



TO KNOW OR TO FEEL?

MYANMAR, THE SMILELAND

RESEARCH PROJECT



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0. INTRODUCTION

0.1. Foreword

I did not doubt a second to give her a positive answer. *(name of the candidate)* was ready to finish her research project which had been having at hand for almost one year long and she asked me to write some words about it. In fact, a project that I consider her first work of art, interesting and deserving a great deal of praise for her effort, illusion and for giving part of herself inside the soul of it. And of course, for my maternal unconditional love for her I could only give her a YES.

I feel proud of her because she has been able to join her three main goals which have been leading the project just from the very beginning: discovering the magic of a country, using English to improve her foreign Language skills and painting her memorable experiences into a traveller's guide.

Since the first days, I knew she would try to give the best of herself, she did not want to create a work as an authentic investigator, she pretended to share her experiences in a very personal way and in my opinion, her resolute approach to the final result becomes a valuable award.

My husband and I feel quite guilty of giving our daughters the chance of not being the same after having seen the moon shining from the other side of the world. As Ibn Battuta said "travelling- it leaves you speechless, then turns you into a storyteller". *(name of the candidate)* has become a good storyteller after the journey to Myanmar.

What you have in your hands is not a report or a documentary, it is a project full of portraits, places, artistic photographs, made by a witness who lived with the people, who breathed the essential, the time, the spirit of the land. The images and the words highlight Myanmar's life as an experience not as a charge, they show the pure smiles, the melodic prays, the shiny sacred buildings, the greenish landscapes and the innocent glances.



Myanmar, which is becoming more aware of its identity, its beauty, its natural wealth, is leading to reach its respect and preservation. And after analyzing face to face this country towards our “modern civilized world” we have discovered that we should think about which kind of future we want to reach. One world full of light and colours where our mother Earth is for each one of us, not for the ones who control the power. In fact, the Sun, the Earth and the Water, are for all the ones who treat the world with love and respect.

Furthermore, inside the pages you have in your hands you will find a mixture of a wonderful land with the deepest feelings which were born inside the heart of a person who after experiencing the country, its people, its colours, its smells and its magic, was able to create a poetic work of art.

Prats de Lluçanès 2016

Your mum, *(name and surnames)*



0.2. Main introduction

Monday, 21st September 2015, Mercè Ferrer, my first of Batxillerat form teacher, tells the whole class about the Research Project we must develop all along the school year to be presented next October 2016.

From then on, I face one of my greatest goals at the moment: to give the best of myself elaborating it.

For a long time, thousands of ideas came to my mind, some of them were discarded immediately, others were kept in order to be reconsidered later. Finally, I decided to focus the project about the alternative medicines between the Western and Eastern worlds.

Interviews, therapy practises, writing the theoretical part of my topic ... but it was the day when I went to an acupuncture session to interview the therapist and take notes about it that I realized I was not doing what my heart was feeling. I had to change direction and get my thoughts back into line.

It was hard for me to change my mind after having moved forward but I knew I would feel myself better if I could put all my efforts into doing something that I underwent comfortable and motivated.

It is true that many times came to my mind the idea that I had spent lots of hours working for nothing, however this is not true, I learnt, and I learnt a lot, I understood that not everything goes as planned and that if you want to do your best, things are not always as easy as one believes.

Consequently, I finally decided to centre the project about an Asian country called Myanmar, discovering its real life, its authentic people and comparing this world with the Western one.

Fortunately, I could live the wonderful experience of visiting this country with my family that is why I could finally decide to work on it.

There were only a few days left before flying to Myanmar, so I rapidly started to create the scaffold of the project. Even during the flight I spent hours thinking and noting ideas, topics, and wondering what my project would finally be like



and what I would find once I got my destination. I was nervous about that, but at the moment, I can say that I could not be able to do anything before visiting the country because the basis of my work has been the words of the local people, what my eyes delighted and what my heart felt day by day.

During my stay, I did not have online connection or Wi-Fi service, so my mainly tools were a notebook, a pen and a camera to take thousands of photos and freeze the magic moments I was experiencing. In fact, my notebook became my great treasure; any place we visited I used it to draft what I felt, what I saw and what I heard. I also wrote down the recommendations, pros and cons of every place, what the guide told us about the country: education, culture, health, customs, religion, etc. I wrote as much as I could. But not being to report my project online, where you always have a safe copy of it, could be very dangerous...I knew that if for whatever reason I lost my diary...that would be the end of my project. And that was about to happen. I remember once when we were having lunch in Golden Kite I was distracted with all those little bowls of different food we had on the table, and I decided to take some notes about that. Suddenly I could not find my notebook in my bag so my heart started beating very fast. I thought I had lost all those pages full of essential information. Thank Goodness I could find it among my belongings!

I wonder what journalists do have when they go abroad but, I guess I was like one of them, breathing, living and dreaming with one goal in mind: discover the deepest part of that amazing world.

Once I went back home, the procedure of my following tasks was to register and distribute all my notes and learning into what my final project would be. While I was developing it I did not feel myself confident enough, maybe because some of my friends told me they were focusing their work mainly on the theoretical part, searching on the internet and getting their information from edited and formal resources whereas mine was based on a country. I had started without any theoretical basis and it was mainly documented with the personal experience I had lived there for a couple of weeks.



“Am I on the right way?, Will I be able to reach my goals and what my teachers expect from me? “... Hundreds of questions were dancing around my mind, I was really afraid of not doing exactly what I had to do.

Maybe it is simply the way I am, but I felt even more insecure when I thought that I had decided that my project would be entirely in English as I had proposed from the very beginning in order to improve my communicative competence as well as the reading and writing skills of this foreign Language. Even though, I had to give it a try.

Once I had a clear idea of how my project would be organized, I decided that it would be like a jigsaw with three pieces: Myanmar and the Western world, English and Graphic design. Three huge items that make me feel engaged.

After these introductory words ... “LET THE JOURNEY BEGIN”

0.3. Work breakdown structure

The project consists of a first theoretical part which describes and compares Myanmar with the Western world. It details basic information about the country, its geography, demography, religion, school functioning among many other sections. All parts include a last subsection which contrasts Myanmar, the Eastern country, with Spain, a Western nation; two similar countries geographically and demographically speaking but very different in culture and way of living. The comparative done here is made of from a subjective and personal point of view.

And last but not least, “Myanmar 13-Day Travelling guide” is the heaviest part of my research project. It deals with a complete traveller’s diary, useful tips, professional photographs, interviews to locals and essentials for tourists. The guide also provides the website “<http://thedownofhope.blogspot.com.es/>” which consists of the main features of the project including an amazing video to spread the magic of Myanmar.



1. MAP



Figure 1: map of Myanmar



2. GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES

Myanmar is 676,578 square kilometres in size, one of the biggest countries in Southeast Asia.

It is surrounded by Bangladesh, India, China, Laos and Thailand.

Myanmar capital city is **Nay Pyi Taw** (also known as Naypyidaw) located in the centre of the country with a population of 924 608 inhabitants. Nevertheless, it is not the most important city around the country. The main and largest one is Yangon with 5 998 000 inhabitants, formerly known as Rangoon. Yangon is also the most important commercial centre in Myanmar and although its infrastructures are not developed compared to that of other major cities in Southeast Asia, it now has the largest number of colonial buildings in the region.

Most tourists visiting Myanmar wonder why the most commercial and developed city is not the capital. The main cause was the greedy military government who moved the capital to Nay Pyi Taw in 2005 with minimal explanations. Some Burmese people say they did it because they were more peaceful and it was easier to control the country out of the most populated city. And honestly, it is not very reasonable Nay Pyi Taw to be the capital city of Myanmar. In fact, it is not in travelling routes and for that reason not many tourists visit it.



*Figure 2:
soldiers from
the dictatorial
military party.*

3. CURRENCY

The Kyat is the currency used in Burma. It is often abbreviated as K (singular) or Ks (plural).

In many places of the country it is also used the US dollar. In fact, hotels, restaurants and public establishments prefer it. US1\$ is more or less 1215'02 Ks.

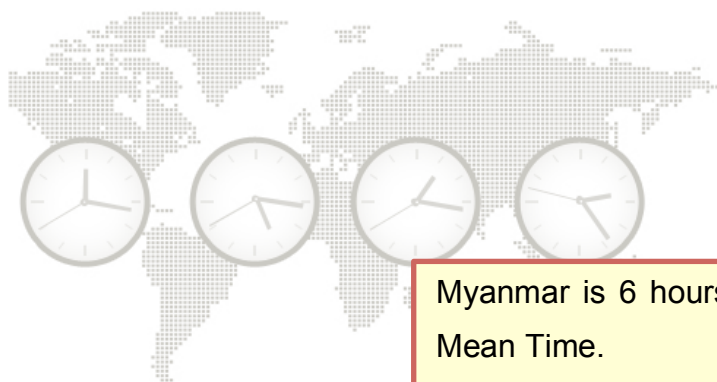


Figure 3: Burmese kyats

4. LANGUAGES

In Myanmar the main language is Burmese. Nevertheless, as the country has a huge diversity of ethnic groups, it also has got some other languages spoken. For example, in the northern region some ethnicities such as Pa O speak their own language, which is similar to Burmese.

And, what about English in Myanmar? Truly, there are few people who speak English in the country probably due to the little number of tourists visiting it. Locals, villagers and most inhabitants cannot communicate with them because of their low English level. However, at restaurants, hotels and public establishments the staff is able to speak this international language.



Myanmar is 6 hours and 30 minutes ahead of the Greenwich Mean Time.



5. DEMOGRAPHY

5.1. Population

According to 2014 data, there were 51,486,253 inhabitants in Myanmar, a number quite similar to Spain with 46'77 million people. We could say that both countries have a very large population. In fact, Myanmar is in the 25th position of the most populated countries in the world while Spain is closely to Myanmar in the 29th position.

5.2. Population density

The population density in Myanmar is 82 people per square kilometre whereas in Spain it is 93 people per square kilometre.

5.3. Age breakdown

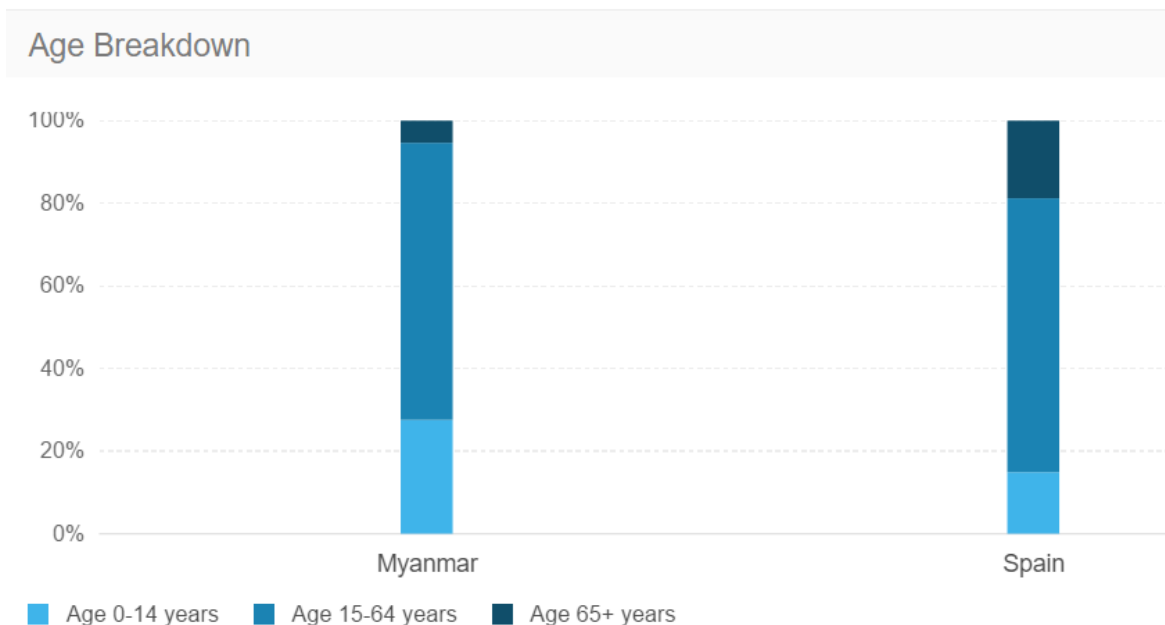
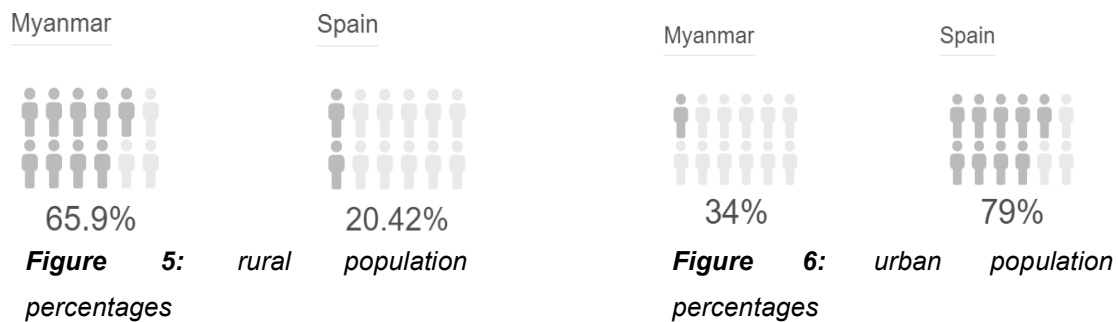


Figure 4: graphic of the average age of Burmese people.



As it is seen in the graph, most people in Myanmar, as well as in Spain, are between 15 and 64 years old. By contrast, in Myanmar there are more people aged 0 to 14 than people older than 64. In Spain, as you can see, it is precisely the opposite.

5.4. Rural and urban population



As it is represented in the graph, in Myanmar most people live in rural areas. Myanmar is still a considered an underdeveloped country compared to many others. Quite a lot of Burmese work in the fields and cultivate their own food for a living. Meanwhile, most Spanish population does not live in the countryside anymore because the main wealth, future and the latest advances as well as the main educational institutions are in the capital cities and urban areas.

Nevertheless, Burmese people, especially the youngest, are increasingly moving to Yangon or to the urban areas around the country to go to universities or to get a better job.

5.5. Life expectancy

According to the latest WHO data published in 2015 life expectancy in Myanmar is around 64 for females and 68 for males. However, given the words of local voices from Myanmar, women usually die at the age of 85 while men die in their



seventies. This big difference is considered to be caused by the alcohol and tobacco that men usually consume during their lives.

6. HISTORY AND CURRENT GOVERNMENT

To understand today's politics it is necessary to know a little bit of the Burmese past life.

Myanmar was founded in 1004 by a monarch who lived in Pagan and who started to build up Pagodas around the region to form what now is Bagan. Along the years, many other monarchs controlled the country and some of these Burmese Kings wanted the absolute power.



Figure 7: map of Myanmar showing the several British wars

Problems and disputes with the monarchs were occurring in Myanmar when the intelligent British Empire, during the colonisation era, took advantage of it and started to colonize the territory. They started from the South, where the First Anglo-Burmese War took place; the Second one reaching Rangoon (Yangon); up to the North from Mandalay to Kachin State, uniting Burma with the British India.

Burma became the first rice exporting country and the economy rose considerably around the nation. However, all the capital was for the British colonisers.

These Burmese signed up to fight with the British as the Japanese invasion was about to begin.

Figure 8: men from the Kachin or Karen ethnicity in 1942.



After some years, in 1942 approximately, a national movement supported by the Japanese Empire arose. That is why the Japanese troops removed the British colonisers after a 120-year invasion from Burma and declared the Burmese Independence.

Nevertheless, the Japanese Empire wanted to conquer Burma and started to invade it. That is when the Burmese Government asked the British troops and partner countries to help them beat the enormous Japanese Military Forces.

British accepted the petition and in 1945 the Burmese returned to the British Empire. However, in 1946 Burma was finally Independent.

In 1962 a communist government reached the power. U Nu, the president, in a kind of dictatorship, enforced a one-part system, nationalized the industry and isolated the country from the rest of the world...

But, this is not the worst and hardest era of the Burmese history. In 1988 many monks, undergraduates and citizens started a revolution. A lot of people were killed by the cruel government and finally, Saw Maung carried out a Coup d'État and created the new military state: "the Union of Myanmar".



Figure 9: "Saint" Aung San Suu Kyi. Promotional poster for the upcoming BBC propaganda

In 1990, elections were held and Aung San Suu Kyi's Party (democracy party) won them. Outraged, the military regime annulled the results and decided to place Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest. Burma was completely isolated from the rest of the world. In Burma few people could go to school or college. In fact, most educational centres were located far away from the cities, and it had a logical explanation: an uneducated or illiterate nation would always be easier to handle for unscrupulous leaders who used the great natural wealth of the country to buy terrifying weapons and to swell their own accounts.

Myanmar was in an heartless dictatorship since 1962, when the first communist regime rose into power until 2010, when the Military regime fell down.



From 2010 to 2015 the military regime still had some power in the government, but in November 2015 elections were held and the National Democracy League won the power but the governor was imprisoned and she could not take direct charge of the power.

Six months ago, Aung San Suu Kyi was liberated and she has since then been governing Myanmar over the democratic president Htin Kyaw. People around the country have Aung San Suu Kyi as a heroine, they adore her and many houses and shops have photos of their beloved lady.

Reasonably after these hard and long periods, the Lady has been considered the salvation of the nation. However, Aung San Suu Kyi has extremely democratic ideas; in fact she is married to a British man. Saying this, I want to make the reader aware that if the pro occidental democracy had reached the power years ago, Burma would not preserve its essence and magic roots nowadays because this woman has a completely occidental mind and she would have just transformed Myanmar into a completely western country. As an example, we can read our tour guide's words: "I am afraid of an over-development of my country and of the loss of Burmese values".

I am afraid of it too. I personally think that the fairest way to lead the country would be by looking for the preservation of the Burmese essence and the wellness of its people. Myanmar is undergoing a rapid transition and it can be difficult finding the latest information on what to expect when you visit it. I can only say and recommend you to visit this country as soon as possible, time in Myanmar is nowadays going at a speed of a thousand kilometres per hour.

If we focus on the current government again, we can say that in the year 2016, Myanmar is a unitary parliamentary republic led by Aung San Suu Kyi and the president Htin Kyaw from the National League for Democracy.

Although the history is different in each country, we could compare Spain to Myanmar in terms of its dictatorship era, which took place in 1988 in Myanmar with its Coup d'état and in 1936 in Spain under the power of Francisco Franco who reached it in the same way. After those hard periods and pitiful



experiences of living under cruel governments; first Spain and more recently Myanmar inhabitants are today under a democratic government system.

To conclude with this section, I would like to quote just one phrase of the brave and fearless Aung San Suu Kyi and Nobel Prize winner in 1991: *“Democracy is when people control the government”*.

7. TERRITORY DIVISIONS

In Myanmar there are more than 135 different ethnic groups, each with its own history, culture and language. The largest group is Burman (Bamar) which is formed by about two-thirds of the population and controls the military system and the government.



Figure 10: map of Myanmar with the seven states and seven region divisions.

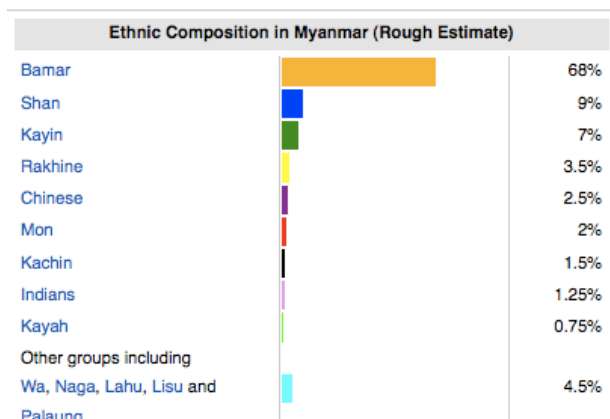


Figure 11: several and main ethnic groups of Myanmar

The seven largest minorities after Bamars are the Chin, the Kachin, the Karenni, the Karen or Kayin, the Mon, the Rakhine and the Shan. That is why Burma is divided into seven states (the more mountainous areas) and seven more regions (the plain areas)



which are largely inhabited by the Bamar ethnicity.



Figure 12: several ethnicities of Myanmar

There is an ethnic group called Rohingya which is not recognised by the government as an ethnic nationality of Burma. They suffer from some of the worst discrimination and human rights abuses in Burma. They mainly live in Rakhine State and many other areas as refugees in Bangladesh.



Figure 13: Citizens of Myanmar living in Thailand holding anti-Rohingya banners as they gather outside the Myanmar embassy in Bangkok

United Nations describe Rohingya ethnic group as one of the most persecuted population in the world, a minority “without friends and without land”. Both the people from Myanmar and the military government persecuted them, did human traffic with them and nobody accepted this minority. Although the problem is still alive, the new government wants to find a solution to the benefit of both communities.





Figure 14: Rohingya migrants from Burma in a boat found floating in Thai waters in May 2015.

While searching information, I found a photo that rang me a bell. I read the title of the article: *“Rohingya Migrants From Myanmar, Shunned by Malaysia, Are Spotted Adrift in Andaman Sea”* dated from 2015.

7.1. Myanmar vs the Western world

That is when I remember those days when boats filled with poor people from kilometres and kilometres away appeared continuously on the TV. And now, that I am doing this research project that I have visited Myanmar and have seen these people with my own eyes, it is when I realize how unfair the world is. We are all humans, are not we?

Piteously, Myanmar is not the only place where this fact takes place. In the 21st century, we do not have to look so far. What about the problem that is currently living Europe, the most advanced continent, with the refugees from Siria and Irak? Or what about the immigrants from Africa who have been risking their lives for years in the dangerous waters of the Strait of Gibraltar just trying to find a better life? Nobody accepts them, neither their land nor government, they do not have a daily meal to fill their stomach up, neither a job, they do not even have a family or a roof to sleep under... And they are human beings just like us.

Both Rohingya and the ones who intent to come to Spain are just asking for help and we are all ignoring them. Unfortunately, this is how human madness is.



8. GEOGRAPHY

The country itself is divided into two: Lower Myanmar, which includes the coastal areas, and Upper Myanmar, formed by the internal parts of the country.

8.1. Climate

Myanmar is affected by the tropical monsoon, which means cloudy, hot and humid summers and less cloudy, rainfall and mild temperatures in winter. Climate varies in the highlands depending on elevation. The higher elevations suffer a heavy snowfall and bad weather.



Figure 15: Irrawaddy river course

The main river in Myanmar is Irrawaddy River which flows relatively straight North-South before emptying through the Irrawaddy Delta into the Andaman Sea. It feeds many stomachs and enriches many fields and lands around the country. It is also the most important commercial waterway in the country.

As till now Burmese people does not have anything but agriculture and consequently it is the backbone of the Burmese economy, people historically has taken advantage of the climate and the characteristics of their habitat to plant food to survive.

Rice is the only major agricultural produce, covering, 60% of the total cultivated land area. Some other major agricultural products include beans, pulses, sugarcane, sesame, groundnut, teak, and fish. Also in the northern parts of the country there are copper mines to find gold, silver, and also Jade (the



Figure 16: Myanmar Jade mine in the northern Kachin State



precious and valorous stone).

8.2. Myanmar vs the Western world

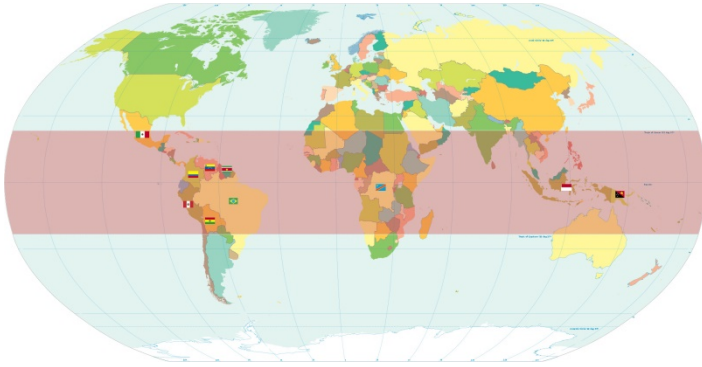


Figure 17: Worldwide map showing the situation of the country in the **equator**.

Along history, every generation around the world has taken advantage of the wealth of the Earth. In Spain, since the earliest ages, we have been looking for the best cultivation to plant. Today, there are also many people, not as much

as years ago, who live from the agriculture and from the work in the land. Nonetheless and reasonably, the products that are obtained here are not the same as the ones in Myanmar. This is because the climates are different. In Catalonia we have four seasons, we are not living in a monsoon region so the rains are more regular and the climate is not so humid, winters are mild and summers are warm. That is why we cannot obtain teak, neither sugarcane nor tea... Due to the climate, the landscapes are completely different and the vegetation too.

Sadly, we have a tough and complicated problem that is affecting both countries. That is endangering the climate, the fields, the forests, the waters, the air... This issue is endangering their inhabitants too, and it is the climate change due to the pollution that the developed countries have been generating for the last centuries. Our blind eyes have not seen anything but consumerism, money and “I needs” for years and years. And that is the result. That is what we wanted, is not it?

In Myanmar the climate has completely changed over the last years. In some areas of the country it rains more frequently, in some other regions there is more dryness than times before, in others it is hotter... And this is causing a change in cultivation, and by a knock-on effect, the way of living too.



“YOUR **FUTURE** IS CREATED BY WHAT
 YOU DO { **TODAY** }
 NOT { **TOMORROW**”

Figure 18: Robert T. Kiyosaki
 quote

What is embarrassing and unfair is that these poor countries that today are waking up in this global world are now bearing the consequences of our own limitless whims. As the American nurse Terry Swearingen once said: “We have lived on the planet as if we had another one to go to”.

9. ECONOMY



Since the transition to a civil government in 2011, Burma has begun an economic overhaul intending to reach and reintegrate into the global economy. Despite these few years of development and improvements, Burma remains one of the poorest countries in Asia. Approximately 26% of the country’s 51 million people live in poverty. They do not have anything else to eat but rice or some food grown by themselves.

The main cause is the heavy government intervention in the economy for so many years. The military regime left Burma with poor infrastructure, endemic corruption, underdeveloped human resources and inadequate access to capital... In addition, they left a rudimentary and antique economic system. For example, visa does not work in most of the places and it is only accepted in hotels and public establishments by paying a tax.



The new elected government, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, will likely focus on accelerating agricultural productivity and land reforms, modernizing and opening the financial sector and improving fiscal management.

9.1. Main sectors

As it is explained in the geography section, agriculture is the main economic activity in the country. Most people live in rural areas and 70% of the working population is still employed in agriculture, whose lifestyle is the basis of this culture.

Being isolated for so many years has resulted into people whose knowledge is based on their agricultural life, which spins around the weather and the seasons. Thus, work is difficult, especially considering that few farmers have modern equipment.

The forestry exploitation is fiercer; in fact, it is the number one in the exporting countries of teak wood. It also exports petrol and minerals even though they are in decline.

Although Myanmar's wealth of natural resources is youthful, inexpensive workforce and its strategic location between Asia's two rising powers, India and China, have captivated foreign investors. Some of the political reforms started a year ago, since then, foreign investment in the country's energy, transportation, tourism, retail, and telecommunications industries has surged by over 40%.

Furthermore, when the military system got the power in 1988, there was a sharp decline in the number of foreign tourists visiting the country. It was not in the military government's interests that occidentals and pro-justice people went there and saw their isolated and ruled country.



9.2 Unemployment

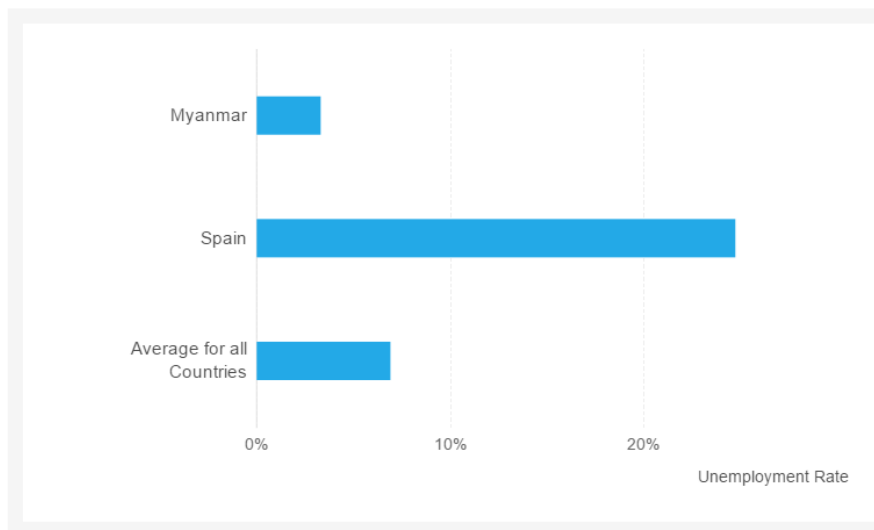


Figure 20: Unemployment rate Myanmar-Spain and the average for all countries.

There are no words to describe the way of working and sustaining the country in Myanmar. Although we realize that there is only 3.3% of unemployment compared to the 26.7% in Spain, the working conditions and the salaries are much worse for Burmese people. Moreover, if we compare the graphs below,, we can observe that Spain, “a well-developed country in our modern world”, has more unemployment than Myanmar. This leads to an ill society, full of mental and psychological problems, low self-esteem and without any aims.

9.3 Salaries

Myanmar salaries can range from \$10 to \$20,000 per month. From the one hand, the average monthly wage is about US\$100 if the employee works more than twelve extra hours per week, apart from the 44-46 hours of the working week.

However, unfairness also exists in the Asiatic country. While a worker in a workshop or with animals and fields earns a maximum of \$100, a private doctor or a banker can get \$15, 000 per day.

During the military rules lower sixty-dollar salaries were paid monthly to pensioners. Nowadays, they get nearly \$120 a month. It is usual then, to find



some old parents who are given part of their adult children's salary, same as in Spain in the 1950's. As San Yu, our loyal guide said: *"My parents spent a lot of money with my siblings and me, so now we give them back all they did for us; they feel grateful for it"*.

According to their culture, Burmese people give their first salary and split it into three parts. The first one for the monasteries, the other one to their parents and the last one to the poorest. When they get older, they give part of their salary to their parents until they get married.

9.4 Myanmar vs the Western world

Minimum salaries are higher in Spain than in Myanmar. The lowest wage in Spain is \$630 whereas in Myanmar an official minimum salary does not even exist. People can earn \$2 per day, which is completely astonishing for us. Obviously, life is cheaper in Yangon rather than in Barcelona. However, most of the Burmese can only invest their salary buying or usually cultivating food to feed themselves and their family. That means they do not have any more resources to live with.

Evidently, Spain main sector is not the first one but the third, the one dedicated to services. There are many competitive enterprises fighting for the best attention and service to the client. Workers are employed in banks, engineering manufacturing or energy distributing companies. This working world seems to be modern, sophisticated and progressed, and it is. However, it is laughable to see the unemployment statistics of both countries. Spain, the super developed European nation, is amply beating the poor Myanmar. In our country there are many people suffering from poverty because of the lack of work. The government is not capable to offer them a way to earn money for a living.

While a long distance keeps facing the lowest salaries in front of the huge and overflowing ones, Myanmar will not be able to grow and cope with the developed world. Although in our country sharp differences also exist, the situation is not so extreme.



Taking this fact into consideration, Burmese people are much kinder and have deeper sensitivity for their ancestors to whom they even give part of their miserable incomes to help their beloved relatives.

9.5 Curiosities

Myanmar economy is so many years late, that just four years ago the government gave just five-hour electricity each day to lots of towns and there are still many sites around the country which still have not got electricity and they use the fire cook and light the house.



10. CULTURE AND SOCIETY

Myanmar has its own unique cultural traditions, some of them are fascinating. Sensitivity and kindness make the nation one of the warmest and most welcoming countries in the world.

The natives of Myanmar communicate in their language; they put on their very own fashion of clothing with the *Longyi*, they relish their fashion of food, they pray in their manner, they play their own games, they have a good time on their festivals, they receive therapy with their conventional medicine and perform their rituals. They are just Burmese people, they are unique.

For the vast majority of Myanmar's population, Buddhism is the centre of their individual life and the monastery is the centre of the community. Buddhism is the heart of the Burmese culture, especially for those who live in villages. They believe that wisdom resides at the *pongyi kyaung*, the monastery. And it is really true that the main wisdom and culture centres are in monks' hands.

Daily life in the village begins with the pongyis (monks) making their rounds in the morning with their begging bowls. By donating that day's food, the villagers earn merit and the monks, who are forbidden to work, are nourished. Monks



can even return to the monastic life once married if they get their wives' permission.

When the monsoon brings the first rains, all hands are put to work to rice planting following the annual cycle of life. During the three months of most intensive rain, marriages and hunting are forbidden, but Nat festivals can be enjoyed (Nat is the name of the festivals celebrated during this time of the year). Harvest in Autumn is also a busy time. During the cooler season the main entertainment is the pwe, a type of folk opera where Burmese dancers retell tales from their ancient Indian influences.

The main dish of the Myanmar cuisine is boiled rice, combined with a little spicy meat or fish and some vegetables. They also enjoy their diet with a great variety of exotic fruits such as mango, bananas, pineapples, dragon fruit.... The common drink is weak green tea which is taken with the tea salad throughout the day in small bowls. In fact, a typical gesture of hospitality in Myanmar is to offer guests a cup of green tea accompanied with fried peanuts and beans with some spicy green tea leaves.



Locally rolled cigars, called cheroots, are smoked by young and old, male and female in the poorest areas. Furthermore, a typical custom around the country is to chew a nut of betel which colours their teeth into a reddish tone.



When it is really hot, both men and women wear skirts, except for those in the military service, who wear long trousers. The longyi is a wrap-around cylinder of cloth that is tucked in at the waist in two different ways depending on the gender. Male and female longyis also differ in the patterns printed or woven into them.



Figure 24: men in U-Bein Bridge wearing Longyi

Women wear a long or

short-sleeved blouse mainly to cover their skin from the sun. On the head men may wear a gaunqbaung, which for a farmer can be a simple length of cloth twisted around the head like a turban. Because of the hot weather and rains, flip-flops are worn rather than shoes. Umbrellas, usually made from the mulberry tree, are carried throughout the year to keep off either sun or rain.



Figure 25: Thanaka trunk and the stone

However, the most common outfit is *Thanaka*, a light yellow cream made of the substance they get after rubbing the cork of *Thanaka tree* with some water against a flat stone. Females more than males cover the skin of their face with this cream; sometimes they draw the shape of a leaf or different designs, in order to protect themselves from the sun and as a symbol of beauty.

For much of Myanmar's history, women played a stronger role than in other traditional Western societies. It is enough looking at the political leader of the country, Aung San Suu Yi, the appreciated Lady who quit the country from the cruel dictatorship. But, what about the secondary paper females have in religion, work and education? At work females still have worse conditions than males; at school they have to pay more taxes than boys for the simple reason that that their obligation is to take care of their children and house-holding.





*Figure 26:
Burmese girl
wearing
Thanaka*

About religion, if a monk is very well considered and respected, nuns are seen as if they were not able to find a husband.

A popular form of recreation is visiting a notable pagoda or attend a festival. Men usually spend their free time playing soccer, even during heavy rains, using a small ball of bamboo cane which is kept up in the air using their heat, feet, knees and shoulders.

10.1 Curiosities



Women get up early and prepare the food for the monks and for their husbands to eat during their working journey and for the rest of the family.

Time ago, women did not have a job, Burmese people considered that women was made to take care of the house. Women and all the family were sustained by the salary of the father.



The the Korean television's influence is starting to be born between the Burmese youth. For instance, they see Korean teenagers wearing trousers and little by little, in the most developed regions, they leave the traditional Longyis.



The main treasures according to the Burmese society are: the teachers, the parents, the lessons, the monks and Buddha. Everyone has a special respect to these beings.

Traditionally, Burmese names are given based on the day of the week that the child was born. The names for each day all start with certain Burmese consonants. Babies born on Tuesday, for example, often will have names that begin with Burmese letters romanized as "S," such as San or Sein; the name of the ones who were born on Friday starts with "Th" like Thi, Thu or Thang.

Years ago and still today, trafficking of women and domestic workers has been another horrifying issue to deal with. Chinese men come in the northern regions of the country and get married with them. Years later, these women are sold as prostitutes. Women from the cities are aware of this fact meanwhile the ones living in the poorest villages become the main victims. There is also workers' trafficking. People from the main cities like Yangon recruit poor workers and pathetic salaries to them.



Figure 27: Burmese woman



10.2 Myanmar vs the Western world

After visiting the country, reading several information resources, commenting with locals, I realize that women keep having a secondary place in their society



Figure 28: Burmese buddhist people praying in the temples

as everywhere else in the world. All religions, similar or different, keep treating women with inferiority compared to men. It is incredible to find oneself in the 21st century, among thousands of theories about equality, human rights and still seeing that so little has been done and there is still much to do.

Thus, citizens from Myanmar do not have free time to spend as

we do in the Western world going to the gym, spending a couple of weeks on holidays at the beach... Burmese people's main goal is to achieve the Buddha's principles, visiting pagodas, stupas and temples. Their faith, prayers and donations are far away from the ones in our "developed" countries.

In our countries it is believed that the beauty resides on showing the body's features with shiny brown skin from sunbathing, a thin tall figure over high-heel shoes and wearing thin light clothes covering a little part of our body. What about the beauty beliefs in Myanmar? People tend to cover their body with long colourful patterned Longyis and long-sleeve shirts. They also wear a sunhat and the Thanaka cream to protect their face from the sun beams. They wear flip-flops under the sun and even under the rain. They do not like to show their body to the rest, however, they will always respect other people's dressing styles.

Social and friendly environment are present in the busy streets and in the markets. Everywhere is plenty of people buying and selling, going and coming back, eating or drinking... But speaking, smiling, facing one another; in other words living in peace and enjoying every moment. Technologies, apart from mobile devices, do not consume their time like they do in our modern world.



Then, it is when I realize that technologies and modernity have taken many positive values away, whereas in Myanmar people are still delighted with their real way of being. I am afraid that if modern tendencies touch that magical land, it will lose its charming.

The weather is still part of their cycle of life. This allows them to keep living in a healthy way, because they provide their nutrition from what Mother Nature gives them. Cancers almost do not exist there; depression and psychologist diseases are very rare. Why? Maybe because they are able to live in a simpler way than we are.

11. EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN MYANMAR

The education system is based on the United Kingdom's system, due to nearly a century of British and Christian presences in Burma. Schooling is compulsory until the end of elementary school, probably about 9-10 years old, while the compulsory schooling age is 15 or 16 at international level. Yangon and Mandalay, as the main cities of the country, have several public schools; nonetheless, in many small villages there are not any schools or teachers to attend their children.

That is why the half of the great amount of children in Myanmar lives in the monasteries as novices, young monks, where they are taken care by the monks and the monks themselves or nearby schools teach the novices.

11.1 Schooling period

The children begin school on 1st June until the last day of February and they are on holidays from February to June again. This, as our educational system, follows the hottest seasonal time.

The ones who can afford going to school start the lessons at 9 am until 3:30 pm.



11.2 Uniform

School uniforms are mandatory. The boys' uniform is a white shirt and green trousers or shorts. The girls' uniform is similar, consisting of a white blouse and a skirt or trousers.



Figure 29: group of boys going to school with the Burmese uniform and their lunch baskets.

11.3 Educational levels

EDUCATION	AGE FROM	AGE TO
Pre school	4	5
Primary	5	10
Secondary	10	16
Post-secondary	16-20 (+22)	

Figure 30: table showing the educational levels in Myanmar

- **Primary school:** children enter primary school for 5 compulsory years. Before primary school children in some regions have the option start with the lowest primary level where they get used to the educational system. In primary education kids are taught of Burmese, English, Mathematics, Science, Geography and History. According to the revised primary curriculum dated from 2001 children should also learn moral civics, painting, music and physical education. However, this programme is only followed in the richest schools from



Yangon. In most of the areas of the country, the schooling program is like the one in Spain forty years ago.

There are public primary schools, private ones or religious-run schools. Most of the ones around the country were founded by the monks in the monasteries. They themselves teach the children from the villages both primary and secondary ages. Apart from learning Sanskrit, it is said that school education in monasteries is often the best way to learn as the monks have the culture of the country and convey positive values and behaviour.

I would say that primary school is compulsory in speech marks because all around Myanmar you can see a lot of children in the streets selling bracelets, postcards to tourists or in the markets with their mothers. Due to the lack of investment in Burmese education, schools often charge students a range of unofficial fees. Many families, particularly those in poorer rural areas, cannot afford to pay these fees and so are forced to withdraw their children from education.

- **Secondary school:** secondary school is for 10-to-19-year olds and also “compulsory” but not free. Children of rich and well-known families are often given easier access to the most prestigious secondary schools. High schools students choose one of 2 tracks upon entering high school: science or arts. All high school students take Myanmar, English, and mathematics. However, Science-specialised students also take 3 additional subjects: chemistry, physics and biology as part of their coursework, while arts-specialised students take geography, history and economics.
- **Universities:** not many people can afford going to university. However, the number of youth who can assume the cost of the post-secondary studies is increasing. This positive fact is due to the reforms of the new government.



The dream of each Burmese student, as it is usual in these underdeveloped countries, is to study overseas, at destinations such as Singapore, Malaysia, Australia, United Kingdom and the United States which are the most common ones.

Popular choices in courses are agriculture, education, technology, law, health, and business management.

11.4 Educational methods

Burmese educational system is as it used to be in Spain in the 1970's. The books they have are really old-fashioned, the information in them is old-dated and the exercises and theory are based on memorization.

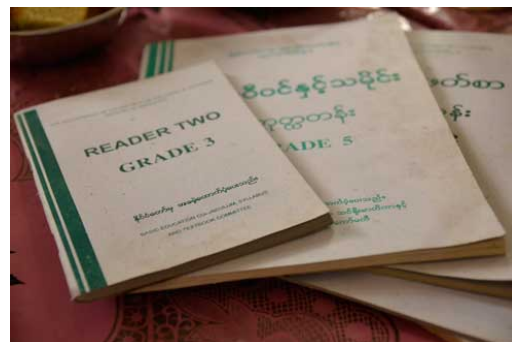


Figure 31: Burmese primary books

Students are considered vessels to be filled with pre-ordained 'knowledge' which they must learn by heart. There is little or no emphasis on understanding the information being committed to memory, or being able to practically apply it.

There are classes where many different educational levels are forced together which does not allow each individual child to benefit from an education adapted to their needs and abilities. As a result, the drop-out rate and education failure remains high.

In addition, teachers are usually not specialized in a certain subject but they teach what they know and what is needed. That is one of the many reasons why the level of knowledge is very low.

There are some computers in the richest schools although the majority of them cannot afford having any electronic or computer devices. They do not even have a radio cassette player, so they cannot exercise with English listening activities. Actually, monks and some children go to nearby tourist spots to practise conversation with foreigners so they can improve their English skills.



11.5 Burmese school aims

Many of the schools in Myanmar have been founded by monasteries, Burmese people donations or international founders. Their main goal is to abolish the need of education in the country, especially of children from poor families.

Education campaigners and founders want to bring up many children who could not and cannot grow up as normal human beings that is to say with the right to learn. The main purpose of many schools is not only giving children modern education, which of course is also a basic aim, but also training kids of the country in moral education. They want to implant sense of responsibility for the nation, culture and religion into the mind of younger generations. Founders, teachers and volunteers want to prepare their successors to face the competitive and global world.

Furthermore, there were and there are lots of families that do not have enough money to pay the school quote or fees neither to bring them up. That is why some monks and non-profit body founders placed free educational establishments. Some local children, and others from the villages and remote areas are accommodated at school and their basic needs are supported by the school itself.

According to Myanmar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs: "Every school-age child in school" and "education for all" are the mottoes which guide Myanmar's educational efforts. So these seem to be the principal aims of the current government. These main goals mean an important step forward for this country, although there is still a lot to do.



Schools bring hope and happiness to the children of Myanmar

Figure 32: Burmese children at school

11.6 Teachers required

Myanmar education completely emphasizes upon rote learning and memorization and inhibits students' creative thinking and critical skills. Teachers themselves learned under the authoritative systems and rudimentary teaching methods.

During the military government, teachers could not teach English. Actually, the only authorized language was Burmese although nowadays, English is taught since their primary lessons. However, teachers have a very low English level in the 4 language skills: reading, listening, writing and above all speaking. Even though teachers do their best and make a big effort to help those children, how can the students learn English if there is nobody who cannot teach them properly?

Most of the instructors are voluntary and non-profit body people who just want to contribute in the growth of the country and to prepare their youngest inhabitants to cope with the monstrous global world. Teachers can be voluntary teenagers who are studying in high schools and universities, generous literate men or women from the surrounding villages or, the most usual ones in rural areas, the monks who live in the monasteries. There are also the ones who studied a degree at university who usually work in either public or private schools.

Year	Teachers	Students
2003-2004	6	31
2004-2005	7	106
2005-2006	9	235
2006-2007	12	418
2007-2008	14	566
2008-2009	17	666
2009-2010	20	746
2010-2011	25	1159
2011-2012	35	1360
2012-2013	44	1534
2013-2014	45	1652
2014-2015	47	2092
2015-2016	58	2506
2016-2017	68	2556

Figure 33: table of the evolution of the number of teachers and students in a school Sagaing



The non-voluntary teachers' salaries are around US\$20-30 per month, leading to a lack of motivation, difficulties in recruiting quality teaching staff, and encouraging teachers to prioritize paid private tuition over their school jobs. And consequently, this fact does not help the schooling population at all.

Nowadays, the educational system has not already changed very much. Nevertheless, today teachers get paid from US\$120-200 per month. Many of them still offer extra scholar lessons, especially in Yangon, to make extra money.

Because of these miserable salaries, the few schools around the country and the enormous quantity of children, lots of teachers are required. There are not enough of them and most of them are ill-prepared to teach.

School centres highly value foreign volunteers from developed countries for their good command of English, especially for their speaking fluency compared to the Burmese teachers'. However, they are content with anyone itching for helping their youngsters.

11.7 Government investments

The annual budget allocated to education by the government was and is still low. During the military rule only about 1.2% of their annual budget was spent on education yearly. They did not even invest in school material and did not offer many free public schools. The poorest are not able to go to school in most of the regions.



Figure 34: *government investments in education metaphorically represented*

In fact, is not it easier to manage an illiterate population? Is not it the key to dictate your people? Sure it is.

Today's government is addressing a 3% of GDP to the educational system and Burmese



education is improving at a snail's pace. Even today, many teachers' salaries, school maintaining and students care are based on donations from tourists and wealthy Burmese people.

The Government must face the education challenge head on. Investment in education must be prioritised, using at least 4% of GDP, and reformed priorities should be established. The governmental system must realize that education is a priority, they must know that, as the educator and scientist George Washington stated, "education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom".

11.8 A closed mind

During the military government until today, there have been girls without access to education in Myanmar. Some disturbed minds say that girls are destined to work in the family home, whereas boys are entitled to receive an education.

It is enough saying that female Burmese teenagers who want to take a university degree have to pay a higher monthly quote than boys. That is based on the simple justification that teenage girls are not made for professional success, they must have children and work at home.

However, although women in Myanmar are usually respected and appreciated, sexism in Myanmar still exists; above all it is evident in the fields of education and in t restrictions to enter some temples and religious sites.

11.9 The power of education

Is education an essential claim? Is education the main key to take a country headway? Can education lift a whole country out of dictatorial rules?

Today, an estimated 61 million primary-aged children are out of school around the globe. 30 million out of them, live in sub-Saharan Africa and 10 million are in South and West Asia.



It is honestly shocking that education is not the international development priority, especially, when you consider just how much impact education aid can have for humanity as a whole.

As Nelson Mandela said “Education is the most powerful weapon to change the world”. Education is a fundamental human right and essential for the exercise of all other human rights. It promotes individual freedom and empowerment and yields important developmental benefits.

We are born as human beings although we are not truly humans till time later. That is because it is not enough to be born under this condition but we fundamentally have to become one of them, a purpose which has learning as an essential way to improve as individuals. And this is only possible with education, an aspect of vital importance.

Education is not a privilege of the richest; it is the inalienable right of every child. The provision of basic education, free of cost, is not only a core obligation of states but also a moral imperative. It is an investment, and one of the most critical ones we can make. This is not only true for Myanmar but for all the countries around the world.

Lack of formal schooling and poor education have negative effects on population and countries themselves. When children leave school without having acquired the basics, it greatly impedes the social and economic development of these countries. And this is because it is a powerful tool by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty and participate fully as citizens. It is painful that most of the people in these underdeveloped countries submitted to a dictatorial rule do not even know what democracy is. As Thomas Jefferson said, “If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be.” Great schools can feed a vibrant, informed and representative democracy.



11.10 Myanmar versus the Western world

Although both countries have compulsory education, Myanmar does not have all the children at school during the primary and secondary stages as it happens in the Western world.

In addition, some of the areas which are considered highly important for the educational and personal development of a child, such as art, music, physical education, ICT... are not present in the Burmese curriculum.

Moreover, the pedagogical methods are still very traditional: children sit and keep in silence while they listen to the teacher giving the lesson. What is more, learners spend a lot of time reading by themselves trying to memorize long pieces of theoretical religious texts.

However, surprisingly the teachers' role has a higher value in Myanmar than they have in our society, even considering the fact that their salaries are much lower. Taking it into account, I wonder why there are still so many voluntary teachers trying to reach the furthest schools to give their children a good education. The only answer I can find is that they truly believe that Education is the only way to keep the country stepping forward.

It is after facing this situation that I realized teachers should be much more well-considered and respected in our society than they are. They are the people who educate the youth in our society, who will become the leaders of the coming generations. What I experienced in Myanmar is that citizens are willing to have the challenge of tuition with their beloved teachers who will lead them to a prosper life.

What about teachers' role in our countries? Do we appreciate them enough after the great efforts they make in front of this young population who have everything, who does not value their rights enough and who has lost motivation and the goals in their lives?



12. WAY OF LIVING



Figure 35: Buddhist novice monks

Myanmar is worldwide known as a peaceful land and has a strong influence on the spiritual life of the Burmese. But not as a God belief, but as a method of cultivating the mind and a way of living. That is why this section is titled “way of living” instead of “religion”.

Close to 90% of people in Myanmar today are Buddhist, and virtually all of them practice Theravada Buddhism. Nonetheless, there is no official state religion but the government shows preference for the most practiced one.

Theravada Buddhism is not a religion in the sense that word is commonly understood, it is not a system of faith or worship but it is a path to follow to get an harmonious living loving kindness to all creatures and oneself. It is enough by knowing that people from Myanmar, Buddhist people, do not believe in a



God, they believe in Buddha instead, who is a human being that shows them that everybody can outgrow ignorance and irrationality and see things as they really are. They believe that hatred, anger and jealousy can be replaced by love, patience, generosity and kindness. They are inspired by the example of Buddha's life. And I can assure that this is not only a theory but a real way of living.

Buddhists emphasize that Buddha's teaching is based on his perception of the nature in the world, the cause of suffering and the way to end up with it.

For Buddhists, the profane world is the world of suffering, dukkha, and the cause of suffering is ignorance and its eradication is the main goal of the Buddhist practice.

Citizens split their life into two parts: on the one hand, working to live and on the other hand, spending great part of their life praying, visiting temples or pagodas and honouring Buddha. People meditate to get



Figure 36: Buddhist novice monks

relaxed, to find the solution of a problem, to charge energy and to be cured. Thus, we could say that meditation is the solution to their main problems.

12.1. But, what is meditation?

Meditation is a conscious effort to change the way our mind works. It literally means “to make grow” or “to develop”. The key of meditation is concentration; people spend from twenty to thirty minutes, even an hour, without thinking about their material life, their problems, without thinking about anything but just leaving their minds blank while concentrating in their deep breathing.

12.2. Generosity, dedication and goodness

People accumulate merit by making offerings to the Buddhist monastic community or Sangha. This is done during monks' morning procession around neighborhoods to collect alms with their begging bowls or in the form of donations to temples and monasteries. In all Buddhist countries the temples are always open, and many people go in during the day. They bring flowers to Buddha or light a candle to show their love and respect, they also offer rice and fruits or light an incense stick to show their honour.



Figure 37: Novice monks in the begging ceremony

They pray in front of their beloved reference, they ask for help, show gratitude, and beg their pardon or they even meditate. Thus, religion becomes the main and strongest pillar of the society.

Kids, youth, adults and elderly people live completely dedicated to their beliefs. It is amazing finding a huge family wearing their best colourful dresses ready to make a long journey in order to be present at a special ceremony or religious festival or just to visit a sacred pagoda to make their offerings. All in all, it becomes a joyous feast for all of them.



And what about the thousands of people taking care of temples, rebuilding them or collecting money to build a new pagoda? Do they get something in return? What is their goal? It is just living for their beliefs and their religion.

Many of the children's goals studying at monasteries are to become the best monks when they grow adults.

12.3. Monks, nuns and novices

It is surprising to see the great number of young girls and boys, middle-aged men, women and the elderly who wear the Buddhist deep red or light pink robe. In Myanmar, there are a great amount of monks and nuns of all ages. But have they been quantified? No one really knows how many monks and nuns there are in the country, but experts in the West estimate between 300,000 and half a million.

In Burma, like in other Southeast Asian countries, it is customary for a male to enter a monastery at some point in his life. Some might remain monks for just a few days, while others, an estimated 15 percent, stay for life. It depends on their beliefs and their life development out of the monastery.

Monks hold the highest status in the Burmese society, and men are considered more mature and marriageable if they have been ordained. A man might also join the monkhood to acquire merit or good karma, to help his mother have a better next life; even a short stance is thought to help.

It is pretty simple to become a monk in Burma. You have to be at least 7 years old, and you may need permission from your parents or spouse. Monks come from all strata of society but those who join monasteries as children tend to come from poorer backgrounds. This is



Figure 37: Smiley novice monks at school



because entering the monkhood can be a bit like going off to free boarding school and some of them go there for education, food, housing, and health care. In addition, the discipline, honesty and way of living in the monasteries bring up honourable kids, which are called novices. Monks who join when they are older might come from upper-class or religious families, or be retirees who are ready to renounce the world.

12.3.1 Monk's life

Monks live pretty well and have quite an easy life although it might seem boring for people from the Western world. They usually get up at 4 am and start their meditation and prayers until 5 am, when they have a complete breakfast and go with their begging bowls to the village to receive the food offerings from the people in town. At 12 am they have lunch and do their Sanskrit lessons and prayers until it is time to go to bed again.

Monks are sustained by the donations which Burmese people make in the temples or to the monks themselves.



Figure 39: Novice

nuns praying

peacefully

Piteously, Buddhism has its dark face too. On Burmese people's opinion, nuns seem not to deserve the same respect as monks. It is said that a woman who goes to the monastery is because she cannot find a husband to spend the rest of their life with. And this is due to persistent conservative views of women in Myanmar society, especially in religious practice.

Although Buddhism is the heart of Myanmar culture, Buddhists coexist with other religions such as Catholicism and Muslim, whose followers suffer from discrimination.

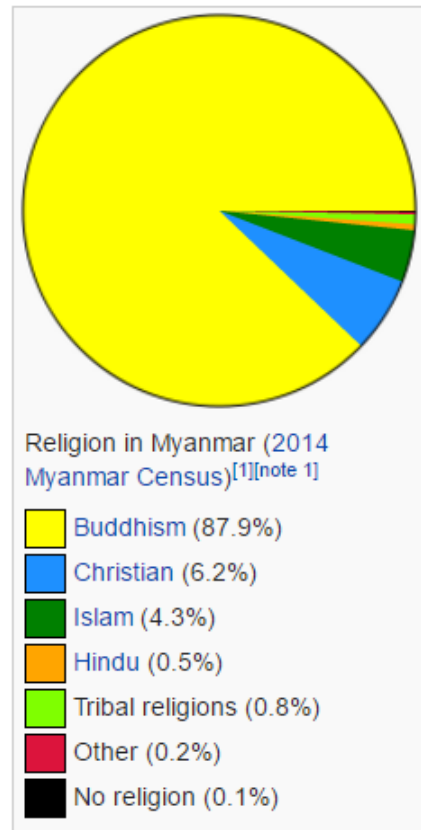


Figure 40: religion in Myanmar

12.4. Myanmar versus the Western world

They are like two sides of the same coin. One culture is light-years behind the other one...but which one is first? While in Myanmar life turns around religion beliefs, in my country life is guided by the most material principles that have ever existed.

It looks like if I had travelled some centuries back in time, where monasteries had the power of the knowledge and education. Monks had a social privileged standing and culture was in their hands. They also grew their properties wider thanks to the villagers' donations, they used to help the poorest and they spread social values. This is what is still currently happening in Myanmar but in my opinion, when tendencies of the modern world land over Myanmar, this strong spiritual feeling will fade down as it happened in our western world years ago.



13. CONCLUSION

If I go a year back in time, I can see all my wonders, doubts and fears, but I am capable now of understanding those feelings caused by the great challenge that was in front of me. I felt as if I were the sap of a huge tree whose branches and leaves I had to feed to let him grow. And now here I am, satisfied of having worked hard but having had the chance to pick up the sweet fruits from that tree.

“Myanmar, the smileland”, an unknown Asian country for most of the western people, but spilling a great culture with rich values and feelings. This is one of the first things I discovered once I got inside this research project.. The spirit of this land and its people captivated me in such a deep way that it was much easier for me to keep going through the different aspects I dealt with.

From now on I can say, with my own words, that my country is the day and Myanmar is the night. But if we travel to Spain 500 years back in time, we could find many more similarities with the current Myanmar way of living.

During the Middle Ages in Spain, culture was cooked in religious buildings, teachers, priests and doctors were the ones who had the power and most respected in our society. People lived with austerity and their lives were based on faith; religion was the centre of their lives. Peace, calm, humility, and serenity, were some of the characteristics of people had on those days.

Surprisingly, once I landed the “Smileland” I found out all these similarities that my grandparents, teachers and books had taught me about the past in my country. It was not only a holiday trip but a trip to my ancestors’ lives. Myanmar is still recovering from a hard dictatorship as it happened in Spain forty years ago.

My great challenge and best harvest have been all the learning I have got from this wonderful experience. I had never worked, travelled and discovered a new world before.

After analysing and studying the country in its whole, what I discovered was that although aspects such as culture, religion, tradition and values are present in



everyday's life, education to children is missing and the main key of a great development for the country points it. In my opinion, education is the only thing that will take the country out to the progress and evolution. My deliberations about what I have just done are to wonder myself where the happiness rests. Is it in the power of money, or in the power of love? Do we feel better having the last trend car and house, or maybe having a spirit of solidarity?

My current wonders about happiness now are: to be or to have? to know or to feel? Brain or soul?

Thanks to this research project I could discover a hidden part of myself: gratitude and the desire of giving my best to others. Now, I have a dream, I want to travel back to Myanmar again to stay there for a long time and share my knowledge with those kids in charge of taking their country forward. Although it has not been possible yet, I tried to organize a charity campaign with The Red Cross in order to collect as many school supplies as possible to send them to the young Burmese learners, but I faced a lot of difficulties on my way. However, I will not let the wind blow my goal away, so I am currently working hard to find an organisation that provides support to send such supplies.

This is not the only difficulty I had to overcome, but it was difficult to find or meet expert Western people who could teach me about any aspects of the Burmese culture. Of course, it would have been great help for my project development. Furthermore, it did not exist a deep theoretical basis on this topic, so all my knowledge was acquired during the 16 days of my trip. Nonetheless, this situation led me to a more elaborated practical part as well as a deep research and investigation project for the theoretical part, since I never found really proven studies on that.

Now, that I already have the work on my hands, I feel satisfied of having changed the direction of my first idea although it was a hard decision because I had started and developed a long part of the project when I felt I had to research on more social and human aspects.

Along my work, I have learned a lot and I have realized that we learn from our own mistakes, so that, "Never give up, great things take time".



Summing up all my experiences, good and bad, weak and strong, ups and downs, pros and cons, the only message I can send is that I finally achieved my main goal: to give my best to get the best.

And last but not least, I would like to mention that I consider my paperwork is based on three main pillars of knowledge, which have been the ones I have improved the most while working on my project: English, because I have worked as a reporter and thus I have used this foreign language in its communicative, reading and writing forms, Graphic design when designing my own traveller's guide and having to play with colours, shapes and distribution, and the discovery of the Burmese culture which has allowed me to find out a magic new land plenty of smiles which have been the seed that has grown and turned into a beautiful and sensitive project called "Myanmar, the smileland".



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