about.com/od/travelplanning/a/visiting_buddhist_temples.htm)

<sup>347</sup> Michelle Brunet, "Buddhist Temple Etiquette," Opposingviews.com, 2013, <http://people.opposingviews.com/buddhist-temple-etiquette-2278.html>

<sup>348</sup> Carl Olson, "Chapter 7: Stories from Buddhist Villages," in *The Different Paths of Buddhism: A Narrative and Historical Introduction* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 129.

<sup>349</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Socialising in Myanmar," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 100.

<sup>350</sup> Gregory Rodgers, "Visiting Buddhist Temples - Do's and Don'ts," about.com, 2013, [http://goseasia.about.com/od/travelplanning/a/visiting\\_buddhist\\_temples.htm](http://goseasia.about.com/od/travelplanning/a/visiting_buddhist_temples.htm)

<sup>351</sup> Michelle Brunet, "Buddhist Temple Etiquette," Opposingviews.com, 2013, <http://people.opposingviews.com/buddhist-temple-etiquette-2278.html>

<sup>352</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Socialising in Myanmar," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 100.

<sup>353</sup> Gregory Rodgers, "Visiting Buddhist Temples - Do's and Don'ts," about.com, 2013, [http://goseasia.about.com/od/travelplanning/a/visiting\\_buddhist\\_temples.htm](http://goseasia.about.com/od/travelplanning/a/visiting_buddhist_temples.htm)

## Chapter 2 Assessment

1. Virtually 100% of Burmans are Theravada Buddhists.

**True**

In Burma, 89% of the population is Buddhist but, among the Burman, nearly 100% are adherents of Theravada Buddhism.

2. According to Theravada Buddhism, women cannot reach a state of nirvana.

**True**

Buddhism teaches that men and women are equal and pursue the same path to Nirvana. Women, however, cannot reach nirvana until they have been reincarnated as a man.

3. *Nats* are animal spirits.

**False**

*Nats* are the spirits of humans who suffered some great tragedy or unnatural death but have not been released from this earthly world. Although specific individual spirits among these *nats* have changed, their number remains constant at 37.

4. Buddhism is the official state religion of Burma.

**False**

Burma has no official state religion although the government, comprised almost entirely of Burman, strongly favors Buddhists and actively promotes Theravada Buddhism.

5. Virtually all male Burman become monks for some period in their lives.

**True**

Virtually all men join the monastery at least once during their lives. Their stay can be a few days or a lifetime.

## CHAPTER 3: TRADITIONS

### Introduction

The ethnic Burman (Bamar), comprising 68% of Burma's population, are descendants of the Burman, Mon, and Tai-Chinese groups who settled the region.<sup>354, 355</sup> The Burman population is primarily concentrated in the river valleys and plains, especially in the urban areas of Rangoon and Mandalay.<sup>356, 357</sup> Their language, Burmese, belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family of the Tai-Chinese language. Burmese is the official language of Burma although English is widely spoken due to years of British colonization.<sup>358</sup>



© markku a / flickr.com  
Monks in Shwedagon

Nearly all Burman are Theravada Buddhists. Monasteries are the center of community life and monks are a common sight on the streets.

Meditation is a routine part of everyday life for many.<sup>359</sup> In spite of their Buddhist faith, Burman have an active tradition of folklore and superstition. They believe in spiritual beings (*nats*) to whom people make offerings to gain favor and avoid misfortune. Burman also honor divine serpents (*Naga*) that live at the bottom of rivers, lakes, and oceans.<sup>360</sup>

Since achieving independence from Britain in 1948, the Burmans have ruled the nation.<sup>361</sup> They have often been accused of trying to quash the culture and ethnic identity of the more than 100 ethnic groups that make up the other 32% of the country's population.<sup>362, 363, 364, 365</sup>

<sup>354</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 3: Myanmar," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 26–27.

<sup>355</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Burma: People and Society," in *The World Factbook*, 2 January 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

<sup>356</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 3: Myanmar," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 26–27.

<sup>357</sup> Edith Mirante, "Burman: Location and Homeland," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 175.

<sup>358</sup> Edith Mirante, "Burman: Language," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 175.

<sup>359</sup> Edith Mirante, "Burman: Religion," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 176.

<sup>360</sup> Edith Mirante, "Burman: Folklore," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 175–176.

<sup>361</sup> Edith Mirante, "Burman: Introduction," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 175.

<sup>362</sup> Hannah Beech, "A Closer Look at Burma's Ethnic Minorities," *Time*, 30 January 2009, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1874981,00.html>

<sup>363</sup> AFP, "Myanmar Christians Forced to Convert to Buddhism: Rights Group," *International Herald Tribune*, 5 September 2012, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/431776/myanmar-christians-forced-to-convert-to-buddhism-rights-group/>

<sup>364</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Burma: 2011 Report on International Religious Freedom," 30 July 2012, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2011/eap/192615.htm>

<sup>365</sup> Lalit Jha, "Burmese Govt Fosters Religious Intolerance: US Official," *The Irrawaddy*, 13 September 2012, <http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/13902>

## Honor and Values

Among the Burman, and Burmese in general, the loss of face (status or reputation) is considered intolerable but not enough to trigger suicide. People who cause another to lose face are often penalized. Juniors are expected, at all costs, to save face for their elders and seniors. Juniors should never contradict, disagree with, or criticize a senior in public. This feeling of *ah-nar-de*, not wanting to impose on others, is so pervasive some have called it a national trait.<sup>366</sup> Older people experience this same feeling, and elderly parents may be reluctant to talk about their own problems in order to avoid troubling their children.<sup>367</sup>



© Dietmar Temps  
Burmese old woman

Friendship is an important cultural value and relations among friends may often be as close as those between blood relatives. True friends are not bossy, jealous, envious, or competitive. Friends are expected to share private thoughts and feelings and not doing so has been the ruin of many relations.<sup>368</sup>

Burmese believe that one owes a debt to anyone who has helped along the way. Children feel gratitude to parents who have raised them. Students are indebted to the teachers who taught them. No matter how difficult it may be to fulfill these obligations, one should try to always be grateful.<sup>369</sup>

Their Buddhist faith has created within the Burmese a sense of fatalism and resilience. Emotional self-control is a key value, and anger must be avoided at all costs. Their sense of duty to others, especially family, leads to a profound respect for self-sacrifice. The Buddhist regard for harmony and broad dislike for conflict suggest that the Burman may be less willing to take risk and are unlikely to challenge authority.<sup>370</sup> Taken together, the basic values of Burman Buddhists have helped create a forgiving and generous people who stand strong in the face of adversity and struggle to forge a peaceful and harmonious community.<sup>371</sup>

<sup>366</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 3: Myanmar," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 41.

<sup>367</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 3: Myanmar," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 41.

<sup>368</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 3: Myanmar," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 40.

<sup>369</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 3: Myanmar," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 40, 43.

<sup>370</sup> Khin Win Thanegi, "The Influence of Theravada Buddhism on Myanmar Society" (paper, International Conference on "Religion, Conflict and Development," Southeast Asian Studies, University of Passau, 25–27 June 2007), 5, 12–13, [http://www.phil.uni-passau.de/fileadmin/group\\_upload/45/pdf/conferences/paper\\_mathanegi.pdf](http://www.phil.uni-passau.de/fileadmin/group_upload/45/pdf/conferences/paper_mathanegi.pdf)

<sup>371</sup> Hong Sar Channaibanya, "Understanding People from Burma's Culture," Australian Mon Association, May 2010, 3–4, <http://www.mon.org.au/file/Understanding%20Burmese.pdf>

## Greetings

Burmese men usually greet other men with a handshake, a nod, and a smile. Women greet other women with a wave, a smile, a nod, or a handshake. Men and women also shake hands, smile, and nod when greeting each other.<sup>372</sup> Burmese do not have a standard phrase for greeting each other. They usually ask a question such as “have you eaten?” or “where are you going?”<sup>373, 374, 375</sup> *Mingalaba*, or “auspiciousness to you,” is the standard greeting for school children to teachers, but it is not commonly used by adults.<sup>376, 377</sup>



© Abhisit Vejajiva / flickr.com  
Men in Longyi

### Exchange 5: Good morning.

Soldier:	Good morning.	min glaa naa neh Khin ba
Local:	Good morning.	min glaa naa neh Khin ba

Burmese greetings vary depending upon the relationship between individuals.<sup>378</sup>

### Exchange 6: How is your family?

Soldier:	How is your family?	min mee taa zoo gaw beh loo leh?
Local:	They are doing fine, thank you.	izwa beh, aa loo ney kawn jaa ba deh

Kinship titles such as “elder brother,” “elder sister,” “uncle,” and “aunt” are often used among close friends even though they may be unrelated. These honorifics are quite common especially the terms “uncle” and “aunt.” The terms “U” (male) and “Daw” for women are frequently used by younger or juniors to address older or senior persons. Although there are many such honorifics attached to names, using “U” and “Daw” are generally safe, especially upon first meetings. Using a person’s name without one of these honorifics is considered rude and disrespectful.<sup>379</sup>

<sup>372</sup> Culture Crossing, “Myanmar: Greetings,” n.d.,

[http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics\\_business\\_student\\_details.php?Id=7&CID=142](http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=7&CID=142)

<sup>373</sup> Saw Myat Yin, “Chapter 4: Socialising in Myanmar,” in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 76–77.

<sup>374</sup> Today in Myanmar, “Myanmar Etiquette; Greetings in Myanmar,” 23 December 2008,

<http://www.myanmar2day.com/myanmar-culture-custom/2008/12/greetings-in-myanmar/>

<sup>375</sup> Edith Mirante, “Burman: Interpersonal Relations,” in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 177.

<sup>376</sup> Saw Myat Yin, “Chapter 4: Socialising in Myanmar,” in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 77.

<sup>377</sup> Today in Myanmar, “Myanmar Etiquette; Greetings in Myanmar,” 23 December 2008,

<http://www.myanmar2day.com/myanmar-culture-custom/2008/12/greetings-in-myanmar/>

<sup>378</sup> Saw Myat Yin, “Chapter 4: Socialising in Myanmar,” in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 78.

<sup>379</sup> Saw Myat Yin, “Chapter 4: Socialising in Myanmar,” in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 78–79.

**Exchange 7: How are you?**

Soldier:	How are you?	beh loo leh?
Local:	Fine, very well.	kaw ba deh

**Exchange 8: Hi, Mr. Mawn Ba.**

Soldier:	Hi, Mr. Mawn Ba.	hey, mam ba
Local:	Hello!	heloo!
Soldier:	Are you doing well?	ney kawn ya yeh laa?
Local:	Yes.	ney kawn ba deh

**Status of Women**

Burmese women enjoy a much more equal status with men than other women throughout the region. They wield considerable influence in the home, and can fully participate in activities outside the home including work. Among most groups, kinship is traced through both the mother's and the father's lines.<sup>380, 381</sup> Men and women have equal rights with respect to inheritance, marriage, and divorce. Girls and boys are educated together and, today, more Burmese women attend universities than men. In other areas, however, women lag behind men, especially in positions of power. Only 20 of the 659 members of the new parliament are women. Women rarely occupy other powerful positions, including in the military.<sup>382, 383</sup>



© Justin Vidamo  
Old woman using sewing machine

Within the predominant Theravada Buddhist view of most Burmese, girls occupy a lower cultural status. The birth of a girl child is celebrated less enthusiastically than the birth of a son. Nevertheless, both girls and boys are treasured. The inability of women to become monks, however, consigns females to a second-class status in a society in which religion is woven into daily life. Women can achieve the state of Nirvana, but only if they are reincarnated as men. Some areas of Buddhist shrines are forbidden to women.<sup>384, 385, 386, 387</sup>

<sup>380</sup> Than Than New, "Gendered Spaces: Women in Burmese Society," *Transformations* 6 (February 2003): 11, [http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue\\_06/pdf/nwe.pdf](http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue_06/pdf/nwe.pdf)

<sup>381</sup> "Myanmar: Family," CultureGrams Online Edition, ProQuest, 2012.

<sup>382</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, "Women in Myanmar," in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty, Ltd, 2011), 313.

<sup>383</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 3: Myanmar," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 51–52.

<sup>384</sup> Than Than New, "Gendered Spaces: Women in Burmese Society," *Transformations* 6 (February 2003): 7, 9–10, [http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue\\_06/pdf/nwe.pdf](http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue_06/pdf/nwe.pdf)

<sup>385</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 3: Myanmar," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 38–39, 51.

<sup>386</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, "Women in Myanmar," in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty, Ltd, 2011), 313.

Although they take primary responsibility for household duties including overseeing the family budget, women also run businesses and work alongside their husbands. Burman men customarily give their entire paychecks to their wives who manage household finances. Daughters are not viewed as a financial liability since Burmese have no tradition of marriage dowries. They, along with their brothers, will look after their parents in old age.<sup>388, 389</sup>

## Hospitality and Gift-Giving

### *Hospitality*

Food at a Burmese home is not served in courses. Instead, the food is spread out on a table. A serving is taken from each dish and placed next to a serving of rice which is always placed in the center of the plate. Utensils are commonly used when visitors come. One eats from the spoon using forks only to push food onto the spoons.<sup>390, 391</sup> Burmese usually eat with their fingers, using only the fingertips of their right hands. But the prohibition against using the left hand for eating is not as rigid as in other countries.<sup>392</sup> A small dish is often placed beside the main plate and is used for discarding bones. Women and children may not join in the meal. They may serve food or fan the guests with a palm fan.<sup>393</sup>



© Dieter Zimig  
Burmese meal

Little conversation takes place during the meal. Instead, conversations normally take place when tea is served or with snacks before a meal.<sup>394</sup>

### *Gift-Giving*

If invited to a Burmese home for a meal, it is appropriate to take along a gift as a token of appreciation. Chocolates, cookies, nuts, or any kind of sweet treat is always appreciated. Useful gifts are another good choice. Small toys or crayons for children; toiletries or cosmetics for the hostess; calendars, ballpoint pens, or shirts for the host, are all good alternatives. Since they are rarely used, expensive or luxury items are not generally appreciated. Flowers are not a good

<sup>387</sup> Than Than New, "Gendered Spaces: Women in Burmese Society," *Transformations* 6 (February 2003): 8–9, [http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue\\_06/pdf/nwe.pdf](http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue_06/pdf/nwe.pdf)

<sup>388</sup> Than Than New, "Gendered Spaces: Women in Burmese Society," *Transformations* 6 (February 2003): 7, 9–10, [http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue\\_06/pdf/nwe.pdf](http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue_06/pdf/nwe.pdf)

<sup>389</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 3: Myanmar," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 38–39.

<sup>390</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, "Eating in Myanmar (Burma)," in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty, Ltd, 2011), 331, 335.

<sup>391</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 6: Food and Entertaining," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 137.

<sup>392</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, "Eating in Myanmar (Burma)," in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty, Ltd, 2011), 335.

<sup>393</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 6: Food and Entertaining," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 137.

<sup>394</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 6: Food and Entertaining," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 137–138.

choice because they are usually reserved for funerals, used as female adornments or as an offering at a Buddhist altar.<sup>395</sup>

### Exchange 9: This gift is for you.

Soldier:	This gift is for you.	dee leh sawn ga min tweh ba
Local:	I cannot accept this.	ma yo beeyaa see neh

Burmese will often protest a little when they are given a gift. The protests are sincere because Burmese feel that true friendship does not require presents. Gifts are rarely opened in front of the giver. To do so might make the receiver appear greedy. When gifts are opened, Burmese do not typically respond with effusive appreciation. Be aware that gift giving places a Burmese in a cultural dilemma: accepting the gift may make one appear greedy but failing to accept it would be rude. Nevertheless, a Burmese is likely to be pleased with an appropriate and thoughtful gift and is a gesture that will not soon be forgotten.<sup>396, 397</sup>

### Food and Eating Habits

Burmese cuisine centers around oil-based curries (*hi'n*), salads, and soups and nearly every meal includes rice. Common herbs include ginger, turmeric, garlic, chili, lemongrass, green onions, and coriander.<sup>398</sup>



© Mikhail Esteves  
Coconut curry with chicken

One of the most famous Burmese dishes is *mohinga*, a dish of thin flat noodles eaten in a fish-based soup broth. It is especially popular as a breakfast dish.<sup>399</sup>

### Exchange 10: This food is very good.

Soldier:	This food is very good.	dee aa saa aa sa ga tay kawn da beh
Local:	It's <i>mohinga</i> .	dee haa moy hin Khaa ba

### Exchange 11: What ingredients are used to make mohinga?

Soldier:	What ingredients are used to make <i>mohinga</i> ?	moy hin kaa go ba neh cheh leh?
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<sup>395</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 6: Food and Entertaining," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 133.

<sup>396</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 6: Food and Entertaining," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 135.

<sup>397</sup> Naoko Kumada, "Rethinking Dana in Burma: The Art of Giving" (conference paper, Interdisciplinary Conference on Religion in Contemporary Myanmar, Stanford University, 22–23 May 2004), 4, [http://www.dhammadownload.com/books/Politics\\_of\\_Gift-giving\\_in\\_Burmese.pdf](http://www.dhammadownload.com/books/Politics_of_Gift-giving_in_Burmese.pdf)

<sup>398</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 6: Food and Entertaining," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 138.

<sup>399</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 6: Food and Entertaining," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 144.

Local:	Fish, fish sauce, ginger, lemon grass, pepper, turmeric, red pepper.	naa, nan jaa yey, chin, sabalin, naa yoo tee moo neh soo nee neh chat da ba
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Another favorite, often served at celebrations, is a dish of Chinese-style yellow noodles eaten in a coconut-curry with chicken (*ohn-no khauk swei*).<sup>400</sup> Popular salads include *maji-yweg thouq* made from tamarind leaves and *shauq-thi dhouq*, made with indigenous lemon.<sup>401</sup> Desserts are basic and include seaweed jelly (*kyauk kyaw*), a lump of palm sugar (*jaggary*), and tapioca pudding sweetened with *jaggery* and coconut (*thagu byin*).<sup>402, 403</sup> Mangoes, jackfruits, guava, watermelon, papaya, lychee, grapes, and pineapples are common in Burma.<sup>404</sup>

### Exchange 12: What is the name of this dish?

Soldier:	What is the name of this dish?	dee hin go beh loo Kho leh?
Local:	This is chicken curry.	dee hin ga chaa taa hin ba

Snacks include sticky rice cakes steamed in banana leaves, vegetable fritters, and *lephet thoke*, a salad made from oil-marinated tea leaves served with dried shrimp, garlic, and sesame seeds. With caffeine equivalent to a cup of strong coffee, the *lephet thoke* salad is a popular afternoon pick-me-up. The caffeine-free alternative is the *gin dok* salad made with pickled ginger rather than tea leaves.<sup>405</sup>



© Wagaung / wikipedia.org  
Lepheth thoke salad

### Exchange 13: The food tastes so good.

Soldier:	The food tastes so good.	dee aa saa aa sa teh aa ya ta shey da beh
Local:	Thank you.	kee zoo tin ba deh

Water is usually drunk after a meal but rarely during or before eating. Tea is a popular beverage.<sup>406</sup>

<sup>400</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 6: Food and Entertaining," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 142–143.

<sup>401</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, "Eating in Myanmar (Burma)," in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty, Ltd, 2011), 328.

<sup>402</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, "Eating in Myanmar (Burma)," in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty, Ltd, 2011), 328–329, 331.

<sup>403</sup> Myanmar, "Lifestyle: Myanmar Traditional Foods," 2006,

[http://www.myanmar.com/lifestyle/traditional\\_foods.html](http://www.myanmar.com/lifestyle/traditional_foods.html)

<sup>404</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 6: Food and Entertaining," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 144.

<sup>405</sup> Robert Lauriston, "Burma Daze," *San Francisco Weekly*, 6 June 2007, <http://sfweekly.net/2007-06-06/dining/burma-daze/>

<sup>406</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 6: Food and Entertaining," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 143.

## Dress Code

Clothing has both an ethnic and a political dimension in Burma. Prominent activists argued against Western attire.<sup>407</sup> Traditional clothing is a symbol of pride in Burmese heritage and became part of a “wear-homespun” campaign.<sup>408, 409</sup>



Among the Burman, both men and women wear the traditional sarong-like garment (*longyi*) known as *htami* (women) or *pa-soe* (men) that is knotted at the waist. Men wear collarless shirts (*ingyi*) and a round-necked jacket (*taibon*). Women wear short fitted blouses.<sup>410, 411</sup> The color and designs of the clothing vary among ethnic groups and by gender. The Burman *longyi* uses fabric with checks, plaids, or stripes in any color.<sup>412, 413</sup>

### Exchange 14: How should I dress?

Soldier:	How should I dress?	beh loo woya ma leh?
Local:	<i>Wear loose fitting clothes which cover your body.</i>	po po ba ba aa woo ko woo loo ya ba deh

### Exchange 15: Is this acceptable to wear?

Soldier:	Is this acceptable to wear?	dee ya way yin ya leh Kha maam?
Local:	<i>Yes.</i>	leh Khan ba deh

Western dress is becoming increasingly common, particularly in the cities.<sup>414, 415</sup> Burmese are generally formal and, in business settings, a suit and tie is preferred although a shirt and tie with slacks is acceptable. Women wear long-sleeved blouses to offices or formal settings since sleeveless or short-sleeved blouses are reserved for casual settings. Skirts or pant-suits are appropriate attire for women. High fashion is less important than neatness.<sup>416</sup>

<sup>407</sup> Peter Olszewski, *Land of a Thousand Eyes: The Subtle Pleasures of Everyday Life in Myanmar* (London: Unwin and Allen, 2005), 77–78.

<sup>408</sup> Shelby Tucker, “Chapter Four: We Burmans,” in *Burma: The Curse of Independence* (London: Pluto Press, 2001), 82.

<sup>409</sup> Eric Trachtenberg, “Burma—The Golden Land, Part I,” *The New Progressive*, 30 November 2011, <http://www.et1964.com/2011/11/burma-the-golden-land-part-i/>

<sup>410</sup> Edith Mirante, “Burman: Clothing,” in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 178.

<sup>411</sup> “Myanmar: Personal Appearance,” CultureGrams Online Edition, ProQuest, 2012.

<sup>412</sup> Vietlong Travel, “Myanmar Traditional Costumes,” n.d., <http://vietlongtravel.com/myanmar-traditional-costumes.html>

<sup>413</sup> Myanmar, “Arts & Literature,” 21 May 2006, [http://www.myanmar.com/artsandliterature/traditional\\_costumes.html](http://www.myanmar.com/artsandliterature/traditional_costumes.html)

<sup>414</sup> “Myanmar: Personal Appearance,” CultureGrams Online Edition, ProQuest, 2012.

<sup>415</sup> Donald M. Seekins, *The A to Z of Burma (Myanmar)* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 274.

<sup>416</sup> Saw Myat Yin, “Chapter 9: Doing Business,” in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 203.

## Non-Religious Holidays

### *Calendars and the Burman Holidays*

Like much else in Burma, even the concept of time is complicated. The traditional Burmese calendar is based on both the sun and the moon. The Burmese era began 638 years after the Christian era, so their year 1374 begins in 2012 and continues through April 2013 after which begins the year 1375.<sup>417, 418</sup> The traditional calendar has eight days in a week and 12 months in a year. In order to make accommodations to the western calendar, Wednesday morning and Wednesday afternoon are counted as separate days.<sup>419</sup> For purposes of holidays, however, Burmese use the Buddhist lunar calendar which is the same as the general lunar calendar except that it begins from the time of Buddha's Enlightenment around 543 B.C.E. According to the Buddhist lunar calendar, the year 2013 would be 2556–2557.<sup>420, 421</sup> Burmese newspapers and official documents are dated using the Burmese calendar, but the western dates are often also added.<sup>422</sup>



© Htoo Tay Zar  
Thingyan celebration, Yangon

The Burman celebrate one major non-religious holiday, Burmese New Year, which falls sometime in April. The five-day New Year's holiday (18–21 April 2013) follows the *Thingyan* water-festival.<sup>423</sup> *Thingyan* falls near the end of the hot dry season and helps welcome the new year. In 2013, the five-day holiday falls from 12–16 April.<sup>424</sup> During the festival, revelers splash water on each other and on passersby to symbolize the washing away of last year's bad luck and misdeeds.<sup>425, 426</sup>

### *National Holidays*

Burma celebrates a number of other public holidays. Independence Day, is celebrated at precisely 4:20 a.m. on 4 January since independence was proclaimed at that time.<sup>427</sup> On 12 February, Burmese celebrate Union Day commemorating General Aung San's agreement at

<sup>417</sup> Cool Emerald, "Myanmar Calendar," 2013, <http://myanmar-calendar.cool-emerald.com/>

<sup>418</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 7: Culture and Travel," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 177.

<sup>419</sup> Donald M. Seekins, *The A to Z of Burma (Myanmar)* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 472.

<sup>420</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 7: Culture and Travel," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 177.

<sup>421</sup> University of Wyoming, "Time and Worship," n.d., <http://uwacadweb.uwyo.edu/religionet/er/buddhism/btime.htm>

<sup>422</sup> Donald M. Seekins, *The A to Z of Burma (Myanmar)* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 472.

<sup>423</sup> Q++ Studio, "Bank and Public Holidays for Myanmar," 2013, [http://www.qppstudio.net/publicholidays2013/myanmar\\_formerly\\_burma\\_.htm](http://www.qppstudio.net/publicholidays2013/myanmar_formerly_burma_.htm)

<sup>424</sup> Q++ Studio, "Bank and Public Holidays for Myanmar," 2013, [http://www.qppstudio.net/publicholidays2013/myanmar\\_formerly\\_burma\\_.htm](http://www.qppstudio.net/publicholidays2013/myanmar_formerly_burma_.htm)

<sup>425</sup> Myanmar Travel, "Thingyan, Myanmar Water Festival," n.d., <http://myanmartravel.org/festivals/thingyan.html>

<sup>426</sup> Edith Mirante, "Burman: Major Holidays," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 177.

<sup>427</sup> Mark Belinsky, "The Weathermen in Burma," Open Salon, 15 August 2008, <http://open.salon.com/content.php?cid=9417>

Panglong with leaders from Burma's tribal ethnic groups to form a federation of partially self-governing states after independence.<sup>428</sup> Peasants' Day, celebrated on 2 March, recognizes the importance of farmers to the national economy.<sup>429</sup> Tabaung Full Moon Day is celebrated near the end of March (26 March 2013).<sup>430</sup> This is the last month of the Burmese lunar calendar and marks the end of the harvest season.<sup>431</sup> Armed Forces Day (*Tatmadaw*), celebrated on 27 March, commemorates the day when the Burmese Independence Army marched against the Japanese.<sup>432</sup>

### Exchange 16: Will you be celebrating the Water Festival?

Soldier:	Will you be celebrating the Water Festival?	min do taa jaan pweh daw tin pa jaam laa?
Local:	Yes!	hoo keh!

Labor Day (Worker's Day) falls on 1 May and celebrates the common worker.<sup>433</sup> Martyr's Day, 19 July, commemorates the assassination of Aung San and other cabinet members in 1947.<sup>434</sup> The final secular holiday of the year is National Day celebration which falls on a full moon in November or December (27 November 2013). This is the anniversary of the protest against the 1920 Rangoon University Act, seen by the Burmese as a colonial effort to limit access to higher education.<sup>435, 436</sup>



© Htoo Tay Zar  
New year festival

### Do's and Don'ts

**Do** use *U* or *Daw* when addressing adults. It is a sign of respect important to the Burmese.

**Do** remove your shoes and socks before entering religious buildings, compounds, and private homes.

**Do** bow your head slightly when passing elderly people as a sign of respect.

<sup>428</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 7: Culture and Travel," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 178.

<sup>429</sup> Holidays Around the World, "Peasants' Day is Celebrated in Myanmar (Burma)," n.d.,

<http://aglobalworld.com/holidays-around-the-world/peasants-day-myanmar-burma/>

<sup>430</sup> Q++ Studio, "Bank and Public Holidays for Myanmar," 2013,

[http://www.qppstudio.net/publicholidays2013/myanmar\\_formerly\\_burma\\_.htm](http://www.qppstudio.net/publicholidays2013/myanmar_formerly_burma_.htm)

<sup>431</sup> MT & K Tourism Company, "March-Tabaung," 2010, [http://www.traveltomyanmar.com/taabaung\\_festival.htm](http://www.traveltomyanmar.com/taabaung_festival.htm)

<sup>432</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 7: Culture and Travel," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 178.

<sup>433</sup> Q++ Studio, "Bank and Public Holidays for Myanmar," 2013,

[http://www.qppstudio.net/publicholidays2013/myanmar\\_formerly\\_burma\\_.htm](http://www.qppstudio.net/publicholidays2013/myanmar_formerly_burma_.htm)

<sup>434</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 7: Culture and Travel," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 179.

<sup>435</sup> Q++ Studio, "Bank and Public Holidays for Myanmar," 2013,

[http://www.qppstudio.net/publicholidays2013/myanmar\\_formerly\\_burma\\_.htm](http://www.qppstudio.net/publicholidays2013/myanmar_formerly_burma_.htm)

<sup>436</sup> Holidays Around the World, "Myanmar Remembers Its Independence on National Day," 2013, <http://aglobalworld.com/holidays-around-the-world/myanmar-independence-day/>

**Do** use your chin to point instead of your finger.

**Do** turn your head away from others before yawning as showing the inside of one's mouth is considered impolite.

**Do** give people things with both hands, and respectfully bend forward as you do.

**Don't** turn the bottoms of your feet towards a Buddha statue.

**Don't** touch a Burmese person, adult or child, on the head.

**Don't** initiate conversations about Burmese politics.

**Don't** sit at the head of the table unless you are the senior person.

**Don't** give money to a monk unless it is in an envelope. Monks are prohibited from handling money.

## Chapter 3 Assessment

1. Loss-of-face is an intolerable affront to Burmese.

**True**

Among the Burman, and Burmese in general, the loss of face is considered intolerable but not enough to trigger suicide. People who cause another to lose face are often penalized. Juniors are expected, at all costs, to save face for their elders and seniors.

2. *Mingalaba* is a standard greeting among most Burmese.

**False**

*Mingalaba*, or “auspiciousness to you,” is the standard greeting for school children to teachers, but it is not commonly used by adults.

3. Flowers are considered inappropriate gifts.

**True**

Flowers are not a good choice because they are reserved for funerals, used as female adornments or as an offering at a Buddhist altar.

4. Eating with the left hand is strictly prohibited in Burmese society.

**False**

Burmese usually eat with their fingers, using only the fingertips of their right hands. But the prohibition against using the left hand for eating is not as rigid as in other countries.

5. A Burman *longyi* is usually made from a fabric with solid colors.

**False**

The Burman *longyi* uses fabric with checks, plaids, or stripes in any color.

## CHAPTER 4: URBAN LIFE

### Introduction

Burma remains a largely rural nation with few cities of any significant size. Only 34% of the population live in urban areas.<sup>437, 438</sup> Approximately 11% of the population live in urban areas with more than one million residents, and only Rangoon has a population over one million.<sup>439, 440</sup> About 30% of the urban population live in Burma's two largest cities: Rangoon and Mandalay.<sup>441, 442</sup>



© Hella Delicious  
Old Rangoon building

Rural-urban migration stems from industrialization and increased economic opportunities in urban centers.<sup>443</sup> In Burma, however, the process has depended much more on political rather than economic reasons. Rangoon served as a regional capital for the British and was a major trade and shipping center. When the British annexed Upper Burma, they encouraged many Indians to move into Rangoon to augment the labor force. In the three years following independence, city populations swelled dramatically as refugees sought greater safety while attempting to escape the guerilla wars and ethnic violence, especially along the border regions. After 1960, at least in Rangoon, rural-urban migration was no longer the most significant factor of economic growth. As the economy flagged, there were no jobs for immigrants. Urban unemployment was nearly four times that of rural areas.<sup>444</sup>

New patterns in urban land use began to develop. Urban slums were razed and replaced with high-rise apartments and commercial buildings.<sup>445</sup> The government is drafting a new 40-year urban development plan focusing on Rangoon and Mandalay. Among the highest priorities are

<sup>437</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Burma: People and Society," in *The World Factbook*, 3 January 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

<sup>438</sup> Thomas Brinkoff, "City Population: Myanmar," 25 July 2009, <http://www.citypopulation.de/Myanmar.html>

<sup>439</sup> Trading Economics, "Population in Urban Agglomerations of More than 1 Million (% of Total Population) in Myanmar," 2012, <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/myanmar/population-in-urban-agglomerations-of-more-than-1-million-percent-of-total-population-wb-data.html>

<sup>440</sup> Thomas Brinkoff, "City Population: Myanmar," 25 July 2009, <http://www.citypopulation.de/Myanmar.html>

<sup>441</sup> Feng Yingqiu, "Myanmar Drafts Urban Development Plan for Economic Development," *Xinhua News*, 9 January 2012, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2012-09/01/c\\_131821443.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2012-09/01/c_131821443.htm)

<sup>442</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Burma: People and Society," in *The World Factbook*, 3 January 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

<sup>443</sup> José A. Gómez-Ibáñez, "Yangon's Development Challenges" (paper, Rajawali Foundation Institute for Asia, Harvard Kennedy School, Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation, March 2012), 1, <http://www.ash.harvard.edu/extension/ash/docs/yangon.pdf>

<sup>444</sup> Than Than New, "Yangon: The Emergence of a New Spatial Order in Myanmar's Capital City," *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 13, no. 1 (April 1998).

<sup>445</sup> Than Than New, "Yangon: The Emergence of a New Spatial Order in Myanmar's Capital City," *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 13, no. 1 (April 1998).

improving and expanding infrastructure and tackling air pollution. Urbanization is likely to remain a major challenge as Burma continues to develop and become part of the world.<sup>446</sup>

## Urbanization

The urbanization plans of the new government could drive unprecedented urban growth and development, but they will meet serious challenges of modernization and urbanization. Neither the federal government nor the cities are ready to handle these new challenges. Current city dwellers already face major problems caused by sagging infrastructure, which may only worsen in the near term.<sup>447, 448</sup> An estimated 10% of Rangoon's population live in slums. Another 40% of residents have no piped water, and there is no central sewage collection or treatment system. Nearly three-quarters of the population have no access to electricity.<sup>449</sup> Electrical supplies are insufficient to meet demand causing persistent blackouts.<sup>450, 451</sup> The transportation infrastructure fares no better. The roads are in poor shape, riddled with potholes but not particularly congested. Buses, which carry an estimated 80% of urban commuters, are antiquated and dangerously overcrowded.<sup>452, 453</sup> Air pollution is a growing concern in the cities, particularly in Rangoon where particulate matter levels are 60% above the safety levels recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO).<sup>454</sup> The main source of the pollution is industry, coal-burning power plants, and vehicles.<sup>455, 456</sup>



© Wagaung / wikipedia.org  
Crowded Mandalay street

<sup>446</sup> Feng Yingqiu, "Myanmar Drafts Urban Development Plan for Economic Development," News, 9 January 2012, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2012-09/01/c\\_131821443.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2012-09/01/c_131821443.htm)

<sup>447</sup> José A. Gómez-Ibáñez, "Yongon's Development Challenges" (paper, Rajawali Foundation Institute for Asia, Harvard Kennedy School, Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation, March 2012), 1–6, <http://www.ash.harvard.edu/extension/ash/docs/yangon.pdf>

<sup>448</sup> Feng Yingqiu, "Myanmar Drafts Urban Development Plan for Economic Development," *Xinhua News*, 9 January 2012, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2012-09/01/c\\_131821443.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2012-09/01/c_131821443.htm)

<sup>449</sup> Asian Development Bank, "Myanmar's Economic Outlook Improving but Broad Reforms Still Needed," 11 April 2012, <http://www.adb.org/news/myanmars-economic-outlook-improving-broad-reforms-still-needed>

<sup>450</sup> Feng Yingqiu, "Myanmar Drafts Urban Development Plan for Economic Development," *Xinhua News*, 9 January 2012, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2012-09/01/c\\_131821443.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2012-09/01/c_131821443.htm)

<sup>451</sup> José A. Gómez-Ibáñez, "Yangon's Development Challenges" (paper, Rajawali Foundation Institute for Asia, Harvard Kennedy School, Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation, March 2012), 9, <http://www.ash.harvard.edu/extension/ash/docs/yangon.pdf>

<sup>452</sup> José A. Gómez-Ibáñez, "Yangon's Development Challenges" (paper, Rajawali Foundation Institute for Asia, Harvard Kennedy School, Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation, March 2012), 10, <http://www.ash.harvard.edu/extension/ash/docs/yangon.pdf>

<sup>453</sup> Bureau of Consular Affairs, U. S. Department of State, "Burma (Myanmar) Country Specific Information: Traffic Safety and Road Conditions," 29 June 2011, [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1077.html#traffic\\_safety](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1077.html#traffic_safety)

<sup>454</sup> Shwe Yee Saw Myint, "Our Growing Air Pollution Problem," *The Myanmar Times* 31, no. 614 (13–19 February 2012), <http://www.mmmtimes.com/2012/news/614/news61420.html>

<sup>455</sup> William Boot, "Environmental Crises Threaten Burma's Economy," *The Irrawaddy*, 21 August 2012, <http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/12024>

<sup>456</sup> Shwe Yee Saw Myint, "Our Growing Air Pollution Problem," *Myanmar Times* 31, no. 614 (13–19 February 2012), <http://www.mmmtimes.com/2012/news/614/news61420.html>

## Work Issues

In spite of the high rates of poverty (16% in 2011), unemployment is low in Burma (nearly 2%) because the primary problem is not jobs but low wages.<sup>457, 458</sup> As Burma transitions toward a more open market economy, it is forging ahead with plans to improve its infrastructure and increase its industrial sector. The government is attempting to expand both trade and foreign relations as a means of creating a firm foundation for new economic ventures.<sup>459</sup>



The task faced by the nation and by foreign investors is to try to rebuild some of the nation's industries and expand existing industrial parks. Most of the growth potential and plans center around Rangoon where several new industrial areas have been established.<sup>460, 461</sup> Planned development and expansion of several ports should result in an increase in construction and other industrial jobs. Tourism is set to see a rapid growth which should provide new jobs in the services sector including hotel, spas, and other retail enterprises necessary to sustain tourism.<sup>462</sup> The most pressing needs are likely to be in technical fields like accounting, banking, manufacturing, and corporate government.<sup>463, 464</sup> These jobs are expected to provide better wages and reduce urban poverty.<sup>465</sup>

Much of the success of these initiatives depends on improving the educational levels of the population. The Burmese labor force consists largely of poorly educated unskilled or low-skilled

<sup>457</sup> United Nations, "Strategic Framework 2012–2015" (report, May 2011), 13,

[http://unic.un.org/imucms/userfiles/yangon/file/UN\\_Strategic\\_Framework\\_for\\_Myanmar\\_2012-2015.pdf](http://unic.un.org/imucms/userfiles/yangon/file/UN_Strategic_Framework_for_Myanmar_2012-2015.pdf)

<sup>458</sup> United Nations Development Programme, "Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey in Myanmar (2009–2010)" (survey report, June 2011), xiii, 56–57,

[http://www.mm.undp.org/ihlca/01\\_Poverty\\_Profile/PDFs/12%20Poverty%20Profile\\_Complete%20Report.pdf](http://www.mm.undp.org/ihlca/01_Poverty_Profile/PDFs/12%20Poverty%20Profile_Complete%20Report.pdf)

<sup>459</sup> Tan Soon Kim, Edwin Neo, and Jesse Satria Oeni, "Myanmar: Opportunities in Asia's Last Frontier Economy," *IE Insights 2* (July 2012), 12–13,

[http://www.iesingapore.gov.sg/wps/wcm/connect/03d627004bdd3658b528bde35d112ac6/IE\\_Insights\\_Myanmar.pdf?MOD=AJPERES](http://www.iesingapore.gov.sg/wps/wcm/connect/03d627004bdd3658b528bde35d112ac6/IE_Insights_Myanmar.pdf?MOD=AJPERES)

<sup>460</sup> Tan Soon Kim, Edwin Neo, and Jesse Satria Oeni, "Myanmar: Opportunities in Asia's Last Frontier Economy," *IE Insights 2* (July 2012), 5, 16,

[http://www.iesingapore.gov.sg/wps/wcm/connect/03d627004bdd3658b528bde35d112ac6/IE\\_Insights\\_Myanmar.pdf?MOD=AJPERES](http://www.iesingapore.gov.sg/wps/wcm/connect/03d627004bdd3658b528bde35d112ac6/IE_Insights_Myanmar.pdf?MOD=AJPERES)

<sup>461</sup> Myaungmya Aung Myint Myat, "Myanmar after Military Rule: How the Political-economic Contours Are Taking Shape," *Myanmar Times* 32, no. 634 (9–15 July 2012),

<http://www.mmtimes.com/2012/news/634/news63421.html>

<sup>462</sup> Tan Soon Kim, Edwin Neo, and Jesse Satria Oeni, "Myanmar: Opportunities in Asia's Last Frontier Economy," *IE Insights 2* (July 2012), 16–17,

[http://www.iesingapore.gov.sg/wps/wcm/connect/03d627004bdd3658b528bde35d112ac6/IE\\_Insights\\_Myanmar.pdf?MOD=AJPERES](http://www.iesingapore.gov.sg/wps/wcm/connect/03d627004bdd3658b528bde35d112ac6/IE_Insights_Myanmar.pdf?MOD=AJPERES)

<sup>463</sup> Christopher W. Runckel, "Myanmar (Burma) in 2012," *Business in Asia*, 2012, <http://www.business-in-asia.com/burma/burma2012.html>

<sup>464</sup> Justin Kent, "Can Manufacturing Succeed in Myanmar?" *Forbes*, 18 October 2012,

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/connorconnect/2012/10/18/can-manufacturing-succeed-in-myanmar/>

<sup>465</sup> United Nations, "Strategic Framework 2012–2015" (report, May 2011), 13,

[http://unic.un.org/imucms/userfiles/yangon/file/UN\\_Strategic\\_Framework\\_for\\_Myanmar\\_2012-2015.pdf](http://unic.un.org/imucms/userfiles/yangon/file/UN_Strategic_Framework_for_Myanmar_2012-2015.pdf)

workers making marginal wages.<sup>466, 467, 468</sup> Jobs requiring high levels of skills are difficult to fill because few Burmese have the training and education to meet job demands.<sup>469, 470</sup>

## Healthcare

Healthcare in Burma is poor. Average life expectancy for urban dwellers is 71 for men and 64 for women.<sup>471, 472</sup>

Maternal mortality rates are among the highest in the world.<sup>473, 474</sup> In spite of a recent increase in healthcare professionals, the system remains critically underfunded. The majority of doctors and nurses work in the private sector in urban areas, creating a severe shortage of rural practitioners.<sup>475, 476, 477, 478</sup> Even where there are adequate

numbers of doctors, shortages of medications threaten patient survival and safety.<sup>479</sup> Outside Rangoon, access to quality medical facilities is sparse. Visitors should avoid surgery or dental procedures because of the high risk of infections including hepatitis and HIV/AIDS.<sup>480, 481</sup>



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<sup>466</sup> Sein Htay, “Burma Economic Review 2005–2006” (report, June 2007), 4, <http://www.ncgub.net/NCGUB/mediagallery/download667c.pdf>

<sup>467</sup> Thura Swiss Ltd., “Labor Realities in Myanmar” (report, 15 March 2012), [http://www.thuraswiss.com/sites/default/files/labor\\_market.pdf](http://www.thuraswiss.com/sites/default/files/labor_market.pdf)

<sup>468</sup> Joshua Kurlantzick, “Beware Talk of Business-Friendly Myanmar,” *Financial Times*, 20 February 2012, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/9d870578-5bb5-11e1-a447-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2Ij1ZMHZL>

<sup>469</sup> Thura Swiss Ltd., “Labor Realities in Myanmar” (report, 15 March 2012), [http://www.thuraswiss.com/sites/default/files/labor\\_market.pdf](http://www.thuraswiss.com/sites/default/files/labor_market.pdf)

<sup>470</sup> Joshua Kurlantzick, “Beware Talk of Business-Friendly Myanmar,” *Financial Times*, 20 February 2012, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/9d870578-5bb5-11e1-a447-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2Ij1ZMHZL>

<sup>471</sup> World Health Organization, “Health in Myanmar 2012: Health Statistics” (report, 2012), 136, [http://www.whomyanmar.org/LinkFiles/Health\\_in\\_Myanmar\\_2012\\_HealthinMyanmar\\_2012\\_16\\_HS.pdf](http://www.whomyanmar.org/LinkFiles/Health_in_Myanmar_2012_HealthinMyanmar_2012_16_HS.pdf)

<sup>472</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, “Health,” in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty, Ltd, 2011), 383.

<sup>473</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “Country Comparison: Maternal Mortality Rate,” 2 January 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2223rank.html>

<sup>474</sup> Hanna Ingber, “Desperate for Healthcare in Myanmar,” *Salon*, 22 June 2012, [http://www.salon.com/2012/06/22/desperate\\_for\\_health\\_care\\_in\\_myanmar/](http://www.salon.com/2012/06/22/desperate_for_health_care_in_myanmar/)

<sup>475</sup> “Burma Health Care System ‘Compromised,’” *Mizzima News*, 17 April 2012, <http://www.mizzima.com/news/inside-burma/6954-burma-health-care-system-compromised.html>

<sup>476</sup> Ministry of Health, Government of Myanmar, “Myanmar Health Care System” (paper, 2011), 11–13, <http://www.moh.gov.mm/file/myanmar%20health%20care%20system.pdf>

<sup>477</sup> World Health Organization, “Health in Myanmar 2012: Health Policy, Legislation and Plans” (report, 2012), 14, [http://www.whomyanmar.org/LinkFiles/Health\\_in\\_Myanmar\\_2012\\_HealthinMyanmar\\_2012\\_5\\_policy\\_legislation\\_plans.pdf](http://www.whomyanmar.org/LinkFiles/Health_in_Myanmar_2012_HealthinMyanmar_2012_5_policy_legislation_plans.pdf)

<sup>478</sup> World Health Organization, “Health in Myanmar 2012: Health Statistics” (report, 2012), 137, [http://www.whomyanmar.org/LinkFiles/Health\\_in\\_Myanmar\\_2012\\_HealthinMyanmar\\_2012\\_16\\_HS.pdf](http://www.whomyanmar.org/LinkFiles/Health_in_Myanmar_2012_HealthinMyanmar_2012_16_HS.pdf)

<sup>479</sup> Doctors without Borders, “Myanmar: Lives Restored by Treatment,” 21 February 2012, <http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/news/article.cfm?id=5781&cat=voice-from-the-field>

<sup>480</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Government, “Myanmar: Health,” 16 November 2012, <http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Myanmar>

<sup>481</sup> Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Burma (Myanmar) Country Specific Information: Medical Facilities and Health Information,” 29 June 2011, [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1077.html#medical](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1077.html#medical)

Following rain, Rangoon's inadequate drainage system allows water to collect creating breeding grounds for mosquitoes, increasing the risk of dengue fever.<sup>482</sup>

### Exchange 17: Is Dr. Mawn Mawn in, sir?

Soldier:	Is Dr. Mawn Mawn in, sir?	aa ko, dawta mawn mawn shee laa?
Local:	No.	ma shee ba bo

Healthcare is a constitutional right in Burma, but few have money to pay for available services.<sup>483, 484</sup> The majority of Burmese (85%) rely on traditional medicine because of its wider availability and lower costs.<sup>485</sup> Although the government is working to provide comprehensive health services, including traditional medicine, patients still bear approximately 90% of medical costs.<sup>486, 487</sup>

### Exchange 18: Is there a hospital nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a hospital nearby?	dee naa ma sey yon shee laa?
Local:	Yes, in the center of town.	hoo keh, meyo leh ma shee ba deh

Nearly half of Burma's HIV infected patients live in Rangoon (13%) and Mandalay (32%).<sup>488</sup> Burma has about 5% of the worldwide cases of a drug-resistant strain of tuberculosis. A lack of medicine and facilities is slowing progress against the disease's spread.<sup>489</sup>

<sup>482</sup> Win Maung and Kyin Tun, "A Review of the Development of Yangon Megacity in Some Aspects of Infrastructure and Environment," in *Megacity Yangon: Transformation Processes and Modern Developments*, Second German-Myanmar Workshop in Yangon/Myanmar 2005, eds. Frauke Kraas et al. (Berlin, Germany: Lit Verlag, 2006), 164.

<sup>483</sup> Margie Mason, Burma.Net News, "Poor Healthcare System Plagues Myanmar," Associated Press, 26 October 2007, <http://www.burmanet.org/news/2007/10/26/associated-press-poor-health-care-system-plagues-myanmar-margie-mason/>

<sup>484</sup> World Health Organization, "Health in Myanmar 2012: Health Policy, Legislation and Plans" (report, 2012), 14, [http://www.whomyanmar.org/LinkFiles/Health in Myanmar 2012 HealthinMyanmar 2012 5 policy legislation plans.pdf](http://www.whomyanmar.org/LinkFiles/Health%20in%20Myanmar%202012%20Health%20Policy%20Legislation%20Plans.pdf)

<sup>485</sup> IRIN, "Most People in Myanmar Rely on Traditional Medicines," OneWorld South Asia, 14 October 2009, <http://southasia.oneworld.net/news/most-people-in-myanmar-rely-on-traditional-medicines#.UP7ngYYbg1A>

<sup>486</sup> Ministry of Health, Government of Myanmar, "Myanmar Health System" (paper, 2011), <http://www.moh.gov.mm/file/myanmar%20health%20care%20system.pdf>

<sup>487</sup> World Health Organization, "Health in Myanmar 2012: Myanmar Health Care System" (report, 2012), 5–6, 35, [http://www.whomyanmar.org/LinkFiles/Health in Myanmar 2012 HealthinMyanmar 2012 4 health care system.pdf](http://www.whomyanmar.org/LinkFiles/Health%20in%20Myanmar%202012%20Health%20Care%20System.pdf)

<sup>488</sup> United Nations Development Programme, "Yangon, Myanmar" (report, 2011), 192, [http://regionalcentrebangkok.undp.or.th/practices/hiv/aids/documents/msmtg\\_multi\\_city/pdf/Reference\\_Guide\\_Yangon.pdf](http://regionalcentrebangkok.undp.or.th/practices/hiv/aids/documents/msmtg_multi_city/pdf/Reference_Guide_Yangon.pdf)

<sup>489</sup> Country Office for Myanmar, World Health Organization, "Multidrug-resistant Tuberculosis in Myanmar Progress, Plans and Challenges," October 2012, [http://www.whomyanmar.org/LinkFiles/TB\\_MDT-TB\\_Factsheet.pdf](http://www.whomyanmar.org/LinkFiles/TB_MDT-TB_Factsheet.pdf)

**Exchange 19: Do you know what is wrong?**

Soldier:	Do you know what is wrong?	ba ma ney leh soo da min tee laa?
Local:	No.	ma tee ba bo

**Education and Schools in Cities**

Burma's once strong educational system has greatly deteriorated since 1962, and shortages of materials, resources, and skilled teachers further compromise quality. Schools have resorted to charging "unofficial" fees to augment insufficient funds.<sup>490, 491</sup> Nationally, two-thirds of children enter elementary school but between 30% and 45% fail to graduate. Urban dropout rates are far lower than in rural areas.<sup>492, 493</sup>



Approximately 67% of urban students attend the last grade of elementary school. Although approximately 75% of urban students attend secondary school, about 60% drop out before completion.<sup>494</sup> Students drop out because of lack of schools, inability to pay school expenses, or work obligations.<sup>495</sup> In 2006, the literacy rate was approximately 90% (94% men/86% women).<sup>496</sup>

Basic public education consists of five years of elementary, four years of middle, and two years of secondary school.<sup>497</sup> Elementary school is free and compulsory. Students passing an examination may enter secondary school. At the end of eighth grade, students must pass another examination before progressing to secondary school (grades 9–11). Following high-school, students may attend vocational training or university.<sup>498, 499</sup>

<sup>490</sup> Arohana, "Education in Myanmar," Thabyay Education Network, 2011, [http://arohanascholarships.org/?page\\_id=125](http://arohanascholarships.org/?page_id=125)

<sup>491</sup> Donald M. Seekins, *The A to Z of Burma (Myanmar)* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 176–177.

<sup>492</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, "World Data on Education, 7th ed., 2010/2011" (report, April 2011), [http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Myanmar.pdf](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Myanmar.pdf)

<sup>493</sup> Donald M. Seekins, *The A to Z of Burma (Myanmar)* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 176–177.

<sup>494</sup> Gordon and Sara Brown, Ltd., "Education in Burma: Guaranteeing Hope of a Better Future" (report, June 2012), 2–3, 5, <http://gordonandsarahbrown.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Note-on-Education-in-Burma.pdf>

<sup>495</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, "World Data on Education, 7th ed., 2010/2011" (report, April 2011), [http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Myanmar.pdf](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Myanmar.pdf)

<sup>496</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Burma: People and Society," in *The World Factbook*, 2 January 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

<sup>497</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, "World Data on Education, 7th ed., 2010/2011" (report, April 2011), [http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Myanmar.pdf](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Myanmar.pdf)

<sup>498</sup> Classbase, "Education System in Myanmar: Education System," 2012, <http://www.classbase.com/countries/Myanmar/Education-System>

<sup>499</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, "World Data on Education, 7th ed., 2010/2011" (report, April 2011), [http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Myanmar.pdf](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Myanmar.pdf)

**Exchange 20: Do your children go to school?**

Soldier:	Do your children go to school?	min yeh Kha ley dewy kawn twaa laa?
Local:	Yes.	hoo keh

Rampant corruption in education causes seats in the best schools to be reserved for Burmese elite or those with government connections.<sup>500</sup>

Burmese universities have been strictly regulated since the 1988 protests. Many campuses were relocated to rural areas or forced to close for up to four years.<sup>501, 502</sup> Distance education became a government priority as a means of reducing the potential of protests. The quality of education in most of the universities has declined to the point where training is inadequate and often regarded as little more than a rubber stamp.<sup>503, 504</sup> The current president, however, is enacting a series of educational reforms designed to restore Burma's education system.<sup>505</sup>

**Restaurants**

Rangoon and Mandalay have multiple dining options. Locals frequent the numerous Chinese restaurants. Western cuisine is largely confined to restaurants in larger hotels.<sup>506</sup> Food from night market vendors can be unsafe and sometimes transmit cholera.<sup>507</sup>

**Exchange 21: Are you still serving breakfast?**

Soldier:	Are you still serving breakfast?	ma neh saa ya taay laa?
Local:	Yes.	hoo keh

**Exchange 22: May I have a glass of water?**

Soldier:	May I have a glass of water?	yey ta Khweh law pey ba?
Local:	Yes, right away.	hoo keh, ya ba deh

<sup>500</sup> Classbase, "Education System in Myanmar: Education System," 2012, <http://www.classbase.com/countries/Myanmar/Education-System>

<sup>501</sup> Canadian Friends of Burma, "Open Schools Campaign," 2000, <http://www.cfob.org/burmaissue/education/openschools.shtml>

<sup>502</sup> Arohana, "Education in Myanmar," Thabyay Education Network, 2011, [http://arohanascholarships.org/?page\\_id=125](http://arohanascholarships.org/?page_id=125)

<sup>503</sup> Arohana, "Education in Myanmar," Thabyay Education Network, 2011, [http://arohanascholarships.org/?page\\_id=125](http://arohanascholarships.org/?page_id=125)

<sup>504</sup> George Packer, "Letter from Rangoon: Drowning," *The New Yorker*, 25 August 2008, 1, [http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/08/25/080825fa\\_fact\\_packer](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/08/25/080825fa_fact_packer)

<sup>505</sup> Richard Stone, "Raising Up a Fallen Ivory Tower," *Science Magazine* 338 (30 November 2012): 1140–1142, <http://www.networkmyanmar.org/images/stories/PDF13/Myanmar-Education.pdf>

<sup>506</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 6: Food and Entertaining," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 149.

<sup>507</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 6: Food and Entertaining," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 149.

Burmese meals include oil-based curries, rice, and side dishes. Restaurants often add an extra layer of oil. Protocol dictates that each person order an individual curry dish. Side dishes are shared among the group.<sup>508</sup> Many Burmese eat with their hands but, in restaurants, a fork and spoon are often provided. Food is never eaten from the fork that is used to guide food onto the spoon.<sup>509, 510</sup>



### Exchange 23: I'd like some hot soup.

Soldier:	I'd like some hot soup.	hin yo poo poo ya ma laa
Local:	Sure.	ya ba deh

A salty fermented shrimp paste (*ngapi*) is often used to flavor the rice and is served as a condiment. *Balachaung*, a crispy mix of fried shrimp, garlic, onions, and fresh raw vegetables is another common condiment.<sup>511</sup> Pickled relishes made from various vegetables accompany most meals.<sup>512</sup>

Tea houses are popular places to purchase snacks, along with coffee and tea. Coffee and tea come presweetened. Black coffee is available upon request.<sup>513</sup>

### Exchange 24: I would like coffee or tea.

Soldier:	I would like coffee or tea.	koffee daa maa ma ho leh phye yey taw chin deh
Local:	Sure.	ya ba deh

It is usual to pay for one's own meal, even if invited to a restaurant.<sup>514</sup> Tipping is uncommon.<sup>515</sup>

### Exchange 25: Put this all in one bill.

Soldier:	Put this all in one bill.	dee phye pin teh maa aa lon teh lay ba
Local:	Yes.	hoo keh

<sup>508</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, "Eating in Myanmar (Burma)," in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty, Ltd, 2011), 328–329, 335.

<sup>509</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, "Eating in Myanmar (Burma)," in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty, Ltd, 2011), 331, 335.

<sup>510</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 6: Food and Entertaining," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 137.

<sup>511</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 6: Food and Entertaining," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 140.

<sup>512</sup> cornFusion, "A Short Essay on Burmese Cuisine," Chowhound.com, 7 June 2007, <http://chowhound.chow.com/topics/409024>

<sup>513</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 6: Food and Entertaining," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 150–151.

<sup>514</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, "Eating in Myanmar (Burma)," in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty, Ltd, 2011), 331.

<sup>515</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, "Directory A-Z," in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty, Ltd, 2011), 365.

**Exchange 26: Can I have my total bill, please?**

Soldier:	Can I have my total bill, please?	naa gon wey phyaa pin pey ba?
Local:	Yes, of course.	hoo keh, ya ba deh

**Markets**

Major cities contain modern shopping malls, bazaars (*zei*), and night markets.<sup>516, 517, 518</sup>

**Exchange 27: How much longer will you be here?**

Soldier:	How much longer will you be here?	dee ma beh law chaa chaa ney ma leh?
Local:	Three more hours.	naw taa ton naa yee law nee meh

**Exchange 28: Is the bazaar nearby?**

Soldier:	Is the bazaar nearby?	dee naa ma zey shee laa?
Local:	Yes, over there on the right.	hoo keh, ho naa ma nee yaa beh ma ba

The indoor Bogyoke Aung San Market in central Rangoon contains over 2,000 shops selling local handicrafts, lacquer ware, ethnic minority items, quality gemstones and jewelry.<sup>519, 520</sup>

**Exchange 29: Do you sell lacquer ware?**

Soldier:	Do you sell lacquer ware?	yoon teh meya yawn laa?
Local:	Yes.	hoo keh

**Exchange 30: May I examine this close up?**

Soldier:	May I examine this close up?	aa nee kaa say sey loo yaa ma laa?
Local:	Sure.	ya ba deh

<sup>516</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, “Yangon,” in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty, Ltd, 2011), 66.

<sup>517</sup> Flash Parker, “Night Market, Botataung Paya, Rangoon, Burma,” AFAR, 15 August 2012, <http://www.afar.com/highlights/night-market-botataung-paya-rangoon-burma>

<sup>518</sup> Today in Myanmar, “Night Life in Yangon,” 3 April 2011, <http://www.myanmar2day.com/myanmar-information/2011/04/night-life-in-yangon/>

<sup>519</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, “Yangon,” in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty, Ltd, 2011), 67.

<sup>520</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, “Yangon,” in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty, Ltd, 2011), 67.

More popular with locals and cheaper than Bogyoke Aung San, is Rangoon's largest market, Theingyi Zai, famous for its incredible selection of herbs and medicines.<sup>521</sup>

**Exchange 31: Can I buy a Shan bag with this much money?**

Soldier:	Can I buy a Shan bag with this much money?	dee ngwey neh shan lweh et weh loo yaa ba ma laa?
Local:	No.	ma yaa naay ba bo

**Exchange 32: Do you have any more of these?**

Soldier:	Do you have any more of these?	dee ma dee ha meyo shee tee laa?
Local:	No.	ma shee daw ba bo

Bargaining is appropriate except in fixed-price government shops. One should never begin bargaining for an item unless one intends to buy it. Leaving a shop without a purchase, after a bargaining session is considered to be rude. To begin bargaining, a shopper should find some fault with the product in order to allow the vendor to lower the price without losing face.

Bargaining is a slow process requiring patience and persistence. Anger is always inappropriate.<sup>522</sup>



USAID photo  
Vegetable market

**Exchange 33: Please, buy something from me.**

Local:	Please, buy something from me.	chey zoo pyoo ywey ta Kho Kho weh pay ba
Soldier:	Sorry, I have no money left.	won neh ba deh kwaa, naa ma ngwey ma chan daw bo

<sup>521</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, "Yangon," in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty, Ltd, 2011), 67.

<sup>522</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 5: Settling In," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 116–117.

## Money and ATMs

Burma's national currency is the kyat (MMK). In January 2013, USD 1 was equal to MMK 843.5.<sup>523, 524</sup> There are virtually no ATMs in the country

other than a handful introduced late in 2012.<sup>525</sup> Foreign cards do not work in Burmese ATM machines.<sup>526</sup> U.S. dollars can be exchanged at the airport, a few banks, and some high-end hotels provided that the bills are in excellent condition with no damage.<sup>527</sup> Credit cards are virtually useless in Burma except for a couple of expensive hotels in Rangoon and Mandalay.<sup>528</sup>



© Jason Tabarias  
Burmese money, Kyats

### Exchange 34: Can you give me change for this?

Soldier:	Can you give me change for this?	min dee ha neh leh naay ma laa?
Local:	No.	ma leh naay ba bo

### Exchange 35: Do you accept U.S. currency?

Soldier:	Do you accept U.S. currency?	dolaar leh Khan ma laa?
Local:	No we only accept kyat.	chet beh leh Khan ba deh

## Transportation & Traffic

### Cars

Burmese roads are generally in disrepair, especially outside the cities. Traffic congestion is uncommon, but in Rangoon, slow-moving vehicles, bicycles, and heavy pedestrian traffic create hazardous driving conditions. Truck drivers on the road between China and Rangoon allegedly drive under the influence of stimulants. Burmese drivers infrequently use their headlights, even at night, and many bicycles lack reflectors, making them difficult to see at night.<sup>529, 530</sup> All

<sup>523</sup> Oanda, "Currency Converter," 13 January 2013, <http://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/>

<sup>524</sup> Lonely Planet, "Myanmar/Burma: Money and Costs," 2012, <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/myanmar-burma/practical-information/money-costs>

<sup>525</sup> Jason Szep, "Myanmar Banking's New 'Wow' Factor—ATMs," Reuters, 30 May 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/05/30/us-myanmar-banking-idUSBRE84T04H20120530>

<sup>526</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, "Directory A-Z," in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty, Ltd, 2011), 364.

<sup>527</sup> Lonely Planet, "Myanmar/Burma: Money and Costs," 2012, <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/myanmar-burma/practical-information/money-costs>

<sup>528</sup> Lonely Planet, "Myanmar/Burma: Money and Costs," 2012, <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/myanmar-burma/practical-information/money-costs>

<sup>529</sup> Bureau of Consular Affairs, U. S. Department of State, "Burma (Myanmar) Country Specific Information: Traffic Safety and Road Conditions," 29 June 2011, [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1077.html#traffic\\_safety](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1077.html#traffic_safety)

drivers are required to have a valid Burmese license.<sup>531</sup> Under Burmese law, an automobile driver involved in an accident with a pedestrian is always at fault.<sup>532</sup>

### Exchange 36: Where can I rent a car?

Soldier:	Where can I rent a car?	kaa beh ma naa loo ya ma leh?
Local:	Downtown.	meeyo teh ma yaa ba deh

### Exchange 37: Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?	dee naa ma kaa peyin sa ya yaw kawn yeh laa?
Local:	Yes.	hoo keh

### Public Transportation

Public transportation is available in the cities. Options include taxis, buses, and trains, but most of these are slow, unreliable, overcrowded, and uncomfortable.<sup>533</sup> Public transportation, including planes and trains, fail to meet international safety standards.<sup>534, 535</sup>

### Exchange 38: Will the bus be here soon?

Soldier:	Will the bus be here soon?	bas kaa ma kaa Khin yaw la ma laa?
Local:	Yes.	hoo keh

Urban public transportation vehicles, including aging buses (*ka*), are unsafe. They are always packed with passengers often hanging over the sides and backs. Pick-up trucks with benches in the back and a roof over the bed are another common option.<sup>536 537</sup>



© Gusjer / flickr.com  
Burmese bus

<sup>530</sup> Overseas Security Advisory Council, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, U.S. Department of State, "Burma 2012 Crime and Safety Report," 21 March 2012, <https://www.osac.gov/Pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=12229>

<sup>531</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Government, "Myanmar: Local Travel," 16 November 2012, <http://www.smarttraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Myanmar>

<sup>532</sup> Bureau of Consular Affairs, U. S. Department of State, "Burma (Myanmar) Country Specific Information: Traffic Safety and Road Conditions," 29 June 2011, [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1077.html#traffic\\_safety](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1077.html#traffic_safety)

<sup>533</sup> Overseas Security Advisory Council, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, U.S. Department of State, "Burma 2012 Crime and Safety Report," 21 March 2012, <https://www.osac.gov/Pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=12229>

<sup>534</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Government, "Myanmar: Local Travel," 16 November 2012, <http://www.smarttraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Myanmar>

<sup>535</sup> Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Burma (Myanmar) Country Specific Information: Traffic Safety and Road Conditions," 29 June 2011, [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1077.html#traffic\\_safety](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1077.html#traffic_safety)

<sup>536</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 5: Settling In," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 120–122.

<sup>537</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, "Transport: Getting Around," in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty, Ltd, 2011), 379.

Taxis, both licensed and private vehicles for hire, are also available. There are no radio taxis in Burma.<sup>538</sup>

**Exchange 39: Where can I get a cab?**

Soldier:	Where can I get a cab?	beh ma aa naa kaa ya naay ma leh?
Local:	Over there.	ho naa ma ya naay ba deh

Trishaws are bicycles with attached sidecars. Two people can ride in the side car, but they may not accommodate larger individuals.<sup>539</sup>

**Exchange 40: Can you take me there?**

Soldier:	Can you take me there?	naa go ho phet Khaw twaa naay ma laa?
Local:	Yes, I can.	hoo keh, Khaw twaa naay ba deh

Trains are notoriously unreliable and uncomfortable. They take much longer than buses to travel the same distances.<sup>540, 541</sup>

**Exchange 41: Is there a train station nearby?**

Soldier:	Is there a train station nearby?	dee naa ma yaa taa bo da yoo wo shee laa?
Local:	No.	ma shee ba bo

Air transportation falls below international safety standards. Visitors are urged to exercise caution and consult their embassy for the latest information.<sup>542, 543</sup>

**Exchange 42: Which road leads to the airport?**

Soldier:	Which road leads to the airport?	ley say go beh lan ga twaa yin ya ma leh?
Local:	The road heading east.	aa shey phet go oo teh bee twaa loo ya ba deh

<sup>538</sup> iExplore, "Myanmar Travel Guide: Myanmar Taxis and Car Rental," 2013, <http://www.iexplore.com/travel-guides/south-and-southeast-asia/myanmar/transportation>

<sup>539</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 5: Settling In," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 122–123.

<sup>540</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 5: Settling In," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 123.

<sup>541</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, "Transport," in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty, Ltd, 2011), 381.

<sup>542</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Government, "Myanmar: Local Travel," 16 November 2012, <http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw/cgi/view/Advice/Myanmar>

<sup>543</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, "Directory A to Z," in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty, Ltd, 2011), 367, 373.

## Street Crimes and Solicitations

Violent crimes in urban areas of Rangoon are infrequent. Outside the city in the more remote regions, opportunities for crime against foreigners increase because there are few police. The most common crimes are those of opportunity: pick-pocketing and stealing unattended items. Since people believe crimes against foreigners are more likely to receive police attention, locals are more common targets.<sup>544</sup>

Beggars are part of the landscape, but the government is trying to remove as many as possible from Burma's streets in order to improve the national image.<sup>545</sup> Some are illegal immigrants, largely from Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos. Recent crackdowns have resulted in the arrests of beggars as part of an effort to reduce immigration and human trafficking.<sup>546</sup> In Mandalay, beggars often set up operations around the railway station. Some masquerade as monks or charity workers.<sup>547</sup> Mothers with infants often make over USD 20 per day, nearly 10 times the daily wage of the average worker. Beware, however, that many of these women “rent” the infants for about USD 5 per day.<sup>548</sup> Although there is little doubt that poverty and extreme circumstances have driven some beggars to their plight, others have refused work noting that they can make more money begging than working.<sup>549</sup>

### Exchange 43: Give me money

Local:	Give me money	cho naw go nowey pey ba
Soldier:	I don't have any.	naa ma ba ma ma shee bo wa

It is impossible to give to every beggar who solicits money. If one doesn't want to give, it is best to politely refuse and walk away. Buddhism believes that it is a moral duty to perform acts of kindness and to help others, and many Buddhists are predisposed to give something. To avoid the problems of being surrounded by a sea of beggars, Buddhists will sometimes throw a handful of coins into a group and let them scramble for the money.<sup>550</sup>

<sup>544</sup> Overseas Security Advisory Council, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, U.S. Department of State, “Burma 2012 Crime and Safety Report,” 21 March 2012, <https://www.osac.gov/Pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=12229>

<sup>545</sup> Shwe Aung, “Mandalay Threatens Beggars with Arrest,” Democratic Voice of Burma, 2 February 2012, <http://www.dvb.no/news/mandalay-threatens-beggars-with-arrest/20050>

<sup>546</sup> “Pattaya Immigration Police Arrest 100 Beggars from Burma, Laos and Cambodia,” *Pattaya Daily News*, 22 June 2012, <http://www.pattayadailynews.com/en/2012/06/22/pattaya-immigration-police-arrest-100-beggars-from-burma-laos-and-cambodia/>

<sup>547</sup> Shwe Aung, “Mandalay Threatens Beggars with Arrest,” Democratic Voice of Burma, 2 February 2012, <http://www.dvb.no/news/mandalay-threatens-beggars-with-arrest/20050>

<sup>548</sup> Myit Makha Mediagroup, “Burma: Vagrant Beggars in the City Yangon,” Democracy for Burma, 15 January 2013, <http://democracyforburma.wordpress.com/2013/01/15/burma-vagrant-beggars-in-the-city-yangon/>

<sup>549</sup> Aung Thet Wine, “Number of Beggars Increasing in Rangoon,” *The Irrawaddy*, 5 April 2010, [http://www2.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art\\_id=18199](http://www2.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=18199)

<sup>550</sup> Prince Vajirananavarorasa, “The Five Precepts: The Buddhist Golden Rule,” *abuddhistlibrary.com*, n.d., [http://www.abuddhistlibrary.com/Buddhism/B%20-%20Theravada/Ethics/The%20Five%20Precepts%20-%20The%20Buddhist%20Golden%20Rule/five\\_precepts\\_the\\_buddhist\\_golde.htm](http://www.abuddhistlibrary.com/Buddhism/B%20-%20Theravada/Ethics/The%20Five%20Precepts%20-%20The%20Buddhist%20Golden%20Rule/five_precepts_the_buddhist_golde.htm)

## Chapter 4 Assessment

1. Approximately 70% of Burmese live in urban centers.

**False**

Burma remains a largely rural nation. Only 34% of the population live in urban areas, and there are few cities of any significant size. Only 11% of the population live in urban areas with more than one million residents.

2. Urban unemployment rates are generally low.

**True**

In spite of the high rates of poverty (16% in 2011), unemployment is low in Burma (nearly 2%).

3. Public transportation is safe in urban areas.

**False**

Public transportation is slow, unreliable, overcrowded, and uncomfortable, and fails to meet international safety standards.

4. Violent crimes are relatively rare.

**True**

Violent crimes in urban areas of Rangoon are infrequent.

5. The rural-urban migration pattern in Burma stems from greater economic opportunities arising from industrialization of the cities.

**False**

Rural-urban migration in Burma has depended much more on political rather than economic reasons. Cities grew because the British encouraged migration from India and refugees moved to cities to escape guerilla wars and ethnic violence.

## CHAPTER 5: RURAL LIFE

### Introduction

Today, as much as 70% of Burma's population live in rural areas on farms.<sup>551, 552</sup> The Burman are concentrated in the central and southern regions in the states of Magway, Bago, Mandalay, Yangon, and portions of Sagaing.<sup>553, 554</sup> The country remains largely dependent on agriculture which accounts for nearly 40% of GDP and employs 70% of the workforce.<sup>555</sup> It is nearly impossible for most farmers to even subsist from farming because they must spend nearly 70% of their income on food. Many are forced to leave or sell their farms to escape mounting debt.<sup>556, 557</sup> About 25% of Burma's people live in poverty, but the rate of rural poverty is nearly twice that of urban centers. In the largely rural states, the highest poverty rate is in Mandalay at 32%, followed by Yangon at 29%, Magway at 28%, and Bago at 18%.<sup>558</sup>



© Doron / flickr.com  
Rural landscape

Burma is one of the least developed nations in the world and scores low on human development indices.<sup>559</sup> Among rural residents, only 65% have access to safe drinking water compared to 81% for urbanites. Access to safe drinking water in the Burman states ranges from 60% in Magway to 80% in Bago.<sup>560</sup> Rural residents have less access to sanitation (77% vs. 84%) or electricity (34%

<sup>551</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Burma: People and Society," 2 January 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

<sup>552</sup> Jason Szep, "Special Report: As Myanmar Reforms, Discontent Grips Countryside," Reuters, 9 August 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/08/09/us-myanmar-farms-idUSBRE87800V20120809>

<sup>553</sup> E. Mirante, "Burman: Location," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 175.

<sup>554</sup> Mitch Harper, "Today's Reference File: Burma Ethnic Map," Ft Wayne Observed, 28 November 2011, <http://indiana.typepad.com/fwob/2011/11/todays-reference-file-burma-ethnic-map.html>

<sup>555</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Burma: Economy," 2 January 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

<sup>556</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, "Transformation Status: Economic Transformation," in *BTI 2012: Myanmar Country Report* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2012), 13, <http://www.bti-project.de/fileadmin/Inhalte/reports/2012/pdf/BTI%202012%20Myanmar.pdf>

<sup>557</sup> Jason Szep, "Special Report: As Myanmar Reforms, Discontent Grips Countryside," Reuters, 9 August 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/08/09/us-myanmar-farms-idUSBRE87800V20120809>

<sup>558</sup> United Nations Development Programme, "Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey in Myanmar 2009–2010: Poverty Profile Report" (report, 2010), 15, [http://www.mm.undp.org/ihlca/01\\_Poverty\\_Profile/PDFs/03%20Poverty%20Profile\\_Poverty%20and%20Inequality.pdf](http://www.mm.undp.org/ihlca/01_Poverty_Profile/PDFs/03%20Poverty%20Profile_Poverty%20and%20Inequality.pdf)

<sup>559</sup> United Nations Development Programme, "Human Development Report 2011" (report, 2011), 2–3, <http://hdrstats.undp.org/images/explanations/MMR.pdf>

<sup>560</sup> United Nations Development Programme, "Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey in Myanmar 2009–2010: Poverty Profile Report" (report, 2010), 63–64, [http://www.mm.undp.org/ihlca/01\\_Poverty\\_Profile/PDFs/07%20Poverty%20Profile\\_Housing,%20Water%20and%20Sanitation.pdf](http://www.mm.undp.org/ihlca/01_Poverty_Profile/PDFs/07%20Poverty%20Profile_Housing,%20Water%20and%20Sanitation.pdf)

vs. 89%).<sup>561</sup> Access to sanitation in the Burman states ranges from 75% in Magway to 83% in Yangon and Sagaing. For access to electricity, the rates range from 24% in Bago and Magway to 54% in Yangon.<sup>562</sup>

The new government realizes that much of Burma's success rests on improving the rural sector. Planned new reforms by the government include crop diversification, access to farm credit, better quality seeds, improved technology, and building factories with livable-wage jobs. For most rural Burmese, however, life remains much as it has for decades. There is no internet, little electricity, and fields are still plowed with oxen and scythes. Most struggle to meet their basic needs as they wait to see how the political reforms will play out.<sup>563</sup>

## Land Distribution

All lands are owned by the state in Burma. The Land Naturalization Act of 1953 recognizes some private ownership of land. But the government retains the right to confiscate any fallow lands. Land is commonly leased to a farmer who must use the land for agricultural production or risk having it seized.<sup>564, 565</sup> Few people hold legal title to their land, and about 33% of the rural population are landless peasants who work the land.<sup>566, 567</sup>



© Simone Pacini  
Agricultural field

### Exchange 44: Do you own this land?

Soldier:	Do you own this land?	min dee myey go paayn sin laa?
Local:	Yes.	hoo keh

<sup>561</sup> United Nations Development Programme, "Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey in Myanmar 2009–2010: Poverty Profile Report" (report, 2010), 65–67, [http://www.mm.undp.org/ihlca/01\\_Poverty\\_Profile/PDFs/07%20Poverty%20Profile\\_Housing,%20Water%20and%20Sanitation.pdf](http://www.mm.undp.org/ihlca/01_Poverty_Profile/PDFs/07%20Poverty%20Profile_Housing,%20Water%20and%20Sanitation.pdf)

<sup>562</sup> United Nations Development Programme, "Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey in Myanmar 2009–2010: Poverty Profile Report" (report, 2010), 66–67, [http://www.mm.undp.org/ihlca/01\\_Poverty\\_Profile/PDFs/07%20Poverty%20Profile\\_Housing,%20Water%20and%20Sanitation.pdf](http://www.mm.undp.org/ihlca/01_Poverty_Profile/PDFs/07%20Poverty%20Profile_Housing,%20Water%20and%20Sanitation.pdf)

<sup>563</sup> Jason Szep, "Special Report: As Myanmar Reforms, Discontent Grips Countryside," Reuters, 9 August 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/08/09/us-myanmar-farms-idUSBRE87800V20120809>

<sup>564</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, "Transformation Status: Economic Transformation," in *BTI 2012: Myanmar Country Report* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2012), 18, <http://www.bti-project.de/fileadmin/Inhalte/reports/2012/pdf/BTI%202012%20Myanmar.pdf>

<sup>565</sup> "Chapter 4: Law and Policy on Forestry and Agricultural Land," in *Burma's Environment: People, Problems, Policies* (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Burma Environmental Working Group, June 2011), 38, <http://www.bewg.org/pubs/finish/4/34>

<sup>566</sup> Roy Prosterman and Darryl Vhugen, "Land to the Tillers of Myanmar," *New York Times*, 13 June 2012, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/14/opinion/land-to-the-tillers-of-myanmar.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/14/opinion/land-to-the-tillers-of-myanmar.html?_r=0)

<sup>567</sup> "Chapter 4: Law and Policy on Forestry and Agricultural Land," in *Burma's Environment: People, Problems, Policies* (Chang Mai, Thailand: Burma Environmental Working Group, June 2011), 39–40, 43, <http://www.bewg.org/pubs/finish/4/34>

**Exchange 45: Did you grow up here?**

Soldier:	Did you grow up here?	min dee maa kyee bin daa laa?
Local:	Yes.	hoo key

More and more farmers are losing their land to the state or military-backed groups. The new Farmland Law, enacted to protect the rights of farmers and to stop land-grabbing, has had the opposite effect by actually making it easier for land to be seized. Daily newspaper articles report that farmers are being evicted from their land, sometimes with no compensation and those who refuse to sell are subject to prosecution. Much of the land is given to those with state connections for the development of commercial farming or other business development projects.<sup>568, 569, 570</sup>

**Economy**

Agriculture is the backbone of the nation's economy, and most Burmans are rice farmers in the central and southern parts of Burma.<sup>571</sup> Although other crops including corn, beans, sesame, potatoes, and sugarcane are also cultivated, rice is the main agricultural crop.<sup>572, 573</sup> The average farm is small averaging only about 2.5 ha (6 ac). More than 80% of cropland depends on rainfall for water with less than 20% of land being irrigated.<sup>574</sup> Most cultivation relies on primitive techniques including oxen or buffalo to plow fields.<sup>575</sup> Fewer than 12,000 tractors are currently in use.<sup>576</sup>



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Poverty

<sup>568</sup> TrustLaw, "Myanmar Farmers Lose Their Grip on Land," Farmlandgrab.org, 30 August 2012, <http://farmlandgrab.org/post/view/20950>

<sup>569</sup> Asian Legal Resource Centre, "Myanmar: Myanmar at Risk of Land-Grabbing Epidemic," Burmapartnership.org, 6 June 2012, <http://www.burmapartnership.org/2012/06/myanmar-myanmar-at-risk-of-land-grabbing-epidemic/>

<sup>570</sup> Jason Szep, "Special Report: As Myanmar Reforms, Discontent Grips Countryside," Reuters, 9 August 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/08/09/us-myanmar-farms-idUSBRE87800V20120809>

<sup>571</sup> Edith Mirante, "Burman," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 176, 179.

<sup>572</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Burma: Economy," 2 January 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

<sup>573</sup> gObserver, Asia, "Myanmar: Myanmar Agriculture Profile 2012," 26 May 2011, <http://gobserver.cn/en/mynmar/agriculture>

<sup>574</sup> Tin Htut, "Unleashing Myanmar's Potential Agricultural Perspective," Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, The Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2012, [http://www.isis.org.my/files/2012/Myanmar/4\\_TinHtut.pdf](http://www.isis.org.my/files/2012/Myanmar/4_TinHtut.pdf)

<sup>575</sup> Soe Lwin, "Irrawaddy Farmers Still Short of Buffaloes, Oxen," The Irrawaddy, 22 October 2009, [http://www2.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art\\_id=17039](http://www2.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=17039)

<sup>576</sup> Tin Htut, "Unleashing Myanmar's Potential Agricultural Perspective" (paper, "Myanmar Roundtable 2012: Understanding the Changes, Realizing the Opportunities," 9–10 July 2012, Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, The Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Yezin Agricultural University, 2012), [http://www.isis.org.my/files/2012/Myanmar/4\\_TinHtut.pdf](http://www.isis.org.my/files/2012/Myanmar/4_TinHtut.pdf)

**Exchange 46: Where do you work, sir?**

Soldier:	Where do you work, sir?	min beh ma aa lo lo leh?
Local:	I am a farmer, sir.	ka no leh ta ma ba

To increase income, many farmers have turned to opium production. Every year since 2006, the amount of agricultural land devoted to raising opium poppies has increased. Most opium is produced in the region known as the Golden Triangle near the borders with Laos and Thailand. Most Burmese opium farmers, however, are members of ethnic minorities. Few Burman farmers are involved in opium production.<sup>577, 578</sup>

Burma's agricultural sector has huge growth potential and is receiving a lot of attention from foreign investors anxious to cash in on the opportunities.<sup>579, 580</sup> Although the government liberalized the rice market in 2003, it continues to exercise control over issues related to cultivation, production quotas, crop selection, and export policy.<sup>581</sup> Access to better seeds and fertilizers could vastly increase output. New and more efficient rice mills could also improve export numbers.<sup>582, 583</sup>

Burma's livestock and fisheries are a significant part of the agricultural sector but are still recovering from the effects of Cyclone Nargis.<sup>584</sup> Serious outbreaks of Avian Influenza (bird flu) occurred in 2007, 2010, and 2011. Avian Influenza is unlikely to soon be eradicated in the nation, so current efforts are focused on early detection and minimizing impacts.<sup>585</sup> The fishing sector mainly exports carp, a relatively unpopular fish in the west, to Bangladesh. In addition to

<sup>577</sup> David Eimer, "Opium Cultivation Increases for Sixth Year in Burma, According to UN Report," *The Telegraph*, 31 October 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/burmayanmar/9644746/Opium-cultivation-increases-for-sixth-year-in-Burma-according-to-UN-report.html>

<sup>578</sup> IRIN, "Burmese Opium Farmers Need Support to Find an Alternative Livelihood," *The Guardian*, 2 August 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/2012/aug/02/burmese-opium-farmers-alternative-livelihood>

<sup>579</sup> Reuters, "Myanmar Moves to Take 'Rice Throne'," Myanmar Business Network, 9 August 2012, <http://www.myanmar-business.org/2012/08/myanmar-moves-to-take-rice-throne.html>

<sup>580</sup> Reuters, "New Opportunities and Potential in Myanmar's Agriculture and Supporting Infrastructure Sectors," Agriculture and Industry Survey (January 2013), <http://www.agricultureinformation.com/mag/2012/05/new-opportunities-and-potential-in-myanmars-agriculture-and-supporting-infrastructure-sectors/>

<sup>581</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, "Transformation Status: Economic Transformation," in *BTI 2012: Myanmar Country Report* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2012), 15, <http://www.bti-project.de/fileadmin/Inhalte/reports/2012/pdf/BI%202012%20Myanmar.pdf>

<sup>582</sup> Reuters, "Myanmar Moves to Take 'Rice Throne'," Myanmar Business Network, 9 August 2012, <http://www.myanmar-business.org/2012/08/myanmar-moves-to-take-rice-throne.html>

<sup>583</sup> Reuters, "New Opportunities and Potential in Myanmar's Agriculture and Supporting Infrastructure Sectors," Agriculture and Industry Survey (January 2013), <http://www.agricultureinformation.com/mag/2012/05/new-opportunities-and-potential-in-myanmars-agriculture-and-supporting-infrastructure-sectors/>

<sup>584</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, "Myanmar and FAO Achievements and Success Stories" (report, May 2011), 6, <http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/rap/files/epublications/MyanmaredocFINAL.pdf>

<sup>585</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, "Myanmar and FAO Achievements and Success Stories" (report, May 2011), 3, <http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/rap/files/epublications/MyanmaredocFINAL.pdf>

finding more popular species, the industry must find a way to resolve the serious lack of electricity that hinders the production of fish products and exports.<sup>586</sup>

## Rural Transportation

Traveling throughout the rural areas and more remote regions of Burma presents a number of challenges. Roads are in poor condition, often riddled with potholes, and frequently unpaved.<sup>587</sup> Landmines present a danger, particularly in the border regions.<sup>588</sup> Outside of the cities, fewer than 10% of secondary roads operate throughout the year.<sup>589</sup> All drivers are required to have a valid Burmese driver's license.<sup>590</sup> There is no roadside assistance available and no ambulance service in the event of an emergency.<sup>591</sup>



© Mark Fischer  
Burmese motorcycle taxi

### Exchange 47: Is there a gas station nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a gas station nearby?	dee naa ma da see sin shee laa?
Local:	Yes.	hoo keh

Public transportation options are limited and likely to consist largely of motor-bike taxis, tri-shaws (*saiq-ka*), bicycles, ox carts, and horse carts (*myint hlei*).<sup>592, 593</sup> It is possible to travel by boat from village to village in some areas, but travel times are extremely slow. Limited train travel connects some of the larger towns with Yangon and Mandalay, and travel time is much longer than by road.<sup>594, 595</sup>

<sup>586</sup> Soe Sandar Oo and Myat Nyein Aye, "Fisheries Sector Not Ready for Western Markets: MFF," *The Myanmar Times*, 15 October 2012, <http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/business/2420-fisheries-sector-not-ready-for-western-markets-mff.html>

<sup>587</sup> Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Burma (Myanmar) Country Specific Information: Traffic Safety and Road Conditions," 29 June 2011, [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1077.html#traffic\\_safety](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1077.html#traffic_safety)

<sup>588</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Government, "Myanmar: Local Travel," 16 November 2012, <http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Myanmar>

<sup>589</sup> Asian Development Bank, "Transport Reforms Can Pave Way for Myanmar's Sustainable Growth," 25 October 2012, <http://www.adb.org/news/transport-reforms-can-pave-way-myanmars-sustainable-growth>

<sup>590</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Government, "Myanmar: Local Travel," 16 November 2012, <http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Myanmar>

<sup>591</sup> Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Burma (Myanmar) Country Specific Information: Traffic Safety and Road Conditions," 29 June 2011, [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1077.html#traffic\\_safety](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1077.html#traffic_safety)

<sup>592</sup> Lonely Planet, "Myanmar/Burma: Getting Around," 2012, <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/myanmar-burma/transport/getting-around>

<sup>593</sup> Sony Vellayani, "Transportation in Myanmar—Through Photos," 30 July 2008, <http://www.sonyvellayani.com/2008/07/transportation-in-myanmar-through.html>

<sup>594</sup> John Allen, Allen John Smith, and Jamie Smith, "Transport," in *Myanmar (Burma)*, 11th ed. (China: Lonely Planet Publications Pty, Ltd, 2011), 376, 379, 381.

<sup>595</sup> Asian Development Bank, "Transport Reforms Can Pave Way for Myanmar's Sustainable Growth," 25 October 2012, <http://www.adb.org/news/transport-reforms-can-pave-way-myanmars-sustainable-growth>

## Rural Healthcare

Constitutional guarantees of a right to healthcare means little to most rural Burmese who have little access to healthcare.<sup>596</sup>

<sup>597</sup> Approximately 1,500 health centers are available for the more than 65,000 villages, which represent approximately 70% of the population. Although 75% of the rural population have some access, patients must often travel for up to one day to reach a clinic in a town.<sup>598, 599</sup> Rural healthcare clinics are staffed by a health assistant, a public health supervisor, a lady health visitor, and a midwife, but no doctors. In smaller regions, there are mini-health centers, each serving 5–10 villages, staffed with a midwife and a public health supervisor, along with unpaid volunteer health workers.<sup>600</sup> This lack of access and high costs have led many rural Burmese to turn to traditional healers whose services and medicines are often free.<sup>601, 602, 603</sup>



© lakareutangranser / flickr.com  
Children in front of local clinic

### Exchange 48: Is there a medical clinic nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a medical clinic nearby?	dee naa ma sey koo Khaan shee laa?
Local:	Yes, over there.	hoo keh, ho naa ma

Life expectancy for both men (64 years) and women (68 years) is lower in rural areas.<sup>604</sup> Only 74% of births are attended by a skilled professional including a midwife (*let-thare*).<sup>605, 606</sup>

<sup>596</sup> Margie Mason, BurmaNet News, “Poor Healthcare System Plagues Myanmar,” Associated Press, 27 October 2007, <http://www.burmanet.org/news/2007/10/26/associated-press-poor-health-care-system-plagues-myanmar-margie-mason/>

<sup>597</sup> World Health Organization, “Health in Myanmar 2012: Health Policy, Legislation and Plans” (report, 2012), 14, [http://www.whomyanmar.org/LinkFiles/Health\\_in\\_Myanmar\\_2012\\_HealthinMyanmar\\_2012\\_5\\_policy\\_legislation\\_plans.pdf](http://www.whomyanmar.org/LinkFiles/Health_in_Myanmar_2012_HealthinMyanmar_2012_5_policy_legislation_plans.pdf)

<sup>598</sup> IRIN, “Myanmar: Rural Healthcare ‘In Crisis,’” 28 January 2011, <http://www.irinnews.org/Report/91761/MYANMAR-Rural-healthcare-in-crisis>

<sup>599</sup> United Nations Development Programme, “Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey in Myanmar 2009–2010: Poverty Profile Report” (report, 2010), 84, [http://www.mm.undp.org/ihlca/01\\_Poverty\\_Profile/PDFs/08%20Poverty%20Profile\\_Health%20and%20Nutrition.pdf](http://www.mm.undp.org/ihlca/01_Poverty_Profile/PDFs/08%20Poverty%20Profile_Health%20and%20Nutrition.pdf)

<sup>600</sup> World Health Organization, “Chapter 2: Country Health and Development Challenges,” in *Who Country Cooperation Strategy 2008–2011 Report: Myanmar* (India, February 2008), 14–15, [http://www.who.int/countryfocus/cooperation\\_strategy/ccs\\_mmr\\_en.pdf](http://www.who.int/countryfocus/cooperation_strategy/ccs_mmr_en.pdf)

<sup>601</sup> IRIN, “Myanmar: Rural Healthcare ‘In Crisis,’” 28 January 2011, <http://www.irinnews.org/Report/91761/MYANMAR-Rural-healthcare-in-crisis>

<sup>602</sup> IRIN, “Most People in Myanmar Rely on Traditional Medicines,” OneWorld South Asia, 14 October 2009, <http://southasia.oneworld.net/news/most-people-in-myanmar-harp-on-traditional-medicines#.UP7ngYYbg1A>

<sup>603</sup> World Health Organization, “Chapter 2: Country Health and Development Challenges,” in *Who Country Cooperation Strategy 2008–2011 Report: Myanmar* (India, February 2008), 15, [http://www.who.int/countryfocus/cooperation\\_strategy/ccs\\_mmr\\_en.pdf](http://www.who.int/countryfocus/cooperation_strategy/ccs_mmr_en.pdf)

<sup>604</sup> World Health Organization, “Health in Myanmar 2012: Health Statistics” (report, 2012), 136, [http://www.whomyanmar.org/LinkFiles/Health\\_in\\_Myanmar\\_2012\\_HealthinMyanmar\\_2012\\_16\\_HS.pdf](http://www.whomyanmar.org/LinkFiles/Health_in_Myanmar_2012_HealthinMyanmar_2012_16_HS.pdf)

<sup>605</sup> Charles Kemp, “Burmese: Health Beliefs and Practices,” September 2007, [https://bearspace.baylor.edu/Charles\\_Kemp/www/burma.htm](https://bearspace.baylor.edu/Charles_Kemp/www/burma.htm)

Approximately 30% of Burmese children are chronically malnourished.<sup>607</sup> Dengue fever is present throughout the nation, including largely Burman states.<sup>608</sup> Malaria is one of the main causes of death in Burma.<sup>609, 610</sup> Snakes are another health risk, particularly in central Burma where about 8% of snake-bite victims die. The most common snakes are the viper and cobra, for which vaccines are available, and the krait and sea snakes.<sup>611</sup>

#### Exchange 49: My arm is broken, can you help me?

Soldier:	My arm is broken, can you help me?	naa leh mawn cho ney loo ko nee ba?
Local:	Yes, I can help you.	hoo keh, koo jee naay ba deh

### Education in Rural Areas

Traditionally, the Burman highly value education. With monasteries as the center of community life, literacy among the Burman has been high. Following independence, Burma's once strong educational tradition declined. Today, national literacy rates remain high (90%) but vary significantly among rural and urban citizens (89% vs. 95% respectively).<sup>612</sup> In Burman-dominated areas, literacy rates for both urban and rural poor are typically higher, partially reflecting the value placed on education.<sup>613</sup>



© Digital Democracy  
Children studying at home

In spite of relatively high literacy, the level of educational attainment is low.<sup>614, 615</sup> Rural students are less likely to enter and remain in school. In Burman-dominated areas, there is an

<sup>606</sup> United Nations Development Programme, "Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey in Myanmar 2009–2010: Poverty Profile Report" (report, 2010), 73, [http://www.mm.undp.org/ihlca/01\\_Poverty\\_Profile/PDFs/08%20Poverty%20Profile\\_Health%20and%20Nutrition.pdf](http://www.mm.undp.org/ihlca/01_Poverty_Profile/PDFs/08%20Poverty%20Profile_Health%20and%20Nutrition.pdf)

<sup>607</sup> Child Rights International Network, "Myanmar: Children's Rights References in the Universal Periodic Review," 27 January 2011, <http://www.crin.org/resources/infodetail.asp?id=23874>

<sup>608</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Dengue Map," 28 January 2013, <http://www.healthmap.org/dengue/index.php>

<sup>609</sup> World Health Organization, "Chapter 2: Country Health and Development Challenges," in *Who Country Cooperation Strategy 2008–2011 Report: Myanmar* (India, February 2008), 4, [http://www.who.int/countryfocus/cooperation\\_strategy/ccs\\_mmr\\_en.pdf](http://www.who.int/countryfocus/cooperation_strategy/ccs_mmr_en.pdf)

<sup>610</sup> World Health Organization Myanmar, "Health Statistics," 2010, 141, [http://www.whomyanmar.org/LinkFiles/Health\\_in\\_Myanmar\\_2012\\_HealthinMyanmar\\_2012\\_16\\_HS.pdf](http://www.whomyanmar.org/LinkFiles/Health_in_Myanmar_2012_HealthinMyanmar_2012_16_HS.pdf)

<sup>611</sup> World Health Organization, "Chapter 2: Country Health and Development Challenges," in *Who Country Cooperation Strategy 2008–2011 Report: Myanmar* (India, February 2008), 9, [http://www.who.int/countryfocus/cooperation\\_strategy/ccs\\_mmr\\_en.pdf](http://www.who.int/countryfocus/cooperation_strategy/ccs_mmr_en.pdf)

<sup>612</sup> United Nations Development Programme, "Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey in Myanmar 2009–2010: Poverty Profile Report" (report, 2010), 89, [http://www.mm.undp.org/ihlca/01\\_Poverty\\_Profile/PDFs/09%20Poverty%20Profile\\_Education.pdf](http://www.mm.undp.org/ihlca/01_Poverty_Profile/PDFs/09%20Poverty%20Profile_Education.pdf)

<sup>613</sup> United Nations Development Programme, "Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey in Myanmar 2009–2010: Poverty Profile Report" (report, 2010), 90, [http://www.mm.undp.org/ihlca/01\\_Poverty\\_Profile/PDFs/09%20Poverty%20Profile\\_Education.pdf](http://www.mm.undp.org/ihlca/01_Poverty_Profile/PDFs/09%20Poverty%20Profile_Education.pdf)

average of one school for every two villages.<sup>616</sup> Approximately 11% of rural children live farther than 2 km (1 mi) from any primary school, and only 24% of rural children have access to secondary schools.<sup>617</sup> Recent statistics from the United Nations report that 25% of Burmese children never enter any school and only 40% of those who do actually complete the five-year elementary schooling.<sup>618</sup> Besides poor access, even though elementary education is free in Burma, many schools are forced to charge fees to augment their meager budgets.<sup>619, 620</sup> Poor families are often unable to bear the burden of school fees, which cover instruction, course materials, testing, and school sanitation. Such fees make it less likely that poor rural children will attend school or complete their education.<sup>621</sup>

### Exchange 50: Is there a school nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a school nearby?	dee naa ma kawn shee laa?
Local:	Yes.	hoo keh

Monastic schools provide increased educational access for poor and rural students. Although such students are still a small percentage of all students, monastic schools truly are free and often include room and board. These schools follow the national primary curriculum.<sup>622</sup> Dropout rates in rural areas are higher than in cities, especially among minority populations.<sup>623</sup> Less than 50%

<sup>614</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “Burma: People and Society,” 2 January 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

<sup>615</sup> E. Mirante, “Burman: Education,” in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 176, 178.

<sup>616</sup> Saw Ehna and C. Guinard, “A Dangerous Journey to Get to School: Why Are Students Fleeing the Burmese Education System?” BurmaNet News, 10 August 2005, <http://www.burmanet.org/news/2005/08/10/burma-issues-a-dangerous-journey-to-get-to-school-why-are-students-fleeing-the-burmese-education-system-saw-ehna-and-c-guinard/>

<sup>617</sup> United Nations Development Programme, “Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey in Myanmar 2009–2010: Poverty Profile Report” (report, 2010), 92–95, [http://www.mm.undp.org/ihlca/01\\_Poverty\\_Profile/PDFs/09%20Poverty%20Profile\\_Education.pdf](http://www.mm.undp.org/ihlca/01_Poverty_Profile/PDFs/09%20Poverty%20Profile_Education.pdf)

<sup>618</sup> Burma UN Service Office-New York & The Human Rights Documentation Units, “Burma: The Impact of Armed Conflict on the Children of Burma” (report, August 2002), [http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs3/BURMA-submission\\_to\\_office\\_for\\_children\\_and\\_armed\\_conflict.htm](http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs3/BURMA-submission_to_office_for_children_and_armed_conflict.htm)

<sup>619</sup> Arohana, “Education in Myanmar,” 2011, [http://arohanascholarships.org/?page\\_id=125](http://arohanascholarships.org/?page_id=125)

<sup>620</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, “World Data on Education, 7th ed., 2010/2011” (report, April 2011), [http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Myanmar.pdf](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Myanmar.pdf)

<sup>621</sup> Saw Ehna and C. Guinard, “A Dangerous Journey to Get to School: Why Are Students Fleeing the Burmese Education System?” BurmaNet News, 10 August 2005, <http://www.burmanet.org/news/2005/08/10/burma-issues-a-dangerous-journey-to-get-to-school-why-are-students-fleeing-the-burmese-education-system-saw-ehna-and-c-guinard/>

<sup>622</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, “World Data on Education, 7th ed., 2010/2011” (report, April 2011), [http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Myanmar.pdf](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Myanmar.pdf)

<sup>623</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “Burma: People and Society,” in *The World Factbook*, 2 January 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

of rural students make it to the last year of elementary school.<sup>624</sup> Lack of school access, inability to pay school expenses, or work obligations stop them.<sup>625</sup>

### Who's in Charge?

Since the new government took office in 2010, there has been a relative decentralization of power in Burma. Each of the 14 states has its own local legislature and a local government led by a chief minister appointed by the president. Each of these is further divided into townships, wards, and village tracks.<sup>626, 627</sup>



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Patrol

#### Exchange 51: Can you take me to your leader?

Soldier:	Can you take me to your leader?	min yeh gawn saw see Khaw twaa naay ma laa?
Local:	Yes.	hoo keh

#### Exchange 52: Does your leader live here?

Soldier:	Does your leader live here?	min yeh yaw ta jee dee ma shee laa?
Local:	Yes.	hoo keh

Most members of these local governments belong to the government's own Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP).<sup>628, 629</sup> Local government powers remain limited but offer the possibility for greater local accountability.<sup>630, 631</sup> Areas in which local governments have

<sup>624</sup> Gordon and Sara Brown, Ltd., "Education in Burma: Guaranteeing Hope of a Better Future" (report, June 2012), 2–3, 5, <http://gordonandsarahbrown.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Note-on-Education-in-Burma.pdf>

<sup>625</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, "World Data on Education, 7th ed., 2010/2011" (report, April 2011), [http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Myanmar.pdf](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Myanmar.pdf)

<sup>626</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Myanmar: Local Government," 2013, <https://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/400119/Myanmar/277050/Local-government>

<sup>627</sup> Government of Myanmar, "Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar (2008)," 2008, 104, [http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs5/Myanmar\\_Constitution-2008-en.pdf](http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs5/Myanmar_Constitution-2008-en.pdf)

<sup>628</sup> Transnational Institute, "Burma's New Government: Prospects for Governance and Peace in Ethnic States" (Burma policy briefing no. 6, May 2011), 3, <http://www.tni.org/sites/www.tni.org/files/download/bpb6.pdf>

<sup>629</sup> Euro-Burma Office Political Monitor, "Nominations of Chief Ministers for Regions and States," *Political Monitor* 7, (12–18 February 2011): 1–6, [http://euro-burma.eu/doc/PM\\_No\\_7\\_-\\_22-02-11.pdf](http://euro-burma.eu/doc/PM_No_7_-_22-02-11.pdf)

<sup>630</sup> Soubhik Ronnie Saha, "Working Through Ambiguity: International NGOs in Myanmar" (research paper, The Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations, Harvard University, September 2011), 4, [http://www.hks.harvard.edu/hauser/engage/humanitarianorganizations/research/documents/myanmar\\_report\\_final\\_version\\_2011\\_09\\_08.pdf](http://www.hks.harvard.edu/hauser/engage/humanitarianorganizations/research/documents/myanmar_report_final_version_2011_09_08.pdf)

<sup>631</sup> Transnational Institute, "Burma's New Government: Prospects for Governance and Peace in Ethnic States" (Burma policy briefing no. 6, May 2011), 3, <http://www.tni.org/sites/www.tni.org/files/download/bpb6.pdf>

authority to act include allocation of land and agricultural loans, small business loans, the promotion of local culture, and municipal issues.<sup>632</sup>

### Exchange 53: Respected leader, we need your help.

Soldier:	Respected leader, we need your help.	ley saa ba deh, kya naw do Khin byaa aa ko aa nee go loo chin ba deh
Local:	Yes.	hoo keh

## Border Crossings and Checkpoints

Land border crossings are open sporadically and subject to closure without notice.<sup>633, 634</sup> Legal crossings are severely restricted. In January 2013, it was possible to cross into Thailand from Tachilek in Shan State and from Kaw Thoung near the southern Thai border. The border crossing into China is at Muse in Shan State while India is accessible from Tamu in Chin State. Visitors are required to enter and exit the country from the same border crossing.<sup>635</sup>



© Axel Drainville  
Border crossing, Tachileik

Checkpoints are common, especially outside of the major tourist areas, and all travelers are advised to carry their passports and visa at all times.<sup>636</sup>

### Exchange 54: Where is the nearest checkpoint?

Soldier:	Where is the nearest checkpoint?	dee naa ma sit sey deh ney yaa shee laa?
Local:	It's two miles.	naa maay law ma shee ba deh

### Exchange 55: Is this all the ID you have?

Soldier:	Is this all the ID you have?	min ma dee maa pon tin aa kon beh laa?
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<sup>632</sup> Transnational Institute, "Burma's New Government: Prospects for Governance and Peace in Ethnic States" (Burma policy briefing no. 6, May 2011), 3, <http://www.tni.org/sites/www.tni.org/files/download/bpb6.pdf>

<sup>633</sup> Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Government of the United Kingdom, "Burma: Local Travel," 18 January 2013, <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/asia-oceania/burma#entryRequirements>

<sup>634</sup> Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Burma (Myanmar) Country Specific Information: Entry/Exit Requirements," 29 June 2012, [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1077.html#entry\\_requirements](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1077.html#entry_requirements)

<sup>635</sup> Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Government of the United Kingdom, "Burma: Local Travel," 18 January 2013, <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/asia-oceania/burma#entryRequirements>

<sup>636</sup> Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Burma (Myanmar) Country Specific Information: Entry/Exit Requirements," 29 June 2012, [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1077.html#entry\\_requirements](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1077.html#entry_requirements)

Local:	Yes.	hoo keh
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Police checkpoints are sometimes set up in the cities to monitor traffic and driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol.<sup>637</sup>

**Exchange 56: Please get out of the car.**

Soldier:	Please get out of the car.	kyey zoo pyoo ywey kaa paw ga twet pay ba
Local:	Yes.	hoo keh

**Exchange 57: Show us the car registration.**

Soldier:	Show us the car registration.	kaa maa pon tin pya ba
Local:	Yes.	hoo keh

Travelers have been extorted by the Burmese military or by ethnic militant groups manning checkpoints. In June 2012, soldiers from the Kachin Independence Army closed a checkpoint run by the Burmese military that was allegedly collecting “taxes” from travelers.<sup>638</sup> Similar allegations against the Burmese army have been leveled in Shan State where temporary checkpoints are frequently erected.<sup>639</sup> Ethnic armed militias sometimes close checkpoints or set up their own throughout Burma causing tensions which occasionally erupt in violence.<sup>640, 641, 642</sup>

**Exchange 58: Are you carrying any guns?**

Soldier:	Are you carrying any guns?	min thay naa dwey yoo laa ta laa?
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<sup>637</sup> Htoo Aung, “Yangon Police Step in to Stop Illegal Races,” *Myanmar Times*, 19 November 2012, <http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/yangon/3168-police-step-in-to-stop-illegal-races.html>

<sup>638</sup> Kachin News Group, “KIA Shut Down Burmese Military Checkpoint in Northern Shan State,” *Burma News International*, 5 June 2012, <http://www.bnionline.net/index.php/news/kng/13211-kia-shut-down-burmese-military-checkpoint-in-northern-shan-state.html>

<sup>639</sup> Shan Human Rights Foundation, “Newsletter,” April 2012, [http://www.shanhumanrights.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=338:april-2012&catid=76:2012&Itemid=77](http://www.shanhumanrights.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=338:april-2012&catid=76:2012&Itemid=77)

<sup>640</sup> Nay Thwin, “Armed Group Closes Checkpoints as Tensions Flare,” *Democratic Voice of Burma*, 8 May 2012, <http://www.dvb.no/news/armed-group-closes-checkpoints-as-tensions-flare/21919>

<sup>641</sup> Saw Khar Su Nyar, “Burma Army Shuts Down Taxation Checkpoints,” *Karen News*, 30 April 2012, <http://karennews.org/2012/04/burma-army-shuts-down-taxation-checkpoints.html/>

<sup>642</sup> “Karen Army Blocks Borders after Chalerm’s Taunts,” *The Nation*, 4 May 2012, <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/national/Karen-army-blocks-borders-after-Chalerm-taunts-30181269.html>

Local:	No.	ma yoo ba bo
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## Landmines

Burma has not yet acceded to the Mine Ban Treaty but is considering doing so. In early 2012, President Thein Sein requested assistance clearing mines in the nation. Both the government and the armed ethnic groups in Burma have extensively used antipersonnel mines. The reported rate of use has diminished since the middle of 2011, perhaps in partial response to talks designed to secure peace agreements with insurgent groups.<sup>643</sup> Although mine laying operations have tapered off, they still continue. In 2011 and 2012, there were several reports of mines being laid in Kayin (Karen) State. Some armed insurgent groups have the capacity to make various types of mines and antipersonnel devices. Several armed ethnic groups have failed to sign agreements with the government and remain armed and able to lay mines.<sup>644</sup>

Landmines are primarily concentrated in the border areas with Bangladesh and Thailand. Eastern Burma is particularly dangerous due to years of violent interethnic conflict. Karen State and the Bago division have the heaviest contamination. All townships in Karen State and Karenni State are contaminated with mines. Significant problems are present in Kachin State, Mon State, Rakhine State, Shan State, and the Tenasserim division. New reports suggest that the border with India in the Chin State is also contaminated.<sup>645</sup>



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Opium farm village

## Exchange 59: Is this area mined?

Soldier:	Is this area mined?	dee ney yaa maayn bon ireeya laa?
Local:	Yes.	hoo keh

<sup>643</sup> Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor, "Myanmar/Burma: Mine Ban Policy," 17 December 2012, [http://www.the-monitor.org/index.php/cp/display/region\\_profiles/theme/2028](http://www.the-monitor.org/index.php/cp/display/region_profiles/theme/2028)

<sup>644</sup> Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor, "Myanmar/Burma: Mine Ban Policy," 17 December 2012, [http://www.the-monitor.org/index.php/cp/display/region\\_profiles/theme/2028](http://www.the-monitor.org/index.php/cp/display/region_profiles/theme/2028)

<sup>645</sup> Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor, "Myanmar/Burma: Mine Action," 19 September 2012, [http://www.the-monitor.org/index.php/cp/display/region\\_profiles/theme/2031](http://www.the-monitor.org/index.php/cp/display/region_profiles/theme/2031)

## Chapter 5 Assessment

1. The Burman are concentrated primarily in the southern and central parts of the nation.

**True**

The Burman are concentrated in the central and southern regions of Burma in the states of Magway, Bago, Mandalay, Yangon, and portions of Sagaing.

2. Farmers fully own the lands they farm.

**False**

In effect, all lands are owned by the state in Burma. The Land Naturalization Act of 1953 recognizes some private ownership of land. But the government retains the right to confiscate any fallow lands.

3. At least one-quarter of rural Burmese lack access to medical and healthcare facilities.

**True**

Although 75% of the rural population have some access, patients must often travel for up to one day to reach a clinic in a town.

4. Opium cultivation is on the rise among the Burman farmers as a way to increase their incomes.

**False**

Most opium is produced in the region known as the Golden Triangle near the borders with Laos and Thailand. Most Burmese opium farmers, however, are members of ethnic minorities. Few Burman farmers are involved in opium production.

5. Approximately 25% of Burmese children never enroll in school.

**True**

Recent statistics from the United Nations report that 25% of Burmese children never enter any school, and only 40% of those who do actually finish five years of elementary schooling.

## Chapter 6: Family Life

### Introduction

Families are a central feature of Burmese life, and ties among members are strong. Ancestral relations are important, but Burmese society does not recognize the clan. The family is the dominant social unit. The family's significance is easily seen in the Burmese language which has words to identify up to seven generations of ancestors and words to describe seven degrees of descendants. The language includes a number of terms unfamiliar in the west that describe familial relationships and others that describe the such tangled relations.<sup>646</sup>



© gg / flickr.com  
Mother and child in Kalaw

Although nuclear families are becoming the norm in cities, many Burman live in extended households that include three generations living under the same roof.<sup>647</sup> Everyone is expected to do their fair share of household obligations and responsibilities. Fathers are usually distant, expressing little emotion, and remaining detached from day-to-day household affairs. Management of the household, including the budget, falls to the wife.<sup>648</sup> Children expect their parents to be a continuing source of support, even into adulthood. Parents expect their children to be obedient and to take care of them in their old age. It is not at all uncommon for parents to live with their children for their entire lives.<sup>649</sup>

### Typical Household and Family Structure

Most Burman live in an extended family setting that often includes parents, parents-in-law, grandparents, and the siblings of a spouse as well as other kin.<sup>650, 651</sup> Nuclear families sometimes live in their own compound, but many related households may live together in their own houses within a larger compound. These individual households may then form extended family units.<sup>652</sup>

<sup>646</sup> Victor Morris, "Family and Society," in *World and Its Peoples: Myanmar and Thailand* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Corporation, 2008), 644.

<sup>647</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 3: Myanmar," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 50–51.

<sup>648</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 3: Myanmar," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 50–51.

<sup>649</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 3: Myanmar," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 37.

<sup>650</sup> Edith Mirante, "Burman: Family Life," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 178.

<sup>651</sup> Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Government of Japan, "Country Report (Myanmar): Myanmar Customs, Traditions and Culture" (conference presentation, 5th ASEAN & Japan High Level Officials Meeting on Caring Societies, Tokyo, Japan, 27–30 August 2007),

[http://www.mhlw.go.jp/bunya/kokusaigyomu/asean/asean/kokusai/siryoku/dl/h19\\_myanmar.pdf](http://www.mhlw.go.jp/bunya/kokusaigyomu/asean/asean/kokusai/siryoku/dl/h19_myanmar.pdf)

<sup>652</sup> M. Nash and A. R. Chaudhury, "Burmese," in *Encyclopedia of the South-East Asian Ethnography*, Vol. 1, A-L, eds. N.S. Bisht and T.S. Bankoti (Delhi, India: Global Vision Publishing House, 2004), 164.

Among the Burman, it is common for a couple to live with the wife's family. But they are free to live with the groom's family or on their own.<sup>653, 654</sup>

#### Exchange 60: Is this your entire family?

Soldier:	Is this your entire family?	dee haa min mee daa zoo daa soo lo beh laa?
Local:	Yes.	hoo key

#### Exchange 61: Does your family live here?

Soldier:	Does your family live here?	min mee taa dee maa ney laa?
Local:	Yes.	hoo key

The typical Burman family has at least five children.<sup>655</sup> Households in rural areas and cities are of roughly equal size, with rural households slightly larger.<sup>656</sup> About 21% of households in the Burman states or regions are headed by females.<sup>657</sup>

#### Exchange 62: How many people live in this house?

Soldier:	How many people live in this house?	dee in maa loo beh nee yaw ney ley?
Local:	Five.	naa yaw ney baa ley

### Status of Elders and Children

#### *Status of the Elderly*

The Burmese have great respect for the elderly. According to Buddhist traditions, no matter how poor a family, the elderly deserve respect and care.<sup>658, 659</sup> Younger people are taught to respect their elders and never to criticize or argue with them. Younger people must do everything

<sup>653</sup> Edith Mirante, "Burman: Family Life," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 178.

<sup>654</sup> Than Than Nwe, "Gendered Spaces: Women in Burmese Society," *Transformations* 6 (February 2003): 5, [http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue\\_06/pdf/nwe.pdf](http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue_06/pdf/nwe.pdf)

<sup>655</sup> Edith Mirante, "Burman: Family Life," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 178.

<sup>656</sup> Edith Mirante, "Burman: Family Life," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 178.

<sup>657</sup> United Nations Development Programme, "Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey in Myanmar 2009–2010: Poverty Profile Report" (report, 2010), 34–35, [http://www.mm.undp.org/ihlca/01\\_Poverty\\_Profile/PDFs/04%20Poverty%20Profile\\_Demographic%20Characteristics%20of%20Households.pdf](http://www.mm.undp.org/ihlca/01_Poverty_Profile/PDFs/04%20Poverty%20Profile_Demographic%20Characteristics%20of%20Households.pdf)

<sup>658</sup> Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Government of Japan, "Country Report (Myanmar): Myanmar Customs, Traditions and Culture" (conference presentation, 5th ASEAN & Japan High Level Officials Meeting on Caring Societies, Tokyo, Japan, 27–30 August 2007), [http://www.mhlw.go.jp/bunya/kokusaigyomu/asean/asean/kokusai/siryou/dl/h19\\_myanmar.pdf](http://www.mhlw.go.jp/bunya/kokusaigyomu/asean/asean/kokusai/siryou/dl/h19_myanmar.pdf)

<sup>659</sup> United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), "Country Report: Myanmar" (convention, High-level Meeting on the Regional Review of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, Macao, China, 9–11 October 2007), 1, 10, <http://social.un.org/index/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=I9bQfu4JeAQ%3D&tabid=333>

possible to avoid causing a loss of face (status or reputation).<sup>660</sup> In Burmese society, it is traditional for a parent to remain with at least one adult child who is responsible to provide care for the parent as s/he ages. In 2001, 90% of parents lived with an adult child. The elderly often provide support for the family by taking on the responsibility of childcare within the home.<sup>661</sup> This continued involvement in the family and being close to relatives is an important factor in creating feelings of well-being among the elderly.<sup>662</sup>



© Jonas Merian  
Grandparents

### *Status of Children*

Children are much loved in Burmese society and often indulged. Both male and female children are regarded as family treasures.<sup>663</sup> Burmese parents often feel it is luckier to have a boy, however, because boys can become monks who bring the family good karma. Boys are typically indulged and pampered much more than their sisters. Girls are raised to be demure, gentle, and quiet. They are taught to care for men and to be loving. It is inappropriate to express admiration for children because this may cause bad luck from evil spirits.<sup>664</sup>

Burma's military continues to actively recruit children into its armed forces as do some armed ethnic militias. Many boys have been forcibly recruited into the military in spite of a minimum age limit of 18 for recruitment. In June 2012, the government agreed to release all under-age soldiers from the army and border-guard forces.<sup>665, 666</sup> In spite of the agreement and the release of some children from the military, however, young boys continue to be recruited.<sup>667, 668</sup> For child soldiers



© Axel Drainville  
Kids working

<sup>660</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 3: Myanmar," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 41.

<sup>661</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, "Executive Summary: The Elderly Population in Myanmar: Trends, Living Conditions, Characteristics and Prospects, April 2005" (report, 2005), 2, [http://www.unicef.org/myanmar/Elderly\\_Population\\_in\\_Myanmar.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/myanmar/Elderly_Population_in_Myanmar.pdf)

<sup>662</sup> Myo Myint Naing, et al., "Quality of Life of the Elderly People in Einme Township Irrawady Division, Myanmar," *Asia Journal of Public Health* 1, no. 2 (July–December 2010): 9, [http://www.asiaph.org/admin/img\\_topic/7777Quality%20of%20Life%20of%20the%20Elderly%20People%20in%20Einme%20Township%20Irrawaddy.pdf](http://www.asiaph.org/admin/img_topic/7777Quality%20of%20Life%20of%20the%20Elderly%20People%20in%20Einme%20Township%20Irrawaddy.pdf)

<sup>663</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 4: Socialising in Myanmar," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 81.

<sup>664</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 3: Myanmar," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 38–39.

<sup>665</sup> Child Soldiers International, "Myanmar," 2012, [http://www.child-soldiers.org/country\\_reader.php?id=4](http://www.child-soldiers.org/country_reader.php?id=4)

<sup>666</sup> Human Rights Watch, "World Report 2012: Burma," 2012, <http://www.hrw.org/world-report-2012/world-report-2012-burma>

<sup>667</sup> Child Soldiers International, "Chance for Change: Ending the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers in Myanmar" (report, London, England, January 2013), 1–2, [http://www.child-soldiers.org/user\\_uploads/pdf/myanmarchanceforchange23jan139258149.pdf](http://www.child-soldiers.org/user_uploads/pdf/myanmarchanceforchange23jan139258149.pdf)

<sup>668</sup> Human Rights Watch, "World Report 2012: Burma," 2012, <http://www.hrw.org/world-report-2012/world-report-2012-burma>

who have been released from service, there are no rehabilitation programs or special services to reintegrate them into the community.<sup>669</sup> The high rates of poverty also place children at risk. An estimated 18% of poor children work in factories or other industries for long hours with little pay.<sup>670</sup> Some children become the victims of trafficking where they are forced to work as beggars or hawkers. Some are forced into the commercial sex trade, many in Thailand.<sup>671, 672, 673</sup>

## Married Life, Divorce, and Birth

### *Marriage*

The minimum age of legal marriage without parental consent is 18 for a woman. There is no specified minimum age for men.<sup>674</sup> Although marriage is expected, many Burmese are delaying marriage or remaining single. Since 1970, the number of single women has spiked. For those 30–34 years of age, 26% were single in 2000 while the rate for those 40–44 was 15%. Approximately one-third of individuals aged 25–34 were single and never cohabitated.<sup>675</sup> A key reason for increased singlehood is the fraying economy in Burma. Another reason is the rising rates of educational levels among some women who find it difficult to find a peer.<sup>676</sup> Nearly 69% of women with a university degree between the ages of 25–34 were single in 2000 compared to only 20% of those with no education.<sup>677</sup>



© superkimbo / flickr.com  
Female college students

### Exchange 63: Do you have any brothers?

Soldier:	Do you have any brothers?	min maa nee koo dwey gaw shee laa?
Local:	Yes.	hoo key

<sup>669</sup> Child Soldiers International, “Chance for Change: Ending the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers in Myanmar” (report, London, England, January 2013), 2, [http://www.child-soldiers.org/user\\_uploads/pdf/myanmarchanceforchange23jan139258149.pdf](http://www.child-soldiers.org/user_uploads/pdf/myanmarchanceforchange23jan139258149.pdf)

<sup>670</sup> Child Soldiers International, “Chance for Change: Ending the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers in Myanmar” (report, London, England, January 2013), 11, [http://www.child-soldiers.org/user\\_uploads/pdf/myanmarchanceforchange23jan139258149.pdf](http://www.child-soldiers.org/user_uploads/pdf/myanmarchanceforchange23jan139258149.pdf)

<sup>671</sup> United States Department of State, “2011 Trafficking in Persons Report-Burma,” Refworld, UNHCR, 27 June 2011, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country..USDOS..MMR..4e12ee8fb.0.html>

<sup>672</sup> *The Irawaddy*, “Children Exploited as Cheap Labour in Myanmar,” One World South Asia, 30 January 2009, <http://southasia.oneworld.net/news/children-exploited-as-cheap-labour-in-myanmar#.UQg3iIYbg1A>

<sup>673</sup> Francis Wade, “Global Recession ‘Fuelling’ Child Labour,” Democratic Voice of Burma, 11 May 2010, <http://www.dvb.no/news/global-recession-%E2%80%98fuelling%E2%80%99-child-labour/8978>

<sup>674</sup> United Nations Data, “Minimum Legal Age for Marriage Without Consent,” 2013, <http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?d=GenderStat&f=inID:19>

<sup>675</sup> Gavin W. Jones, “Delayed Marriage and Very Low Fertility in Pacific Asia,” *Population and Development Review* 33, no. 3 (September 2007): 455, 457, [http://dahuang.dhxy.info/population/Delayed\\_Marriage\\_Fertility09.pdf](http://dahuang.dhxy.info/population/Delayed_Marriage_Fertility09.pdf)

<sup>676</sup> Gavin W. Jones, “Delayed Marriage and Very Low Fertility in Pacific Asia,” *Population and Development Review* 33, no. 3 (September 2007): 463, [http://dahuang.dhxy.info/population/Delayed\\_Marriage\\_Fertility09.pdf](http://dahuang.dhxy.info/population/Delayed_Marriage_Fertility09.pdf)

<sup>677</sup> Gavin W. Jones, “Delayed Marriage and Very Low Fertility in Pacific Asia,” *Population and Development Review* 33, no. 3 (September 2007): 464, [http://dahuang.dhxy.info/population/Delayed\\_Marriage\\_Fertility09.pdf](http://dahuang.dhxy.info/population/Delayed_Marriage_Fertility09.pdf)

In day-to-day life, Burmese women have a degree of equality with men in both the domestic and economic spheres. Many wives work alongside their husbands or run their own businesses.<sup>678, 679</sup> The traditional Burman family structure could be considered “matriarchal”. Women have primary responsibility for raising the children, doing domestic chores, and managing the household budget.<sup>680, 681, 682</sup>

**Exchange 64: Are you the only person in your family who has a job?**

Soldier:	Are you the only person in your family who has a job?	min mee daa soo teh maa min dee yaa yaw beh aa lo shee daa laa?
Local:	No.	maa hoo baa boo

Household space is divided by gender. The kitchen, always in the back of the home, is the female domain. Closet space is allocated separately because a woman’s clothing must not touch any man, including a monk’s, because it “steals” men’s power (*hpon*). Men and women’s clothes are separated for washing.<sup>683, 684</sup>

*Divorce*

Recent data for the rate of divorce in Burma is difficult to find, but based on census data from 1991, it is believed to be around 1%.<sup>685</sup> Under Burmese law, marriages can be dissolved either through mutual consent of both parties or by a court. Grounds for divorce include cruelty and abuse, adultery, and desertion.<sup>686</sup> Either a male or a female may initiate divorce proceedings, but a man cannot divorce his wife without reason. A woman may divorce a husband if he gives away or sells property without his wife’s consent.<sup>687</sup> A couple may complete the divorce



<sup>678</sup> Than Than Nwe, “Gendered Spaces: Women in Burmese Society,” *Transformations* 6 (February 2003): 6, [http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue\\_06/pdf/nwe.pdf](http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue_06/pdf/nwe.pdf)

<sup>679</sup> “Myanmar: Family,” CultureGrams Online Edition, ProQuest, 2012.

<sup>680</sup> Than Than Nwe, “Gendered Spaces: Women in Burmese Society,” *Transformations* 6 (February 2003): 7, 9–10, [http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue\\_06/pdf/nwe.pdf](http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue_06/pdf/nwe.pdf)

<sup>681</sup> Saw Myat Yin, “Chapter 3: Myanmar,” in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 38–39.

<sup>682</sup> Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Commonwealth of Australia, “Burmese Community Profile” (report, August 2006), 19, <http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/delivering-assistance/government-programs/settlement-planning/pdf/community-profile-burma.pdf>

<sup>683</sup> Than Than Nwe, “Gendered Spaces: Women in Burmese Society,” *Transformations* 6, (February 2003): 6–8, [http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue\\_06/pdf/nwe.pdf](http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue_06/pdf/nwe.pdf)

<sup>684</sup> Irwin Block, “Burmese Panty Protest Has a Serious Side,” *Calgary Herald*, 27 May 2008, <http://www.canada.com/calgaryherald/story.html?id=af3fc4ed-2907-4a04-883b-db228aa140f2>

<sup>685</sup> National Population Committee, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of the Union of Myanmar, “Myanmar: National Report on Population” (report, 1994), 5, <http://countryoffice.unfpa.org/myanmar/drive/SPI0209.pdf>

<sup>686</sup> Aye Kyaw, “Status of Women in Family Law in Burma and Indonesia,” *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 4, no. 1 (Fall 1988): 108.

<sup>687</sup> Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, United Nations, “Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties Under Article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of

process by going to court, announcing that they are divorced in newspapers, or executing a deed of divorce before local elders.<sup>688</sup> If a husband leaves his wife for three years without communicating or providing financial assistance, the marriage is automatically ended.<sup>689</sup>

### Exchange 65: Is this your wife?

Soldier:	Is this your wife?	dee haa min may maa laa?
Local:	Yes.	hoo key

Property acquired jointly is split evenly. Since community-recognized cohabitation constitutes a valid marriage, it makes no difference whether the union was registered.<sup>690</sup> Normally, fathers are given custody of boys while mothers receive custody of daughters. If the children are very young, they generally live with the mother.<sup>691</sup>

### Birth

Children are expected to come quickly after marriage. When a woman has given birth, her friends customarily bring practical gifts, such as baby clothes. Gifts should never be given before the baby's birth since the recipient may believe this will bring misfortune.<sup>692</sup> Food is always given as gifts to monks following the birth of a child.<sup>693</sup>

Families prepare a cradle with clothes in it for the newborn. Useful gender-appropriate gifts are laid around the cradle the first time the child is placed in it.<sup>694</sup> If the child is a son, a learned man is called to perform a hair-washing ritual. Gold or silver coins are placed in a cup used to wash the child's hair so that the child will grow up wealthy.<sup>695</sup> When the child is a month old, the baby's head is shaved. Hair represents bad karma from a previous life.<sup>696</sup>

Postpartum (*me dwin*) is viewed as the time a mother is susceptible to illness, since her body is "cold" from blood loss. She is therefore given warm drinks and foods associated with "hot" properties to restore her health.<sup>697</sup>

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Discrimination Against Women, Combined Second and Third Periodic Reports of States Parties, Myanmar" (report, 4 September 2007), 50, [http://www.bayefsky.com/reports/myanmar\\_cedaw\\_c\\_mmr\\_3\\_2007.pdf](http://www.bayefsky.com/reports/myanmar_cedaw_c_mmr_3_2007.pdf)

<sup>688</sup> Aye Kyaw, "Status of Women in Family Law in Burma and Indonesia," *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 4, no. 1 (Fall 1988): 108–109.

<sup>689</sup> Aye Kyaw, "Status of Women in Family Law in Burma and Indonesia," *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 4, no. 1 (Fall 1988): 112.

<sup>690</sup> Gender Index, "Gender Equality and Social Institutions in Myanmar," n.d., <http://genderindex.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/MMR.pdf>

<sup>691</sup> Social Institutions and Gender Index, "Myanmar: Discriminatory Family Code," 2012, <http://genderindex.org/country/myanmar>

<sup>692</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 4: Socialising in Myanmar," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 82.

<sup>693</sup> Sue Penney, *Discovering Religions: Buddhism* (Oxford, England: Heinemann, 1995), 44.

<sup>694</sup> Sue Penney, *Discovering Religions: Buddhism* (Oxford, England: Heinemann, 1995), 44.

<sup>695</sup> Edith Mirante, "Burman: Rites of Passage," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* Vol. 3, 2nd ed., eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 177.

<sup>696</sup> Sue Penney, *Discovering Religions: Buddhism* (Oxford, England: Heinemann, 1995), 44.

<sup>697</sup> Charles Kemp, "Burmese Health Beliefs and Practices," September 2007, [https://bearspace.baylor.edu/Charles\\_Kemp/www/burma.htm](https://bearspace.baylor.edu/Charles_Kemp/www/burma.htm)

**Exchange 66: Are these your children?**

Soldier:	Are these your children?	dee haa min Khley dwey laa?
Local:	Yes.	hoo key

**Exchange 67: Are these people part of your family?**

Soldier:	Are these people part of your family?	dee loo dwey haa min mee daa zoo teh ga beh laa?
Local:	No.	maa hoo baa boo

**Family Social Events***Weddings*

Buddhist weddings in Burma are purely secular affairs (*lokiya*) that are not officiated by monks.<sup>698, 699</sup> According to the Buddhist law in the nation, if a man and a woman are recognized as a couple by seven houses to the right and seven to the left, they can become husband and wife. Any distinguished couple in the community can conduct the ritual ceremony. The couple performing the ceremony should have a long and happy marriage and many children. Couples may forego such ceremonies and simply sign a marriage certificate at a registry of marriage office.<sup>700</sup> Other couples prefer to get married in a “court marriage” conducted by a judge. Such weddings require a judge and witnesses.<sup>701</sup>



© Isriya Paireepairit  
Wedding Ceremony

Part of the ceremony includes preparing alms for the monastic community (*sangha*) as a form of giving through which the couple will accrue merit. If they are moving into their own home, monks will visit to bless it for the new residents.<sup>702</sup>

Following the marriage ceremony, refreshments are served. The couple greets each of their guests who offer wishes for a long and prosperous life. After the reception, the newlyweds return

<sup>698</sup> WeddingSutra, “Have A Buddhist Wedding in Myanmar,” n.d., [http://weddingsutra.com/travel/honeymoon\\_buddhist.asp](http://weddingsutra.com/travel/honeymoon_buddhist.asp)

<sup>699</sup> Saw Myat Yin, “Chapter 4: Socialising in Myanmar,” in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 84.

<sup>700</sup> Saw Myat Yin, “Chapter 4: Socialising in Myanmar,” in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 84–85.

<sup>701</sup> Myanmar’s, “Myanmar Wedding,” 2012, <http://www.myanmar.net/myanmar-culture/myanmar-wedding.htm>

<sup>702</sup> Myanmar’s, “Myanmar Wedding,” 2012, <http://www.myanmar.net/myanmar-culture/myanmar-wedding.htm#offering>

to their home where they pay respects to each of their parents who then bless the couple. Many contemporary weddings take place in urban hotels which provide wedding packages.<sup>703, 704</sup>

### Exchange 68: Congratulations on your wedding!

Soldier:	Congratulations on your wedding!	min yeh let ta min ga laa pweh go go yoo ba deh!
Local:	We are honored you could attend.	min yeh teh yaw da naa go yoo ba deh

### Exchange 69: I wish you both happiness.

Soldier:	I wish you both happiness.	min do nee yaw sa lon peeyo shon jaa ba sey loo soo tawn ba deh
Local:	We are honored.	min do oo go yoo ba deh

### Funerals

In the Buddhist religion, death is simply one stage in the cycle of life. There are no required mourning periods.<sup>705</sup> Burmese funerals often last a week with the burial or cremation taking place on the third or fifth day following death. If the death occurs right before the Burma New Year, funerals are held as quickly as possible to avoid bringing misfortune into the new year.<sup>706, 707</sup>



© Roel Meurders  
Funeral

When an individual dies at home, the corpse is washed, dressed in the deceased's favorite or newest clothing, and placed on a bed decorated with lace and flowers. The body of an individual who has died in a hospital is not allowed back into the village or the street where the individual lived. Instead, it will be kept at the morgue or, in rural areas, the coffin is sometimes placed at the outskirts of the town before burial.<sup>708</sup>

A large canvas tent is often erected near the family home which may hold the body and where friends and family meet. During the seven-day wake, all doors in the home stay open. Friends and family take turns watching the house during this time.<sup>709</sup>

<sup>703</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 4: Socialising in Myanmar," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 85–86.

<sup>704</sup> Myanmar's, "Myanmar Wedding," 2012, <http://www.myanmars.net/myanmar-culture/myanmar-wedding.htm>

<sup>705</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 4: Socialising in Myanmar," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 88–89.

<sup>706</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 4: Socialising in Myanmar," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 89.

<sup>707</sup> All Myanmar Tours, "Funerals, Myanmar," 2006, <http://www.allmyanmartours.com/myanmar-travel-guide/Funerals.html>

<sup>708</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 4: Socialising in Myanmar," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 88–89.

<sup>709</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 4: Socialising in Myanmar," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 89.

**Exchange 70: Please be strong.**

Soldier:	Please be strong.	aa tin taa ba
Local:	We will try.	too zaa ba meh

Throughout Burma, burial is the norm but in Rangoon, cremation is more common. During the ceremony, monks recite prayers, and the deceased's employer reads an official notice releasing the individual from work obligations.<sup>710</sup> Family and friends give food and candles to the monks to increase merit for the deceased. Burmese believe such goodwill helps the lingering spirit of the dead person.<sup>711</sup> It is obligatory to attend funerals in Burma. To fail to attend shows a serious lack of concern for the family. If, for some reason, one simply cannot attend a funeral, one can send another person along with a letter, telegram, or phone call.<sup>712</sup>

**Exchange 71: I would like to give my condolences to you and your family.**

Soldier:	I would like to give my condolences to you and your family.	min neh min mee taa zoo tweh naa won neh jaa pee poo lay ba deh
Local:	Thank you.	tee zoo tin ba deh

*Shinbyu*

One of the most important occasion in a boy's life comes when he enters a monastery as a novice monk. Virtually all Burman males become a monk, even if only for a few days. This time is a source of great pride for parents and grandparents. Parents often prepare a feast and give money or robes to the local monks.<sup>713</sup>



© Dieter Zirnig  
Young monks in Mandalay

A traditional ritual used to be the ear-piercing ceremony (*na htwin*), which was considered a female rite of passage equivalent to the boy's *shinbyu*. Such rituals, however, have fallen out of favor in recent year. Young girls who enter a nunnery may have a novitiation ceremony similar to that for boys becoming monks.<sup>714,715</sup>

**Naming Conventions**

Most Burmese names contain one or two syllables which, when taken together, have a specific meaning. Some Burmese names may contain only a single syllable.<sup>716</sup> Most Burmese have no

<sup>710</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 4: Socialising in Myanmar," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 90–91.

<sup>711</sup> A to Z of Manner and Etiquette, "Funeral and Religious Customs," 2006, <http://www.a-to-z-of-manners-and-etiquette.com/funeral-and-religious-customs.html>

<sup>712</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 4: Socialising in Myanmar," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 90.

<sup>713</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 4: Socialising in Myanmar," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 81.

<sup>714</sup> Patrick A. Pranke, "Buddhism in Myanmar," *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, ed. Robert E. Buswell, Jr. (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 2004), <http://learners.in.th/file/asakya/BUDDISM+IN+MYANMAR.pdf>

<sup>715</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 4: Socialising in Myanmar," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 81.

surnames (family names) and, therefore, there is no need for women to change their names after marriage. Naming customs reflect historical beliefs in astrology, and a child's name still typically reveals the day of the week when he was born. For example, a child born on "Thursday" would have one name beginning P, B, or M, the letters associated with a Thursday birth.<sup>717, 718, 719</sup>

Sometimes, all or part of the father's name may be included in the child's name but rarely will one find a father and son with exactly the same name. This can be seen in the case of the famous opposition activist Aung San Suu Kyi. Her father's complete name, Aung San, precedes her own, Suu, which is followed by part of her mother's name, Kyi. Husbands and wives may find themselves with the same name or a reversal of the same names. For example U Tin Hla (man) may be married to Daw Hla Tin (woman). In this example, "U" and "Daw" are honorific forms of address.<sup>720</sup>



© Taro Taylor  
Inlé Lake family

The use of honorifics preceding a Burmese name is mandatory. Each honorific term carries information about the status and rank of a person and therefore, honorifics change throughout one's life. The most common honorifics include *Maung* for a child, *Ko* for a young adult, *U* for a working adult (which also means uncle), and *Saya* for teachers, writers, physicians, bosses, or anyone in a responsible position. For females, the equivalent terms are *Ma*, *Daw* (which can also mean aunt), and *Sayama*. Individuals may further confuse the naming process by inserting the name of their hometown in front of their names. For example, U Khant, brother of former UN Secretary General U Thant, inserted his hometown before his name and is officially known as Pantanaw U Khant. A university graduate may elect to add "Tekkatho" meaning university before their name as in the example of Tekkatho Aung Thein.<sup>721, 722, 723</sup>

<sup>716</sup> Donald M. Seekins, *The A to Z of Burma (Myanmar)* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 317–318.

<sup>717</sup> Daw Mi Mi Khaing, "Burmese Names," *The Atlantic*, February 1958,

<http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/195802/burma-names>

<sup>718</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 3: Myanmar," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 61.

<sup>719</sup> Donald M. Seekins, *The A to Z of Burma (Myanmar)* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 317.

<sup>720</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 3: Myanmar," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 62.

<sup>721</sup> Donald M. Seekins, *The A to Z of Burma (Myanmar)* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 318.

<sup>722</sup> Saw Myat Yin, "Chapter 3: Myanmar," in *Culture Shock! Myanmar: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011), 64–65.

<sup>723</sup> Daw Mi Mi Khaing, "Burmese Names," *The Atlantic*, February 1958,

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## Chapter 6 Assessments

1. Nuclear families have replaced extended families as the most common family structure.

**False**

Many Burman live in an extended family setting that often includes parents, parents-in-law, grandparents, and the siblings of a spouse and other kin.

2. There is little difference in the size of urban and rural households.

**True**

The typical Burman family has at least five children. Rural households are roughly the same size as urban ones, with rural ones slightly larger.

3. It is common for newlyweds to move in with the groom's parents.

**False**

Among the Burman, it is common for a couple to live with the wife's family but they are free to live with the groom's family or on their own.

4. The divorce rate in Burma is low.

**True**

Recent data for the rate of divorce in Burma is difficult to find, but based on census data from 1991, it is believed to be around 1%.

5. The legal age for marriage for men and women is 18.

**False**

The minimum age of legal marriage without parental consent is 18 for a woman. There is no specified minimum age for men.

## FINAL ASSESSMENT

1. Freedom of the press in Burma is severely restricted.  
**True / False**
2. Burma has few natural resources.  
**True / False**
3. The largest minority ethnic group in Burma is the Mon.  
**True / False**
4. The president is directly elected by the people.  
**True / False**
5. The Central Basin and Lowlands region contains Burma's major hydrocarbon basins.  
**True / False**
6. Theravada is the most liberal form of the religion.  
**True / False**
7. Women in a pagoda should not attempt to speak with a monk.  
**True / False**
8. The one major religious holiday observed by Burman is the Shwedagon Festival.  
**True / False**
9. Burman often begin their day with a prayer.  
**True / False**
10. Buddhist clergy often run for political office.  
**True / False**
11. Both men and women frequently use a handshake when greeting others.  
**True / False**
12. Burman women have little control of household finances.  
**True / False**
13. Honorifics should be used with a person's name in order to show respect and to be polite.  
**True / False**

14. The Burmese have three different calendars which they use to mark time.  
**True / False**
15. It is appropriate to eat from a fork.  
**True / False**
16. Approximately 75% of residents have no access to electricity.  
**True / False**
17. Healthcare access in most of the nation's cities is adequate.  
**True / False**
18. The person who invites guests to a restaurant is normally expected to pay for everyone's meals.  
**True / False**
19. It is inappropriate to bargain unless one actually intends to buy an item.  
**True / False**
20. Access to ATM machines is extremely limited even in major cities.  
**True / False**
21. Local leaders, including the chief minister, are elected by the population.  
**True / False**
22. The most heavily mined regions of Burma are along its borders with Bangladesh and Thailand.  
**True / False**
23. Nearly two-thirds of rural Burmese have no access to electricity.  
**True / False**
24. Approximately half of Burmese farmers are landless peasants.  
**True / False**
25. Burmese agriculture is heavily dependent on irrigation.  
**True / False**
26. Buddhist weddings are secular.  
**True / False**
27. The normal mourning period following the death of a relative is two weeks.

**True / False**

28. Burman family names (surnames) precede the given name.

**True / False**

29. Parents often live with their children throughout their lives.

**True / False**

30. Nearly one in five children from poor families works in factories or other industries.

**True / False**

## FURTHER READINGS AND RESOURCES

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