

RANGOON AS FOREIGN CITY ON BURMESE SOIL 1852-1942

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ย่างกุ้ง ในฐานะเมืองต่างชาติดบนแผ่นดินพม่า 1852-1942

นายไขมอน นิโกลัส ดันแกน

วิทยานิพนธ์นี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตรปริญญาศิลปศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต

สาขาวิชาเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ศึกษา (สหสาขาวิชา)

บัณฑิตวิทยาลัย จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

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Thesis Title                   RANGOON AS A FOREIGN CITY ON BURMESE SOIL  
  1852-1942  
By                                 Mr. Simon Nicholas Duncan  
Field of Study                 Southeast Asian Studies  
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นายไข่มอน นิโคลัส ดันแคน: ย่างกุ้ง ในฐานะเมืองต่างชาติบนแผ่นดินพม่า 1852-1942 (RANGOON AS A FOREIGN CITY ON BURMESE SOIL 1852-1942) อ. ที่ปริกษาวิทยานิพนธ์หลัก: รศ. ดร.สุเนตร ชุตินธรานนท์, 80 หน้า.

“ย่างกุ้ง คือเมืองนานาชาติที่ถูกสร้างขึ้นบนผืนแผ่นดินพม่า” ประโยคประทับใจจากหนังสือ ประวัติศาสตร์พม่า สมัยใหม่ จากปลายปากกาของไมเคิล คาร์นีย์ นักประวัติศาสตร์ชาวพม่าที่บรรยาย “บรรยากาศของย่างกุ้งในยุคอาณานิคม” วิทยานิพนธ์ฉบับนี้ มีจุดมุ่งหมาย เพื่อวิเคราะห์และวินิจฉัย สาเหตุ ความเป็นมา และพัฒนาการของเมืองย่างกุ้งซึ่งในขณะนั้น เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของจักรวรรดิอินเดียของบริเตน เติบโตอย่างรวดเร็วและรุ่งเรือง มากด้วยคนหลากหลายเชื้อชาติ ในช่วงยุคอาณานิคม พ.ศ.2395-2485 รวมถึงปัญหาที่เกิดขึ้นในช่วงเวลาดังกล่าว

การเข้ามาของผู้คนในเมืองย่างกุ้ง ทำให้จำนวนประชากรเพิ่มขึ้นอย่างรวดเร็ว ทั้งชาวจีน ชาวอินเดีย ผู้คนจากทั้งในเอเชีย รวมถึงชาวตะวันตกโดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งชาวอังกฤษ สาเหตุดังกล่าวกระตุ้นปริมาณการส่งออก โดยเฉพาะ การส่งออกข้าว ไม้สัก และน้ำมันไปยังพื้นที่ต่างๆ แรงงานที่มีทักษะฝีมือและมีการศึกษา เช่น ชาวอินเดีย จะขึ้นกับการบริหารงานของคนอังกฤษ ทำงานในส่วนที่แรงงานท้องถิ่นชาวพม่าไม่สามารถทำได้ย่างกุ้งในยุคอาณานิคมถือเป็นช่วงเวลาการขยายตัวของบริติชอินเดีย

ชาวพม่ากลายเป็นเพียงส่วนหนึ่งของประเทศจากการอพยพเข้ามาของผู้คนจำนวนมาก แม้ว่าปรากฏการณ์ลักษณะดังกล่าว เคยเกิดขึ้นกับพม่าในอดีต ความหลากหลายของผู้คนที่อพยพเข้ามาในย่างกุ้ง ช่วงยุคอาณานิคมนี้ก่อให้เกิดความขัดแย้งทางเชื้อชาติและนำไปสู่การก่ออาชญากรรม ซึ่งเกี่ยวข้องโดยตรงกับความรับผิดชอบหลักของเจ้าหน้าที่ตำรวจชาวอินเดีย และชาวอังกฤษ

ย่างกุ้งในยุคอาณานิคมกลายเป็นเมืองท่านานาชาติที่ถูกสร้างขึ้น โดยผู้คนที่หลั่งไหลเข้ามา จากเมืองเล็กๆ ในอดีต มีเพียงแค้เจดีย์ชเวดากอง ซึ่งเป็นสถานที่สำคัญของผู้จาริกแสวงบุญ กลายเป็นเมืองที่เต็มไปด้วยโบสถ์ มัสยิด ศาสนสถานของชาวฮินดู ตึกกรมบ้านช่องที่ใหญ่โต รวมถึงสภาวะเศรษฐกิจที่เฟื่องฟูในขณะนั้น แม้ว่าในบางครั้ง การผ่อนคลายและกิจกรรมบันเทิง หลังจากการทำงาน เช่น การดื่มแอลกอฮอล์ หรือการชมม้าแข่ง จะขัดกับวัฒนธรรมและศีลธรรมตามหลักศาสนาของชาวพม่า แต่ปรากฏการณ์ดังกล่าว ถือเป็นสิ่งที่ “ใหม่” ของผู้คนในเวลานั้น

สาขาวิชา: เอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ศึกษา (สหสาขาวิชา)      ลายมือชื่อนิติศ .....

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## 5587536320: MAJOR SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

KEYWORDS:RANGOON/ BRITISH COLONIAL PERIOD /IMMIGRATION/ RACIAL TENSION/ GLOBAL ECONOMY

SIMON NICHOLAS DUNCAN: RANGOON AS FOREIGN CITY ON BURMESE SOIL 1852-1942. ADVISOR: ASSOC. PROF. SUNAIT CHUTINTARANOND, Ph.D., 80 pp.

“Rangoon was a foreign city erected on Burmese soil”. This is how Burmese historian Michael Charney describes Rangoon during the colonial period in his book „A History of Modern Burma“. This paper was written to explore how and why Rangoon grew so rapidly in the colonial period of 1852 to 1942 into a prosperous modern, cosmopolitan city as part of British India and what problems that caused.

The population grew massively during the time largely due to immigration. The immigration was mainly from India and China but also from elsewhere in Asia and the West, mainly from Britain. Large scale immigration was required as the port city grew quickly due to the large volume of exports, chiefly rice, teak and oil which required the city to be connected to the hinterland. The immigrants did both skilled and unskilled labor. Indians were favored by the British administration as they could communicate with each other, had a higher level of education than the Burmese at the time and were able to do jobs the locals could not. Rangoon became, in simple terms, an extension of British India. This was not the first time that Burma or even Rangoon had hosted immigrants, however during this period the Burmese quickly became the minority in the biggest city in their country. This was an unusual situation that caused a number of problems, including but not limited to racial tension and international crime which required a larger police force made up primarily of Indians and British. Rangoon in this period became a foreign city not just in terms of its population of immigrants but also because of its buildings and the new society that was created. The city once a small pilgrimage town famous for the Shwe Dagon pagoda became much larger and full of churches, mosques and Hindu temples and huge buildings associated with commerce. When the new immigrant population relaxed after work they indulged in forms of entertainment such as drinking alcohol or watching horse racing that were either against Buddhist Burmese culture or simply new and alien ideas.

Field of Study :Southeast Asian Studies

Student’s Signature .....

Academic Year : 2013 .....

Advisor’s Signature .....

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

“Rangoon was a foreign city erected on Burmese soil”.<sup>1</sup> This is how American historian Michael Charney, an expert on Burma, describes Rangoon during the colonial period in his book „A History of Modern Burma“. To elaborate further Charney is trying to tell us that during the time of colonial administration by the British Rangoon did not appear to be a Burmese city. In the chapter that the quotation is taken from, Charney describes how Rangoon, especially from the late nineteenth century onwards, was a city that looked as if it had been physically transported from Europe or the Americas, due to both the Western style buildings and the industry and technology installed there. It came to be regarded as perhaps the most modern city in Asia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century<sup>2</sup>, which seems unthinkable if compared to the present day city, now renamed Yangon, which is well known for crumbling buildings, decaying infrastructure, power outages and streets full of old cars.<sup>3</sup>

However, when Charney describes Rangoon as “a foreign city on Burmese soil” he is not merely talking about western style architecture, city planning and technology; he also refers to the fact that due to very high immigration, Burmese became a minority in the largest city in their country. The dominant group of people in the city became Indians, and eventually the main Indian language of Hindustani could be heard more often on the streets than Burmese.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Charney,2009, P. 18

<sup>2</sup> Charney,2009, Chapter One

<sup>3</sup> See for example Charney, 2009, Chapter Nine and Conclusion

<sup>4</sup> Charney, 2009, Chapter Two



However it was not only a city of Indians, Burmese and officers from the British government, Rangoon also attracted a significant number of Chinese. Furthermore as Rangoon expanded and the economy grew, the city attracted people from Japan, the Middle East, all across Europe and even from the Americas.<sup>5</sup>

This thesis aims to explain how and why Rangoon grew so rapidly in the British colonial period of 1852 to 1942 into a prosperous modern city with a cosmopolitan population and explore what impact that had.

In 1852, Rangoon was a modest sized town called Yangon, in bad condition, famous as a pilgrimage site with a population of several tens of thousands of people, mostly Burmese or Mon with small numbers of other ethnic groups and a few Chinese, Indians, Armenians, Europeans and a small number of Eurasians.<sup>6</sup> By 1942, it was called Rangoon, Japan bombed it heavily and much of the population fled<sup>7</sup>.

In between the population rapidly rose to around half a million and at some stages had higher immigration than anywhere on earth.<sup>8</sup> The city became the number one export port for rice, often sending out more than its two rivals Bangkok and Saigon combined.<sup>9</sup> The busy port area had state of the art rice milling technology and teams of many working elephants moving huge teaks logs felled often in northern Burma or in Thailand and floated downstream to Rangoon, the elephants were later watched by delighted rich western tourists.<sup>10</sup>

A visitor to Rangoon in the last few decades before the war could stay at a hotel operated by the Armenian Sarkies Brothers who also operated the legendary Raffles in Singapore. There they could eat fine western food served by Indian waiters and listen to a live Russian band. If lucky they could have rubbed shoulders with distinguished guests such as Prince Damrong of

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<sup>5</sup> See Charney, 2009, Chapter Two or Myint-U, 2001, Chapter Nine

<sup>6</sup> Pearn, 1939, pp.53-54, pp.59-60, pp.70-83, and p.139

<sup>7</sup> Myint-U, 2006, pp.221-224

<sup>8</sup> See population tables on various pages in Pearn, 1939 or Charney, 2009, Chapter Two

<sup>9</sup> See the book „The Rice Industry of Burma 1852-1940“, 2012, for more detail on this.

<sup>10</sup> Headlam, 1903, pp.271-274 and pp.293-294

Thailand, Prince Edward of England (a future king), Shan Princes, a famous British spy, or any of the top western authors of the day, Huxley, Maugham and many others laid their heads here.<sup>11</sup>

If they fancied entertainment elsewhere they could choose from a number of British clubs (assuming they were white), where they may have met Kipling taking inspiration for *Mandalay*, the most famous poem in Britain, or a young George Orwell relaxing from his police career and getting ideas for *Burmese Days*, whilst enjoying the famous Pegu club cocktail, which was also served in London and New York.<sup>12</sup>

In the day time they could go to the second best horse racing course in Asia, have an English speaking Indian driver take them across town in an American car to a British department store or a German photography studio. Perhaps they could enjoy a haircut by a former Pilipino circus performer, a cigar from an Egyptian merchant, a stroll in a park or zoo with statues of British monarchs.<sup>13</sup> If you needed money, you could go to a British bank and be served by Scots, a New York bank with American staff, and Chinese, Indian or Japanese banks.<sup>14</sup>

If you had spiritual needs there were churches; Baptist, Catholic, Armenian and others. A synagogue, numerous types of mosques, Hindu temples, and Buddhist temples where you may meet a fake Scottish priest or visiting Koreans were also found there<sup>15</sup>, a young King Chulalongkorn of Siam visited the Shwe Dagon pagoda, the most famous religious building in Rangoon.<sup>16</sup>

The bustling downtown streets were thronged with people selling Chinese meats, Indian sweets, betel nuts and more. Here you could rub shoulders with Iraqi Jews, an Italian playing an organ for coins, a Chilean consulate officer who would become very famous in later years as a poet, a British boy who could go on to be a very famous comedian on the BBC, visiting American circus performers, Belgian tourists and many others. If you tired of walking you could get into an imported rickshaw or later on cycle rickshaw controlled by an Indian or Chinese man. If you needed to go to a government building there is a good chance you would be served by a

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<sup>11</sup> Rooney, 2012, pp. 1-166

<sup>12</sup> Rooney, 2012, pp. 1-166 or Collis, 1975, Chapter „Leisure“

<sup>13</sup> Rooney, 2012, pp. 1-166

<sup>14</sup> Turnell, 2009, pp. 106-134

<sup>15</sup> Rooney, 2012, pp.1-166

<sup>16</sup> Piemmettawat, 2000, pp.5-18 and pp.62-82

Eurasian, as Rangoon had more Eurasians than anywhere in the region, many of the Asian parents having been born in Malaya or India.<sup>17</sup>

People who were interested in illegal activities could obtain cocaine from Japan, opium, both domestic and imported, guns from Germany and France and women from Northeast Asia and Europe.<sup>18</sup>

If you got bored of looking at the imposing buildings designed by people from Glasgow and Hong Kong, including the headquarters of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company, the largest inland water transportation company in the world<sup>19</sup>, you may again people watch. If you were lucky you may see Bose or Gandhi from India giving a speech. Perhaps the mayor of Calcutta would be in town either to give a speech or to be tried and imprisoned for sedition.<sup>20</sup>

You may have been lucky enough to see the last King of Burma, Thibaw, being put onto a ship to be sent to India where he would die as a political prisoner.<sup>21</sup> In the arrivals section of the port you may be able to see the Last Mughal Emperor of Delhi and his entourage arrive, also as political prisoners to Rangoon where they would die and be put into unmarked graves. Perhaps you could see the last Queen of Burma arriving back to see out her days in Rangoon after her husband died in India.<sup>22</sup>

In fact the only building in Rangoon, aside from a pagoda, where you were more likely to meet a Burmese Buddhist than any other race or religion was the large prison.<sup>23</sup>

How did the small Burmese town of Dagon in 1852 become the cosmopolitan city of Rangoon where Indians dominated, people flocked from across the globe and men outnumbered women and Hindustani was the dominant language? How and why did this happen in less than a century and what impact did it have? These are the questions that are explored in this thesis.

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<sup>17</sup> Seekins, 2011, pp.28-38 or Rooney, 2012, pp.1-160

<sup>18</sup> Report on Rangoon Town Police For the Year 1922 or Charney, 2009, pp.26-28

<sup>19</sup> Rooney, 2012, pp.1-160

<sup>20</sup> Collis, 1975, Chapters Two, Three, Four and Five

<sup>21</sup> Myint-U, 2006, pp.173-178

<sup>22</sup> See the book The Last Mughal The Fall of a Dynasty

<sup>23</sup> See the book Report on the Prison Administration of Burma For the Year 1923

## CHAPTER II

### Rangoon – City of Trade

Writing in 1990 in his book „Scots in Burma“, Alister McCrae, who lived and worked in Burma at the end of the colonial period, says the following:

"It was the Victorian Scots who led the creation of the merchant houses which opened world markets to Burma's natural resources. That hitherto remote and little known country became the biggest exporter in the world of rice and hardwood teak; and it was a Scot who founded the first major British oil company there. Scottish capital and management created a transport system on Burma's rivers which grew into an immense undertaking carrying much of the country's trade and also creating a significant source of shipbuilding work on the Clyde. "<sup>24</sup>

From McCrae we learn that British (specifically Scottish) merchants set up merchant houses, mainly in Rangoon to export the holy trinity of Burmese resources; rice, teak and oil. Also we learn that the British created a domestic transport system, mainly river-based, to move the products down to Rangoon for export. Rangoon also became interlinked with the global economy as, for example ships were built in Scotland during the later stages of the colonial period specifically to sail to and from Rangoon.

'British Rule in Burma 1824-1942' written in 1946 by G.E.Harvey, who worked in Rangoon for the Indian Civil Service during the period in question continues with similar themes as McCrae, writing on how the delta areas around Rangoon were changed by the British to expand the rice growing industry and why that change occurred:

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<sup>24</sup> McCrae, 1990, foreword

"But depopulation was not the only cause in the Irrawaddy delta. When we arrived in 1852 it was mile after mile of swamp, with a lonely village here and there. Today it contains five million people, a third of the population, growing more food than the entire country can eat. But there had been no incentive to grow it before the Suez Canal was opened in 1869, bringing Burma into the world economy and turning Rangoon, once a stockade on a river bank, into a great modern port."<sup>25</sup>

As we know from previous pages, using evidence from the historian Pearn, G.E. Harvey downplays the size of Rangoon prior to the British, showing perhaps bias due to having been employed by the British Government. Also it is possible that he exaggerates and over simplifies somewhat the importance of the Suez Canal to the expansion of Rangoon and the Burmese economy. Burmese historian, Myint U, Thant in his book „River of Lost Footsteps“, elaborates a little and shows how Rangoon was effected by world events. He explains how the American Civil War of 1861-1865 cut off the rice supply from North and South Carolina to Europe. According to Myint U, this plus the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 created a permanent rice market for Burmese rice in Europe.<sup>26</sup>

However it seems that Harvey and Myint U may be guilty of over-simplifying or even misunderstanding the situation at the time. Far more detail is offered in „The Rice Industry of Burma 1852-1940“ by Cheng Siok-Hwa. Siok-Hwa explains that the American Civil War was not the only important event in world history at the time to have an impact on rice exports from Rangoon. In 1857 the Indian Mutiny disrupted the flow of rice from India to Europe also. Also she explains how when the American Civil War finished in 1865 it was tough for America to regain its position as a large exporter of rice for a number of reasons; many fields and equipment had been damaged by the fighting and the slaves who had worked the fields before did not want to return to work in bad conditions.<sup>27</sup>

Until the early 1700s much of the rice consumed by Europeans was grown in Italy, however from the beginning of the eighteenth century Italy was pushed aside by India and the two Carolina States in America.

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<sup>25</sup> Harvey, G.E., 1946, p. 14

<sup>26</sup> Myint U, 2006, p.166

<sup>27</sup> Siok-Hwa, 1968, p.9

The fact that both India and North and South Carolina had large problems leading to a big decline in the amount of rice they could export in the late 1850s to 1865 was extremely fortuitous for Burma and Rangoon.<sup>28</sup>

By 1867 Rangoon outstripped Akyab as main rice exporter, before the opening of the canal. In fact when the canal opened in 1869 it was a further three years, in 1872 before a steamer loaded with rice from Burma finally passed through it.<sup>29</sup>

This was mainly due to the fact that it was cheaper at this point to transport the rice via the Cape of Good Hope on a sailing boat than a steamer via the Suez Canal due to tariffs. Two other factors are also highly significant: firstly that the Burmese government did not allow the export of even one bag of rice<sup>30</sup> and secondly the demand for rice for a variety of uses increased greatly during around this time.<sup>31</sup>

It is worth mentioning also that the companies exporting the rice during this period were not only British, but also Chinese and Indian. The middlemen and cultivators were mainly Burmese. The Chinese companies sold to China and Malaya, Indian companies to India, and the British to India and elsewhere. However the British were the biggest companies. Around two thirds of the rice went to India which was not able to produce enough food to support its huge population. In a sense Burma, which became part of British India, through the export port of Rangoon came to have the function of helping to supply British India with food.<sup>32</sup>

Eventually along with rice, teak and oil became the main export products along with smaller amounts of rubies and metals. Rangoon rapidly became the main port of the country and very significant to world trade and later received more immigrants than any port in the world.<sup>33</sup>

This, of course did not happen overnight. In order for it to happen, two things were required, great planning and labor both skilled and unskilled to work in Rangoon and beyond.

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<sup>28</sup> Siok-Hwa, 1968, p. 8

<sup>29</sup> Siok-Hwa, 1969, p. 12

<sup>30</sup> Siok-Hwa, 1969, p.12 and p. 3

<sup>31</sup> Siok-Hwa, 1969, p.8

<sup>32</sup> Harvey, 1946, p. 60

<sup>33</sup> Charney, 2009, p. 19

## 2.1

### Teak

According to Dauverge and Lister the British Empire enhanced its power by colonizing forests from North America to Africa to South and Southeast Asia.<sup>34</sup>By this they mean that for example the wood was used for ships to transport goods or soldiers or to wage war and later the wood became important in for the construction of railways across the empire. In the case of teak in Burma it could at the same time be considered as both Southeast Asians forests due to the geographical location and South Asian forests as it became a part of British India which is of course in South Asia.

By the 1870s the wharf at Rangoon was full of timber yards where elephants were dragging huge logs of teak.<sup>35</sup>These elephants by the 1910s (if not earlier) were working through the night in the timber yards and some boats also left Rangoon in the evening at this time<sup>36</sup> meaning that industry was in place to export goods around the clock.

These working elephants even became an unusual tourist attraction mentioned by Headlam<sup>37</sup>amongst others. The photo of the mahout on page 294 in his book regarding his visit to Rangoon in 1903 appears to show an Indian doing this important job. In traditional Burma, as in neighboring Thailand elephants were revered and respected animals that had been used for labor and in ceremonies and warfare for centuries. The use of elephants by foreign companies in Rangoon and elsewhere in Burma, often connected to the teak industry would not have insulted, surprised or irritated the Burmese.

However, they would have been no doubt deeply insulted by the terrible treatment of the highly revered white elephants by the British. The last royal white elephant of King Thibaw was

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<sup>34</sup> Dauvergne and Lister, 2011, p. 12

<sup>35</sup> Marshall, 2012, P. 25

<sup>36</sup> P-B, 1998, p. 3

<sup>37</sup> Headlam, 1903, p. 293

moved to Rangoon zoo after King Thibaw was exiled to India. We know that it was there from at least 1891 when Otto E. Ehlers, a German adventurer, visited and that it finally died in the zoo in 1910.<sup>38</sup>

The teak industry in Burma could be said to gain importance from the mid-1850s when William Wallace, a Scot, set up the Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation in the port city of Moulmein, Burma. This went on to become the largest exporter of Burmese teak, helped in part by a move to Rangoon in the early 1860s, as he sensed that Rangoon would soon have better connections to the hinterland and bigger, better port facilities than Moulmein, the main port for British exports at the time.<sup>39</sup>

In 1885, the Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation was alleged to have taken teak from Upper Burma, then a country separate from British Burma under the rule of King Thibaw, without paying the correct tax and exporting the timber from Rangoon. This incident, in part, led to the third and final Anglo-Burmese War and all of Burma becoming a part of British India.<sup>40</sup>

This goes to demonstrate, how important and large the teak export industry was at that point in time. By the late 1880s close to 400,000 tons of teak was exported, a business which as well as human labor required 5,000 elephants working in Rangoon and in the countryside. There were Burmese, Indian and Chinese companies involved, but it was mainly dominated by the British, especially the Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation.<sup>41</sup>

As well as making Britain and „Upper Burma“ rivals, teak, (and also rice exports), made Britain and Siam into economic rivals on the world stage. In 1850 over half of all exports from Siam were forest products and then from 1870-1890 they had to adapt their economy, probably due to the rise of British Burma and then 60-70 per cent of their total exports were rice.”<sup>42</sup>

Burma lead Siam from 1852 until the twentieth century in exporting teak, but then encountered more serious competition from their neighbors. The Burmese forests, had been

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<sup>38</sup> Schliesinger, 2010, p. 163

<sup>39</sup> McCrae, 1990, P. 23-24

<sup>40</sup> Myint-U, 2006, P. 12

<sup>41</sup> McCrae, 1990, P.49

<sup>42</sup> Manarungsan, 1989, P.49



running out of enough quality trees to meet demand since the late nineteenth century, meanwhile Siam had improved the reputation of its teak around the same time.

To combat this Britain imposed high import taxes on Siamese teak into Britain or her colonies and also, since a number of teak businesses in Siam were owned by British companies they had another chance to make money from this export.<sup>43</sup>

The following table adapted and shortened by myself from original work by Furnivall sheds light on exactly how much teakwood was processed into timber in Burma from the period of 1856 to 1897, including teak imported from Siam and processed in Burma and just how much was exported and to where. It also suggests that annexing „Upper Burma“ increased the amount of teak, but perhaps not as much as some people may imagine. Importantly this table also demonstrates again quite clearly that the Suez Canal did not increase exports from Rangoon in the first few years, in fact it declined, although export figures do increase after the canal is more established and under British control.

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<sup>43</sup> Manarungsan, 1989, P.137

- Adapted from information in „Table III-1. Teak Production and Export“ from **Saito and Lee, 1999, p.107**

1856/57-1896/97				
Period (annual average)	Production (Tons „000 including imports)	Exports (Tons „000)		
		India	Others	Total
1856-57 to 1858-9	73.3	n.a.	n.a.	67.8
1859-60 to 1863-64	92.1	n.a.	n.a.	82.2
1864-65 to 1868-69	112.9	n.a.	n.a.	108
1869-70 to 1873-74	133.2	n.a.	n.a.	98.1
1874-75 to 1878-79	227.1	n.a.	n.a.	134.6
1879-80 to 1883-84	202.8	n.a.	n.a.	143.1
1883-84 to 1885-86	258	112	45	157
1886-87 to 1888-89	228	116	36	152
1889-90 to 1890-91	293	124	52	176
1890-91 to 1892-93	258	134	48	182
1893-94 to 1895-96	313	131	55	186
1896-97	344	118	68	186 <sup>44</sup>

Besides some deforestation in Burma, economic rivalry with Siam and all the Burmese lumber that was used in India in railway construction Burmese teak had other important impacts on the region. David K Wyatt, writing in his book „Thailand: A Short History“ mentions how the exploitation of teak by the British in lower Burma was moving into northern Thailand in the 1870s, during the early period of the reign of King Chulalongkorn. The King was worried that the Prince of Chiang Mai would grant too many logging licenses to the British and in a worse-case scenario this could lead to a war.<sup>45</sup>

This in part led Thailand to pay more attention to its northernmost region and make more effort to unify the nation. During this period a lot of new foreign labor and capital was introduced into northern Thailand. Writing about the late nineteenth century teak trade in northern Thailand, Suehiro Akira describes the situation “Until the 1880s the forests were mainly

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<sup>44</sup> Saito and Lee, 1999, p.107

<sup>45</sup> Wyatt, 1982, p.194

worked by Chinese and Burmese, who obtained teak concessions from local princes in Muang Chiang Mai and Muang Nan".<sup>46</sup>

He goes on to explain how the situation changed during the reign of King Chulalongkorn, by 1898 around 60 percent of teak logging in northern Thailand was done by British merchants or their „subjects“, meaning in this case Burmese or Shans. By 1909, one year before the death of King Chulalongkorn, one British company alone, The Bombay Burmah Trading Company had a one third share of the market.<sup>47</sup>

This information shows that a lot of people from Burma were working in northern Thailand during the reign of King Chulalongkorn, not as forced labor of Thailand, but rather as either labor of British companies or working independently or even in some cases working for Burmese owned companies operating inside Thailand. One century before the idea of Burmese making profit from forests within Thai territory would not be a popular one to say the least. This shows how Burma coming under the control of the British led to improved relations between Siam and Burma, the traditional enemies.

Teak production and export figures rose and fell a lot during the 90 year period of history studied in this thesis. Prior to this teak was used in construction of some buildings in Rangoon as it was better suited than brick to the climate<sup>48</sup>. However as it became a valuable export product it was not used so much in the city. Also teak would have no doubt been used for various projects such as railways elsewhere in Burma during construction booms probably lowering exports. The teak from the countryside in Burma was tied together and floated downstream, to Rangoon, which depending on the location and the size of the waterway and other factors could take years.<sup>49</sup>

After rice and teak, the third most important export product in Rangoon was oil.

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<sup>46</sup> Suehiro, 1989, P. 57

<sup>47</sup> Suehiro, 1989, P. 58

<sup>48</sup> Pearn, 1939, p.53

<sup>49</sup> Headlam, 1903, p. 293

## 2.2

### Oil and other exports

The oil business was much more unstable than teak, this time not caused by rivalry with neighboring countries, but due to the fact that making money from oil extraction and/or processing is a much more risky proposition. A number of oil related businesses failed in Burma in the latter half of the nineteenth century.<sup>50</sup> Oil took a long time to make a significant impact on the export economy of Burma and was never as important as rice or teak. However, by the 1930s crude oil production finally rose to over one million tons, of which 75 percent went to India. The Burmah Oil Company produced 80 percent of this and went on to found Anglo Persian Oil Company in 1909, which eventually became the giant BP Company.<sup>51</sup>

The indigenous oil industry may date back as far as the eleventh century and certainly between 1755 and 1855 there was oil industry near Yenangyaung in central Burma.<sup>52</sup> Figures on the number of wells and their production level in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries vary wildly.<sup>53</sup> Burmese historian U Khin Maung Gyi suggests that the three Anglo-Burmese Wars may have been in order for them to take control of the oil in this region.<sup>54</sup>

Samples of “Rangoon Oil” were sent by the British, to India shortly after the conclusion of the 1852 war. Of course at that time most of the oil in Burma was in so-called „Upper Burma“.<sup>55</sup> The 1860s saw the beginnings of a worldwide oil industry<sup>56</sup> and with that, of course a growing demand for the product which was believed to be abundant in Burmese controlled territory. Burmese oil was shipped to India only in modest amounts at first, before expanding in the late 1890s due to demand there for kerosene.

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<sup>50</sup> McCrae, 1990, P. 35-36

<sup>51</sup> McCrae, 1990, P. 62

<sup>52</sup> Longmuir, 2001, p. 5

<sup>53</sup> Longmuir, 2001, p. 18-23

<sup>54</sup> Longmuir, 2001, p. 53

<sup>55</sup> Longmuir, 2001, p. 57

<sup>56</sup> Longmuir, 2001, p. 71

Aside from British companies there were also a few created by Indian immigrants to Burma, namely A.S. Jamal Brothers & Company and Nath Singh Oil Company.<sup>57</sup>

In her book „**Oil in Burma: The Extraction of “Earth Oil” to 1914**“, Longmuir tells us that she stops her book at 1914 as the oil industry was firmly established in Burma by then, a later date than the rice and teak industries. This is evidenced for example by the Burmah Oil Company, the most well-known oil company in the city and in Burma during the period studied in this thesis. When their large headquarters was constructed in 1908 it was in fact not their office but an office for Fleming & Company, a mercantile house, like the Burmah Oil Company it was also a Scottish, specifically Glaswegian company who acted as agents for Burmah Oil Company for a while. Burmah Oil Company was only founded in 1886.<sup>58</sup>

Oil had less time than rice and teak to make an impact on the city and the oil itself was not found in Rangoon but far away in the hinterland. The direct impacts on Rangoon included a strike of oil workers marching to the capital in 1938, a few refineries being built on the river<sup>59</sup>, which no doubt would have created some more pollution problems for the modern city, and of course the large office of the Burmah Oil Company.

Interestingly, before the three Anglo-Burmese Wars, in Europe the best known Burmese products were rubies, but their export during 1852-1942 in monetary terms, compared to rice, teak and oil was minimal.<sup>60</sup>

Due to the large amount of products exported from the port at Rangoon, businesses and government offices were by the water and then going further north were things associated with the leisure of British or other Europeans, for example gardens, the infamous Pegu Club which did not allow Burmese members, the race course and churches. Things for Indians, Chinese and Burmese tended to be further away. Of course all the goods exported from Rangoon had to go somewhere and that was usually done by sea. Plenty of trade was carried out between Rangoon and India and other countries in Asia including a number of British colonies. However Rangoon also connected Burma to economies in Europe and even sometimes Africa and the Americas.

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<sup>57</sup> Longmuir, 2001, p. 221-222

<sup>58</sup> Rooney, 2012, p. 67

<sup>59</sup> Longmuir, 2001, p. 181-2

<sup>60</sup> McCrae, 1990, P. 56-57

The long distances between Rangoon and the west were shortened by the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, a great engineering project by perhaps the main rival of Britain during this period, France.

The rivalry and the impact of the canal on Rangoon and Burma are important and will be looked at in some detail next.

## 2.3

### **The Suez Canal and Nineteenth Century British-French Rivalry**

“Ship me somewhere east of Suez, where the best is like the worst,

Where there aren’t no Ten Commandments an’ a man can raise a thirst.”

These words were written by Rudyard Kipling in 1892 as part of his famous poem „Mandalay“ and according to „The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations (Fifth Edition)“ mark the introduction of the phrase „East of Suez“ to the English language.<sup>61</sup> Subsequently the phrase would appear in many books and articles written in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century describing hotels, restaurants etcetera as the best “...east of Suez”. Often this phrase was written by British living in or visiting British controlled territories in South or Southeast Asia.

This tells us two things, firstly that the Suez Canal was well known by British people whether they were in Britain or Asia, but also that as the phrase wasn’t coined until 1892, the impacts of the canal on British people and trade were perhaps not immediate. Of course, for the development of the port city of Rangoon it was very important and should be discussed here at some length regarding the various impacts it had on the city. In discussing the Suez Canal it is

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<sup>61</sup> Knoles, 1999, p. 438

also possible, and indeed necessary, to discuss the rivalry between Britain and France from the mid to late nineteenth century.

Throughout much of the nineteenth century relations between Britain and France were not good, although there were exceptional periods such as in 1854 when Britain, France and Turkey joined forces to fight Russia in the Crimean War.<sup>62</sup>

One outcome of the rivalry between Britain and France that is related to Rangoon is the impact it had on shipbuilding. At a number of points in the nineteenth century France had arguably the best naval vessels in the world. Britain would stop at nothing to equal and beat the French in this game<sup>63</sup>, leading to many innovations in both countries and enabling them to do very well in battles and also have excellent ships for transporting goods.

The particular innovation that is relevant to Rangoon is the gunboat. This type of vessel, less than 200 feet long and crewed by thirty men, was operated by sail when at sea and steam on rivers. The Anglo-Burma war of 1852 is described as an example of some of the most effective ever use of a gunboat in battle.<sup>64</sup> This technology was centuries ahead of what Burma had at that time and one reason that Britain had such advanced boat building techniques was the ship building wars they conducted against the French. Aside from attempting to construct the best naval fleet in the world the French also made some great engineering projects in the nineteenth century, perhaps none more so than the Suez Canal.

Prior to the construction of the Suez Canal the journey between Suez and Cairo was a bumpy 19 hour overland trip.<sup>65</sup> This despite the fact that only 125.5 km separated the two places.<sup>66</sup> So, clearly the construction of the canal was of some benefit to the citizens of Egypt, but of course that was not the main reason for its costly construction.

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<sup>62</sup> David, 2007, p. 200

<sup>63</sup> David, 2007, p. 159

<sup>64</sup> David, 2007, p. 159-160

<sup>65</sup> Gribbin, Mary and Gribbin, John, p. 281, 2008

<sup>66</sup> The figure of 125.5 km is based on data provided from the website „[www.distance-calculator.co.uk](http://www.distance-calculator.co.uk)“, entering Suez as a start point and Cairo as the end for a land journey between the two places in Egypt.

The French originally conceived a plan to construct this canal in 1798 to assist their Asian trade. Although this dream did not become reality until 1854 when a construction company for the canal was formed. Later this year France would join Britain to fight against Russia in the Crimean War, showing that they enjoyed good relations at this time. Work began in 1859 mainly using local labor but by 1864 many Chinese and Indians were doing the manual labor. The Suez Canal finally opened for business on November 17 1869.

This, of course, was not the end of the story. Five years later, in 1874, Disraeli became Prime Minister of Britain. The historian W.D. Rubenstein tells us more

“If social reform comprised one half of Disraeli's programme, the other half was imperialism and an enhanced centrality for the Empire. He and his government were also busy in office on this front. In late 1875 Disraeli purchased the shares in the Suez Canal owned by the bankrupt Khedive (King) of Egypt for £4 million. The Suez Canal had been built in 1869, chiefly by French engineering, and the French owned many of its shares. For Britain, the Canal represented the shortest route to India, the 'jewel in the crown' of the British Empire, and obtaining a controlling interest in the Canal was widely seen to be in Britain's strategic interests. Disraeli himself masterminded the purchase in secret, with the direct assistance of Rothschild's Bank, and received the subsequent approval of the Cabinet and Parliament as a necessary measure to forestall the French government from controlling the main route to India. Ownership of the Canal was widely regarded as the prelude to British occupation of Egypt, and perhaps other areas in the Middle East, but Disraeli made no further moves in this region.”<sup>67</sup>

So, Disraeli bought the Suez Canal to help the trade flow from India, of which from 1886 to 1937 Burma became a part. Also the above quotation shows that by the mid-1870s Britain again did not trust the French, a situation that was common throughout much of the nineteenth century.

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<sup>67</sup> Rubenstein, p. 174-175, 1998



A few years after Britain had gained control of the Suez Canal and later had a heavy influence over Egypt<sup>68</sup>, France began colonizing in Southeast Asia. This, of course, worried Britain who had control of India, Malaya, Singapore and so-called „Lower Burma“ at that time.

Upper Burma with its fabled riches of precious metals and gem stones, natural resources and strategic location had not escaped the eyes of the British. The French too were interested and set up a consulate in Mandalay, the capital of Upper Burma, with the intention of gaining a concession for the ruby mine in Mogok and influence in the country, influence that would have led to a loss of profits for British companies in Rangoon or elsewhere in the British controlled areas of Burma.<sup>69</sup>

The reasons why the British decided to fight a war with Upper Burma in 1885 which led to them later taking control of the whole of Burma are various and it is beyond the scope of this thesis to go into all of them here in detail. However, certainly one of the reasons for the war and acquisition of territory was trade rivalry with France and the strategic location. This view is held by, for example W.D. Rubinstein<sup>70</sup>, Elaine Halton<sup>71</sup>, Marilyn V.Longmuir<sup>72</sup> and Gertrude Bell<sup>73</sup> amongst others. (It is only fair to point out that some of these authors also attribute other causes to that conflict, such as pressure from merchants in Rangoon to the British Government.<sup>74</sup>)

Of course, France also wished to gain access to the potential 400 million customers of China and the territory they took in Southeast Asia was with that in mind.<sup>75</sup> Upper Burma would also have helped with this objective and around this time H. R. Davies from Britain had grand dreams of building a railway from Calcutta through Burma and into China.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Morris, p. 206, 1968

<sup>69</sup> O'Connor, V.C. Scott, 2008, p. 100

<sup>70</sup> Rubinstein, 1998, p. 203

<sup>71</sup> Halton, 1999, p. 44

<sup>72</sup> Longmuir, 2001, p. 53

<sup>73</sup> Bell, 2013, letter dated 4/3/1903, [http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk/letter\\_details.php?letter\\_id=1378](http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk/letter_details.php?letter_id=1378)

<sup>74</sup> See for example Longmuir, 2001, p. 77

<sup>75</sup> Gildea, 2009, p. 418

<sup>76</sup> Myint-U, 2011, p. 16

Prince Henri d'Orleans, the grandson of King Louis-Philippe of France, travelled by land from China to India via Burma in the 1890s and also asked his government to look into the project. Neither dream materialized.<sup>77</sup>

Also worth mentioning at this point, to give another indication of the state of relations between the two Western rivals in this time period, is the fact that in 1941, when Rangoon had a number of foreign banks, there was not one French bank. This despite the fact that there were banks from China and Holland amongst other countries<sup>78</sup>

So, aside from having an impact on relations between Britain and France and the connection to the British annexation of Upper Burma, how did the Suez Canal impact Rangoon, by how much, and when?

This, of course, is not so simple to answer. A number of history books try to perhaps oversimplify the situation by suggesting that the opening of the canal made Rangoon and Burma rich and suggest that it happened quickly and that without the canal this would not have been the case. Donald Seekins writing in 2011 for example tells us that the city of Rangoon became "...one of the richest in the British Empire after the Suez Canal was opened in 1869."<sup>79</sup>

That the city became one of the richest in the British Empire is not up for dispute, however, it would be more accurate to say that it became one of the richest in British Empire a number of decades after the opening of the Suez Canal. Also, it is perhaps worth mentioning that the British Empire by some measures did not exist until 1876 when Prime Minister Disraeli, against popular opinion, conferred the title of Empress on Victoria who was merely the Queen before then.<sup>80</sup> Without an Emperor or Empress there is no Empire, at least from a technical point of view.

Harvey, a former British Civil Servant in Rangoon, writing of his experience in 1946, stated that there was no incentive to grow rice in large quantities before the canal was opened in

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<sup>77</sup> Myint-U, 2011, p. 17

<sup>78</sup> Turnell, 2009, p. 106

<sup>79</sup> Seekins, 2011, p. 30

<sup>80</sup> Arnold, 1998, p. 174

1869 and that the canal turned the city into a “great modern port.”<sup>81</sup> Again, as can be seen from elsewhere in this chapter, it is an oversimplification. That the Suez Canal did not have an immediate positive impact on teak (in fact the export figures declined in the first few years of operation) is demonstrated in the „**Teak**“ section of this chapter.

Of course it helped Rangoon a lot, but it took some time to make an impact, and surely the annexation of Upper Burma full of teak, oil, rubies and more and the mass immigration from India and elsewhere played equally important roles in the development and expansion of the city. Even before the construction of the canal, since 1852 Rangoon had been expanding in size and increasing in prosperity. As an example of the latter consider the following information about the beginnings of The Chartered Bank in Rangoon.

The bank opened its Rangoon branch in 1858 at a time when business was booming in the colonies. In *Realms of Silver*, the Scottish author Sir Compton MacKenzie wrote of that period, “There were not many places in the world, even during the boom of the early Sixties, that could afford to pay equally high charges for banking facilities, and the prosperity of Rangoon can be realized when a building site bought by the Bank in August 1864 for 20,000 rupees could have been sold at a profit of at least 50 percent within less than a couple of years.”<sup>82</sup>

Elsewhere, Harvey says that “...the great English firms at Rangoon did not come into existence til 1870, on the opening of the Suez Canal.”<sup>83</sup> Again, there is some truth in this, as is demonstrated elsewhere in this chapter, however many of the great firms were Scottish, not English and some large Scottish and English companies existed in Rangoon before 1870, and others that came later did not immediately turn up following the completion of the canal. Of course, it is important to remember how many large firms in Rangoon were operated by Chinese, Indians and others.

No doubt as Seekins mentions elsewhere in his book the export economy of Rangoon was accelerated by the opening of the Suez Canal.<sup>84</sup> However, it is debatable as to whether the

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<sup>81</sup> Harvey, 1946, p.14

<sup>82</sup> Rooney, 2012, p.95

<sup>83</sup> Harvey, 1946, p.64

<sup>84</sup> Seekins, 2011, p. 39

expansion of the size of the city of Rangoon in 1876 to 11 square miles (28.5 km), was due to construction of the canal.<sup>85</sup> As Siok-Hwa tells us, despite the canal opening in 1869, Burmese rice did not pass through until 1873, and even then much rice, at first, went to Europe from Burma via the Cape of Good Hope for at least the next decade to save money. Passing through the canal in the early days required paying large fees and there was also the expense of using steamships rather than a sail boat that could go via the Cape of Good Hope.<sup>86</sup>

Writing in 2009 in his book „Fiery Dragons: Banks, Moneylenders and Microfinance in Burma“, Sean Turnell says the following

The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 transformed Burma's prospects as a centre for commercial agriculture. Cutting shipping times to and from Europe by half, the Canal not only directly opened up European markets to rice exports from Burma, it also stimulated demand for the commodity more generally in a region suddenly exposed to greatly expanded commercial opportunities. The price of rice accordingly soared.<sup>87</sup>

That the price of rice soared due to the opening of the canal is not entirely true, and this is proven by the figures provided on the same page of the book.

#### Paddy Prices and Land under Cultivation 1845-1900

Year	Wholesale Paddy Price. ( Rs per 100 Baskets).	Paddy Land Annual Average Acreage Lower Burma (000s of acres)
1845.	8.	354
1850.	24.	679
1855.	45.	993
1860.	45.	1,333
1865.	50.	1,627
1870.	70.	1,965

<sup>85</sup> Seekins, 2011, p.33

<sup>86</sup> Siok-Hwa, 2012, p. 12-p.13

<sup>87</sup> Turnell, 2009, p. 15

1875.	65.	2,704
1880.	85.	3,402
1885.	95.	4,011
1890.	95.	4,865
1895.	95.	5,765
1900.	95.	6,832

Source: Table derived from data in Cheng Siok-Hwa (1968:25)<sup>88</sup>

As can clearly be seen from the table the price of rice tripled between 1845 and 1850, although why is unclear, possibly due to increased demand. From 1850 to 1855 the price increase is close to double, no doubt caused by Britain taking control of Rangoon and other areas of so-called „Lower Burma“ and increasing demand for exports. The price increase from 1865 to 1870 is also large, but for reasons mentioned previously this was not because of the Suez Canal, it simply did not increase prices immediately as it was not used much for rice transport in the early days following the opening in late 1869. This can be seen from the table by the fact that the wholesale price of rice actually declined from 1870 to 1875, the first half a decade after Suez was opened for business, although the number of acres for growing rice increased a lot, possibly a case of over supply driving down the price. The price did increase a number of times, but the impact of the Suez Canal took some time and was not the only reason for the rise.

Was money set aside for the expansion of Rangoon in 1876 because of farsightedness about the future trade possibilities created by the creation of a much shorter and quicker route to Europe?

Possibly, but it seems quite quick to implement a change and secondly perhaps in the mid-1870s the increase in city size was also due to other factors such as providing homes and leisure space for the growing middle class of the city, space for companies exporting products to

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<sup>88</sup> This table is reproduced from Turnell, 2009, p. 15, Rs=Rupees, the Indian currency.

India, China and Southeast Asian countries and more space for government buildings. No doubt the canal led to the expansion of the city size and its wealth, but perhaps not that early on.

“Ship me somewhere east of Suez, where the best is like the worst,

Where there aren’t no Ten Commandments an’ a man can raise a thirst.”<sup>89</sup>

The quotation from Kipling, also mentioned at the start of this section, is an appropriate place to finish discussing the impacts of the opening of the Suez Canal on the foreign city of Rangoon. Kipling suggests that some British men wished to live and work in Asia to be free from the Christian morality of Victorian Britain.

Elsewhere in the poem *Mandalay* he also mentions the attractiveness of Burmese women.<sup>90</sup> He is suggesting, perhaps, that some British men enjoyed being in Asia as they could drink to excess and have casual relations with local women regardless of whether they were married or not and no one would complain or find out. However, the canal changed this situation in India to some extent as historian Magaret Macmillan explains in her book about British women living in India during colonial times.

British society in India was turning on itself. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, together with faster and safer communications between Britain and India, meant that the exiles could keep closer ties with Home. By the 1860s, the practice of taking Indians as wives or mistresses was frowned upon by government and condemned by society. (Only the planters, on their lonely gardens, kept up the old custom, but their little weakness was never discussed in polite circles.)<sup>91</sup>

So, the canal had another effect on Rangoon. As morality in British society in India changed two things happened that are of relevance to this thesis. Firstly, children who had British fathers and Indian mothers became less accepted in India than before and many looked to move on to other places, Rangoon later becoming the most popular. Secondly, no doubt a number of British men who enjoyed relations with Asian women may have moved on. Again, Rangoon would have been a popular spot as attempts to stop these practices came later than India

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<sup>89</sup> Knoles, 1999, p. 438

<sup>90</sup> Knoles, 1999, p. 438

<sup>91</sup> Macmillan, 2007, P.59

(the 1890s), and they were not as successful. <sup>92</sup>This topic is explored in more depth in the Chapter **Rangoon as a Foreign City on Burmese Soil** under the section **Eurasians**.

The trade that helped fund the city required substantial changes to Rangoon during the ninety year period studied in this thesis and shall be discussed next.

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<sup>92</sup> Myint-U, 2006, p.190

## CHAPTER III

### Town Planning

Planning for the expansion of Rangoon began in 1852 by Dr. William Montgomerie who had been on the team responsible for the planning of Singapore.<sup>93</sup> As part of his master plan he suggested the construction of many western style buildings designed to last and also, according to architectural expert Rooney, to intimidate the indigenous population as one technique employed by the relatively small number of British who were now running the city.<sup>94</sup>

The idea that they would do this sounds at first far-fetched, but consider the evidence offered by Pearn. According to him in the late 1700s in Rangoon

“It was illegal for a Burmese subject to build a brick house, for it was feared that such buildings might become centres of resistance against the authorities; but no restriction was placed on the materials used by European residents for their buildings, provided they obtained prior permission and paid a heavy tax; though in general the Europeans preferred timber houses “not from any want of brick or lime, but because the wooden houses are more adapted to the dampness and the climate. Such few brick buildings as do exist, are used more as magazines than as dwelling-houses.”<sup>95</sup>

So, due to the climate it made more sense to build with wood and indeed prior to 1852 this was often what they did. The argument that Rooney puts forth, that the British made large brick buildings to intimidate and suggest that they would be around for a long time seems plausible. Also it is worth bearing in mind that wooden buildings would probably be constructed from teak, a valuable export product. Also, having many wooden buildings in a city that can experience earthquakes is not a good idea, as they can catch fire and cause a lot of damage in this scenario, so perhaps the plans for expanding the city by the use of brick buildings was not so bad.

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<sup>93</sup> Rooney, 2012, p. 12

<sup>94</sup> Rooney, 2012, p. 54

<sup>95</sup> Pearn, 1939, p.53



The British began planning for the expansion of Rangoon after they took control of the city in 1852 following the Second Anglo-Burmese War.<sup>96</sup> Aside from inspiration from the planning of Singapore, the British also took inspiration from the previous planning of the expansion of Malacca and Penang in Malaya and various Indian cities.<sup>97</sup> After Dr. Montgomerie had drawn up his plan, Lieutenant Alexander Fraser of the Bengal Engineers made a plan that took into account various problems found in Rangoon; namely flooding and erosion of the shore. The plan by Fraser was for a town of just 36,000 people with Sule Pagoda (constructed many centuries before) as the center of the town.<sup>98</sup>

Seekins tells us that wooden and bamboo buildings were banned as they were deemed both ugly and more importantly a fire hazard, although a number of British officials were forced to live in wooden buildings, including monasteries, in the early days until of British occupation of the city until construction of brick buildings was complete.<sup>99</sup>

In order to realize this new master plan hundreds of old Mon Buddhist buildings, part of a fishing village on the waterfront at Rangoon, were destroyed by Burmese laborers to make way for the new „improved“ town.<sup>100</sup> The city expanded in size a number of times as it grew wealthier, more important and contained more people.

By 1876 for example it was increased to 11 square miles, which was due to the recently opened Suez Canal according to Seekins, and again in 1921 to 30.809 square miles, or in other words it expanded in size by almost three times in a 45 year period.<sup>101</sup> Viewed from above people would wonder why, as the city expanded, it did so mainly from south to north and not much in easterly and westerly directions. This was as the land in those areas was too swampy.

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<sup>96</sup> For information on this war see for example David, 2007, pp.146-170

<sup>97</sup> Seekins, 2011, p. 30

<sup>98</sup> Seekins, 2011, pp.30-31

<sup>99</sup> Seekins, 2011, pp.30-31

<sup>100</sup> Dalrymple, 2007, p.454

<sup>101</sup> Seekins, 2011, p.33

For the same reason there was no expansion to the land across from the Strand, known as Dala. This was also due to the soil being too swampy and so a connecting bridge was never constructed.<sup>102</sup>

The plans, architecture and design of the city were for business and “an alien implementation on Burmese soil.”<sup>103</sup> As more western tourists arrived in the twentieth century they were disappointed that the new city was not exotic looking, aside from the train station which was co-designed by a Burmese architect, a rare exception for the new buildings in the city.<sup>104</sup> Many of the architects were British and often they had designed buildings in Scotland or India.<sup>105</sup>

As Rangoon grew it needed a large, ambitious and intimidating HQ for the British who controlled the city. This building was known as the Secretariat. Plans for this huge structure, which is still standing today, and dominates the downtown area a few streets away from the commercially important harbor, were made soon after Britain took Upper Burma in 1886 and export expansion looked certain. Construction began in 1889, was completed in stages and finally finished in 1905. The design, by a British architect resident in Rangoon, brought British Victorian ideas to Rangoon and the construction was overseen by an Indian contractor. This was typical for many buildings of this period.<sup>106</sup>

Prince Damrong of Siam first visited the city in 1891 before the Secretariat and other large administrative buildings were in place and returned in 1936. The Prince mentions that on the second visit the city had transformed almost beyond recognition, looking European and having no wooden buildings and having a taller skyline than 1891. By then it was the third most important trading port in the British Indian Empire after Calcutta and Bombay.<sup>107</sup>

Also in between these two visits Rangoon gained a power station on the Rangoon River in 1906, electric trams were introduced from 1906-1908 and electric street lights were installed

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<sup>102</sup> Seekins, 2011, p.33

<sup>103</sup> Seekins, 2011, p.34

<sup>104</sup> Seekins, 2011, p. 35

<sup>105</sup> Rooney, 2012, pp. 99-101, p.103, p.123

<sup>106</sup> Rooney, 2012, pp. 23-27

<sup>107</sup> Damrongrathanuphap, Prince, 1991, pp.29-30

from 1907-1911. This was in total contrast to the countryside that was not transformed in this manner, creating resentment.<sup>108</sup>

This was one of a number of reasons for the Saya San peasant rebellion against the colonial government in 1930 in the Burmese countryside, although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to go into more details here, it is worth also mentioning that the Saya San rebellion did not reach Rangoon.<sup>109</sup>

From 1863 until the outbreak of the Second World War, Burma managed to export around at least double the amount of rice as both regional rivals, Indo China and Siam.<sup>110</sup> This along with teak, oil and other natural resources provided enough money to allow and encourage the size of the city to expand and improve constantly throughout the period of 1852 to 1942. The new wealth either left Burma, was spent on construction in Rangoon or on projects to link the hinterland to the capital. None of these had much positive impact on the average Burmese living outside Rangoon.

One aspect of planning the town that was inadequate and often had deadly consequences was the idea of disease prevention. For example there were sanitation problems caused by a lack of proper water supply in areas where the poor (Burmese, Chinese and others) lived, even in the twentieth century.<sup>111</sup>

The book „Disease and Demography in Colonial Burma“ by Judith L. Richell provides numerous examples of how diseases were able to spread from overseas after entering the port of Rangoon by ship. Sometimes the disease would only cause casualties in the city, other times it would spread into the hinterland due to the movement of people and goods by boat on the domestic rivers or by train. This of course shows another downside to being linked to the global economy and having a high number of immigrants constantly arrive in the city.

The problems that poor sanitation could cause in the city were known at least from the end of The 1824-1826 Anglo-Burmese War when British soldiers died in the city and others

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<sup>108</sup> Charney, 2009, p. 20

<sup>109</sup> See for example Myint-U, 2006, pp. 208-215

<sup>110</sup> Manarungsan, 1989, P.74

<sup>111</sup> Charney, 2009, p. 20

were forced to leave for healthier areas such as Moulmein.<sup>112</sup> In 1870 a 119 page report offering advice was written, sadly the Chief Commissioner of Burma at the time, Fytche, himself resident in Rangoon, declined to read the whole report and refused to appoint a Sanitary Commissioner as he thought it was a waste of money.<sup>113</sup>

During the colonial period Rangoon experienced many catastrophes sometimes caused by this kind of thinking, indeed again in 1905 it was decided that there was an “urgent” need for training sanitation inspectors. Despite the “urgency” the first class was not held until 1913.<sup>114</sup> Other times disaster was caused not by a lack of local planning but by the fact that Rangoon was heavily connected to the global economy as part of the British Empire.

Listing all the diseases that spread in the city and then into the countryside, when, why and how they spread during 1852 to 1942 would be beyond the scope of this thesis. Examples include the 1918 world flu pandemic<sup>115</sup>, which caused an estimated 300,000 to 350,000 deaths in Burma across a three year period<sup>116</sup> an unknown number of cholera deaths<sup>117</sup> and 244,000 deaths throughout Burma between 1905 and 1939 of plague started by the arrival of two male plague victims from overseas. At least this last disaster set in motion some measures to attempt to prevent this kind of incident being repeated.<sup>118</sup>

The plague disaster epidemic also shows the disadvantage of being connected to a large global trade network and being part of the British Empire. It took 39 years for plague to travel by land from Yunnan in China in 1855 to Canton and Hong Kong in 1894, via the Chinese interior. Plague arrived in Bombay in western India in 1898 and yet only took a year (by sea and carried by Indian passengers) to arrive in Rangoon in 1899 (via Calcutta on the east coast of India).

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<sup>112</sup> See for example David, 2007, pp.146-170

<sup>113</sup> Richell, 2006, p. 59

<sup>114</sup> Richell, 2006, p. 185

<sup>115</sup> Richell, 2006, p. 62

<sup>116</sup> Richell, 2006, p. 159

<sup>117</sup> Richell, 2006, p. 170

<sup>118</sup> Richell, 2006, p. 181

It took a number of years before there was a serious outbreak in the Burmese capital. Later on it spread from Rangoon to Java via rats on a trading vessel.<sup>119</sup>

Town planning is of course a complex undertaking and will never be perfect. Rangoon was particularly challenging for a number of reasons. This was mainly due to the fact that no one knew how large the city would become in the 90 year period studied in this thesis. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, when expansion plans began in 1852 a town of 36,000 inhabitants was envisaged.<sup>120</sup> However by 1871, 98, 138 people were resident in Rangoon. By 1941, 500, 800, were living in the city just before World War Two arrived.<sup>121</sup> This meant that the city had to constantly change, expand, evolve and meet new challenges and it was tough for city planners and other people in charge of the running of Rangoon to keep up. No doubt things were also hindered by the fact that most of the people involved were British or Indian, not born in Burma and some did not even live in the city, meaning they could not know some local problems, such as the swampy soil, and possible local solutions, rather they sought to impose foreign ideas on Burmese soil.

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<sup>119</sup> Richell, 2006, p. 181

<sup>120</sup> Seekins, 2011, pp.30-31

<sup>121</sup> Richell, 2006, p. 42

## CHAPTER IV

### **Rangoon as a Foreign City on Burmese Soil**

This is a very complex, yet essential topic for understanding Rangoon during the period 1852-1942. Simply put, a huge number of people arrived from overseas, the vast majority from India, followed by China and Britain, but also from many other countries in the West and from within Asia. Some stayed only a short time before moving on to another part of Burma, returning home or entering a third country. Meanwhile others settled down, lived out their entire life in Rangoon and were survived by children, quite often from the result of marrying a Burmese.

The vast majority of the immigrants were male, coming to Burma for work. As is similar in many large port cities in contemporary Southeast Asia they came to fill two gaps in the labor market; unskilled or semi-skilled work many locals shunned due to it being dangerous, difficult and dirty and the other type of work, highly skilled positions that for various reasons the local labor pool cannot fill. It is worth bearing in mind also that many people moved down to Rangoon and the surrounding areas from further North, East and West in Burma and these people were often from ethnic minority groups and spoke a different language, thus helping to add to the melting pot of cultures in Rangoon.

Before going any further, it will be useful to take a look at a table of immigration taken from „A History of Rangoon“ by Pearn. This table shows us the number of people living in Rangoon broken down by race and in the case of India split into Hindus and Muslims. According to Pearn the 1872 Census is probably not complete and certainly not as detailed as the ones from 1881 onwards. By as early as 1881 the total number of Burmese plus all other races of people born within the boundaries of Burma was already slightly lower than the total number of foreigners in Rangoon. Also from 1881 we see that the total number of Indian Hindus and Muslims was almost as high as the total number of people born within Burma. In fact the number of Indians had increased more than four times in nine years from 1872 to 1881, from 15,677 to 66,077 Indians.

It is also, of course, significant that in conducting the census, the British chose to classify the Indians by religion, the people born within Burma by ethnic group, the Europeans were all lumped together as one group, the Chinese and Armenians by country, Jews by religion and Eurasians originally counted as Europeans and then nine years later warranting a separate category. Even without reading any further on the subject it is possible to analyze this data and think that it infers a city with a cosmopolitan population, fractured along ethnic and religious lines, which surely hints at trouble.

### Census returns from 1872 and 1881-

	1872	1881
1. Burmese	59,918	64,948
2. Karens	n.a.	171
3. Other Indigenous Races	9,388	1,890
4. Total of 1-3	69,306	67,009
5. Hindus	15,261	44,908
6. Muslims	416	21,169
7. Total of 5-6	15,677	66,077
8. Chinese	3,181	3,752
9. Europeans	3,867	2,856
10. Anglo-Indians	(included above)	1,487
11. Armenians	187	55
12. Jews	83	172
13. Total population	98,138	134,176 <sup>122</sup>

We also learn from table one that there was a population explosion during the 1870s in Rangoon mainly caused by migration. This trend continued during the next several decades as we can see from Table Two, also provided by Pearn in „History of Rangoon“.

The number of Burmese and other people born within the borders continued to rise at a decent level, but from this data alone we cannot be sure why this is. Numerous other books

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<sup>122</sup> Pearn, 1939, P.234

suggest that this was mainly caused by domestic migration from Upper Burma to the prosperous city of Rangoon. We also learn from the following table that the total number of Indians was significantly higher than Burmese by 1891 and around 50 percent higher by 1901. Additionally, we can see that by 1901 there were thousands of people living in Rangoon who did not fit into any of the categories. These would likely have included other Asians such as Thais and Japanese who were there in small numbers and are mentioned in other literature as well as people from Africa, the Middle East and the Americas. Of course, the fact that the whole of Burma became a British territory in 1885 explains a big rise in population after this year.

**TABLE TWO - Census returns from 1891 and 1901-**

	1891	1901
1. Burmese	68,319	77,825
2. Karens	2,455	848
3. Other Indigenous Races	2,532	3,013
4. Total of 1-3	73,306	81,686
5. Hindus	58,280	77,444
6. Muslims	29,207	41,846
7. Total of 5-6	87,487	119,290
8. Chinese	7,576	11,018
9. Europeans	4,120	8,805
10. Anglo-Indians	3,711	4,674
11. Armenians	164	191
12. Jews	219	508
13. Total population	180,324	248,060 <sup>123</sup>

So, what exactly were all these people doing in Rangoon at the time, and why were there many more Indians for example than Chinese, considering that they both share borders with Burma. Firstly, there were many more Indians because they had a larger, poorer population at the time and secondly because the British already controlled India at the time. Other reasons are perhaps a little more complex and surprising.

The Indian imported labor was mainly for industrial work, not agricultural which was handled by and large by the domestic population. <sup>124</sup> Maxwell-Lefroy disagrees with this view,

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<sup>123</sup> Pearn, 1939, p. 255



suggesting that the majority of Indians were engaged in work in the paddy fields of Burma or running shops, leading to more immigration than either London or New York in the decades before World War Two.<sup>125</sup> Before attempting to work out which of these two authors is likely to be more accurate it is worth bearing in mind two things; firstly that both books are about Burma as a whole, not only Rangoon and secondly Harvey worked in Rangoon for the British Government and is likely to be a tad biased. Evidence offered on numerous pages in „The Rice Industry of Burma 1852-1940“ by Cheng Siok-Hwa, including a section on Indian labor, suggests that Harvey is correct and very few Indians in Rangoon at this time were engaged in agricultural work. Indeed in 1936 Rangoon had a mere three acres of rice fields so surely there were not many people engaged in agriculture directly, no matter where they were born.<sup>126</sup>

The Indians in Rangoon, as time went on were engaged in a number of trades besides providing physical labor, these included civil servants for the British administration, doctors, police, traders and money lenders. Aside from the divide and rule policy there were also a number of practical reasons why the British were keen to import Indian labor, firstly, because they knew and trusted them and secondly due to a skills shortage in Burma, which did not, for example, have any university until 1920. Even when the first University opened in Rangoon in 1920, practical subjects such as medicine were not popular and the total numbers of students enrolled was small.<sup>127</sup>

Later, as the Indian and other foreign population increased it also made sense to have large numbers of Indian police, for example as they could speak the dominant language of the city of Rangoon, Hindustani, and often English, which helped the British administration.

Indians are also notorious during this time frame for the Chettiar money lenders mentioned in many books. According to Harvey there were 1,400 companies in Rangoon run by this caste of Indians by the end of British rule. Their function was to lend money to agriculture,

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<sup>124</sup> Harvey, 1946, p. 14

<sup>125</sup> Maxwell-Lefroy, 1963, p. 14

<sup>126</sup> Siok-Hwa Cheng, 1968, p. 23

<sup>127</sup> Harvey, 1946, p. 45 and p.47

thus filling a void due to a lack of a Burmese banking system. Harvey notes that there were more Burmese money lenders than Indians but that the Indians had 80 percent of the profit.<sup>128</sup>

This was due to the fact that they had more experience and suggests that they were required for the economy to run smoothly, however there no doubt would have been some resentment from the Burmese.

There were also money lenders from different Indian ethnic groups and Chinese. Again they were connected to the rice industry.<sup>129</sup> The Chinese were involved in selling rice to Malaya and other places.<sup>130</sup> Of course the Chinese, like the Indians, were involved in a number of different kinds of labor such as coolie labor, rickshaw drivers and small businesses. The British were involved in government work, police force or import and export companies often connected to rice, teak or oil. Rarely were the British and other Europeans engaged in low skilled physical jobs.

Of course one other sizable ethnic group has not been discussed yet – Eurasians. These were people with one parent from Europe and one from Asia. In the case of Eurasians in Rangoon, the father was almost always European and the mother Asian. The mother was not only likely to be Burmese, Indian was also common. Many times the father was not married rather the child was the result of a romantic liaison.<sup>131</sup>

The number of Eurasians increased from 1,487 in 1881 to 4,674 by 1901 according to Pearn<sup>132</sup> who uses the phrase „Anglo-Indian“ to describe the people who may actually in some cases be half Burmese. However we shouldn’t forget that Burma was part of British India at the time. These people did not fit comfortably into either Burmese or British society at the time but they often found good employment as they usually understood two cultures and were often bilingual. They endured a number of social problems, for a better understanding the novel „Burmese Days“ by George Orwell provides insight into the kind of problems they likely faced. Despite the fact that it is fiction, „Burmese Days“ is based on reality, so much so that the

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<sup>128</sup> Harvey, 1946, p. 55

<sup>129</sup> Siok-Hwa, 1968, p. 185-9

<sup>130</sup> Siok-Hwa, 1968, p. 110

<sup>131</sup> Larkin, 2003, p. 72

<sup>132</sup> Pearn, 1939, p. 234 and p. 255

publishers initially worried it was non-fiction which delayed its publication in Britain by one whole year.<sup>133</sup>

Aside from Burmese, other ethnic races from Burma, Chinese, Eurasians, Indians and Europeans, there were also smaller numbers of people from other countries in Asia, the Middle East, Africa and the Americas living in Rangoon at this time. They were involved in a number of things. According to Lunet de Lajonquiere who visited Rangoon in 1904 there were Parsis trafficking precious stones, Japanese women prostituting themselves and Americans working in a circus amongst other occupations by the smaller numbers of foreigners.<sup>134</sup> Elsewhere in his book „Siam and the Siamese: Travels in Thailand and Burma in 1904“ he mentions that there is friction and tension between the different ethnic and religious groups gathered in the city and crime caused by the international population.<sup>135</sup>

These two elements will be dealt with in more depth in the next chapter. First it would be wise to look at some of the groups of immigrants in detail to see what they brought to the city. Of course in terms of sheer numbers the Indians dominated and therefore were involved in many things, some Indians were very successful, others died in poverty. The British, small in number, had the power, prestige and often money too, doing governmental jobs and working for or owning trading houses. What tells us more about the foreign city is how other groups contributed to the foreign city. The next largest group is the Chinese.

## 4.1

### The Chinese

Although the numbers of Chinese resident in Rangoon never came close to catching up with the Burmese or Indians in the city during the colonial period, they were still the third

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<sup>133</sup> Orwell, 1934, p. vii

<sup>134</sup> De Lajonquiere, 1904, p. 165 and p.168

<sup>135</sup> De Lajonquiere, 1904, p. 166 and p. 167

biggest group after the Indians and the indigenous people, peaking in the 1931 census at 7.6 percent of the total population of the city.<sup>136</sup>

Chinese have resided in the city since at least the eighteenth century and at that time, when Rangoon was known as Dagon, even though exact figures for the Chinese population are not available, we know that there were enough Chinese living by the wharf at the edge of the town for it to be called China Wharf.<sup>137</sup>

After the British took over the city and it expanded and developed, the number of Chinese residents also increased. The earliest available figure is for 3,181 Chinese living in Rangoon in 1871 when the official total population was 98, 138.<sup>138</sup> So, they comprised around three percent of the population of the city. Although, presumably the 3,181 people were comprised of more men than women and more adults than children, so in fact the Chinese probably contributed more than three percent to the workforce. Nine years later in the next census the Chinese community increased in size by only a modest amount but by 1891 it numbered 7,576, more than double from 1872 and it increased again until it peaked in 1931 at 30, 626<sup>139</sup>, or 7.6 percent of the city as mentioned previously.<sup>140</sup>

Bangkok also had huge numbers of foreigners in this period<sup>141</sup>, despite not being colonized, but unlike Rangoon the vast majority were Chinese. The social structure is described by Phongpaichit and Baker in their book about the history of the Thai economy as follows

“...they settled for a simple threefold social division: Thai peasants tilled the land; Thai bureaucrats ran the government; Chinese merchants and labourers ran the urban economy.”<sup>142</sup>

Of course, in Rangoon, this was not the case. Like Bangkok during the same period there were many thousands of Chinese laborers working in the city and a smaller number of Chinese

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<sup>136</sup> Seekins, 2011, p. 39

<sup>137</sup> Pearn, 1939, p.53

<sup>138</sup> Pearn, 1939, P.234

<sup>139</sup> Pearn, 1939, P.287

<sup>140</sup> Seekins, 2011, p. 39

<sup>141</sup> Phongpaichit and Baker, 1998, p. 14

<sup>142</sup> Phongpaichit and Baker, 1998, p. 14-15

merchants, but the role of the Chinese in Bangkok could be said to be similar to the Indians plus the Europeans in Rangoon. Two famous Chinese examples who could be considered very successful in their different ways from the period are Lim Chin Tsong and the Aw family.

Lim Chin Tsong ran the Burmah Oil Company's only domestic agency for many years<sup>143</sup>, as well as operating steamers that sent passengers and freight between Rangoon, Southern China and the Straits Settlements, surveying for gold, copper and tin and owning a sugar refinery and many other businesses he also found time to breed racehorses and sponsor the best polo tournament in the city. He was born in Rangoon as the son of a Chinese immigrant and educated in a Catholic school in the city. He got his first business break by taking over the modest trading company that his father had made and expanding it greatly. Due to his Chinese background and being born, raised and educated in what could be described as a British city, he was able to make connections in London, China and British colonies<sup>144</sup>, something that not too many Burmese were able to do at that time.

He died in the latter half of the 1920s although no one is quite sure how. By the 1920s he was incredibly wealthy and well-known in the city. He had a huge house (still standing today) and there were various rumors about his demise. Two popular ones are that he killed himself after he went bankrupt due to some serious shipping accidents or that he left Burma as he was counterfeiting money and was about to be caught.<sup>145</sup>

Maurice Collis, a former employee of the British Government, worked in Rangoon for a number of years in the late 1920s and early 1930s, a turbulent time in the city that saw a number of riots and protests, often featuring racist elements. Collis did not get the chance to meet Lim Chin Tsong as he was already dead or perhaps in another country at that time. Despite this, Lim Chin Tsong appears twice in „Trials in Burma“, a memoir of Collis's time working in Burma, showing how well-known and important a figure he was.

Collis describes the Lim house as a „palace“ and Mr.Lim as a hardworking millionaire.<sup>146</sup> Collis implies that it shows that anyone can make money and become successful in Rangoon

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<sup>143</sup> Longmuir, 2001, p. 3

<sup>144</sup> Rooney, 2012, p. 149

<sup>145</sup> Rooney, 2012, p. 149

<sup>146</sup> Collis, 1975, p. 34

regardless of race. However, later on in his book, again using Mr.Lim as one example he exposes the downside of being Chinese, or Asian, including Burmese, rather than being British in the city at that time.

Now, Rangoon society was wholly English and it was composed of three great clubs, the Pegu, the Boat, and the Gymkhana. Nobody but a European could be elected to these clubs. Wealth or attainments or character was irrelevant; only race counted. Thus, Mr. Lim Ching Hsong's palace and frescoes, his money and good nature did not excuse the fact that he was Chinese.<sup>147</sup>

Another great success story from the Rangoon Chinese community at the time was the AW family. They are responsible for marketing Tiger Balm and making it popular across the world. Chinese herbalist Aw Chu Kin moved to Rangoon in 1870<sup>148</sup>, or possibly in 1862 under the spelling Aw Chi Ching<sup>149</sup>. Both accounts agree that he was Chinese, specifically a Hakka which allowed his sons later to make use of Hakka connections to sell the product in different territories.

One son died early on but Boon Haw (1882-1954) went to Fujian province in China to study and the youngest son, Boon Par (d.1944), studied in Rangoon at a British school.<sup>150</sup> After finishing school Boon Par was an apprentice pharmacist under the Burmese U Thaw who gave him the secret recipe for Tiger Balm before he died. Boon Haw helped his brother promote it and became one of the wealthiest Chinese in Burma by the 1920s.<sup>151</sup> In 1923, Boon Haw left the Rangoon business to be handled by his brother, and moved the headquarters to Singapore, extending the sales network to Malaya, Siam and the Dutch Indies.<sup>152</sup>

Or to put it another way, perhaps the way some Burmese may see it, a Chinese immigrant arrives in Rangoon, his sons get foreign education, take a product from a small Burmese businessman and get rich selling it in Rangoon at first and then in a number of other countries

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<sup>147</sup> Collis, 1975, p. 52

<sup>148</sup> Rooney, 2012, p. 37

<sup>149</sup> Lombard and Aubin, 2000, p. 335

<sup>150</sup> Lombard and Aubin, 2000, p. 336

<sup>151</sup> Rooney, 2012, p. 37

<sup>152</sup> Lombard and Aubin, 2000, p. 336

where there were Chinese connections and later move the headquarters to Singapore meaning that there was not even much possibility of Burmese gaining employment in the successful company started on their soil and using an idea from a Burmese pharmacist. This type of story would have been common at the time, and illustrates some of the advantages Chinese and other foreigners had in the city of Rangoon over the Burmese.

Luckily for the Chinese despite these and a few other big success stories, the Burmese anger and resentment was usually directed at the Indians or at the British colonial authorities, with a few exceptions where Chinese became the target. What did the tens of thousands of other Chinese do in Rangoon? Many Chinese in Rangoon were engaged in relatively simple menial jobs such as rickshaw pullers, selling food on the street<sup>153</sup>, selling sweets<sup>154</sup> etcetera. Chinese had been trading with Burma since at least the thirteenth century<sup>155</sup> and by the time Burma was controlled by the British Chinese Muslims from Yunnan came to the city annually by caravan, on foot, to exchange their goods for imported items in Rangoon<sup>156</sup>.

As time passed rather than just coming to the city to trade for a few days or to work for a few years and move on more and more Chinese settled permanently in the city. Another successful example would be Mr. Chan Chor Khine, a property baron who by the 1930s owned a car<sup>157</sup>, no doubt a symbol of wealth and status at the time.

By the end of this period there were also a number of Chinese banks operating in Rangoon including Overseas Chinese Banking Corporation and Bank of China<sup>158</sup>. Aside from a few banks the Chinese were also heavily involved in finance in Rangoon on a smaller scale as they seemed to have almost a monopoly on pawnshops, in the way that the Chettiars from India had cornered the market for moneylending.<sup>159</sup>

As noted earlier in this chapter the population of Chinese in Rangoon increased every decade. This was not only from immigration but also because of more „Chinese“ children being

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<sup>153</sup> Seekins, 2011, p. 38

<sup>154</sup> Damrongrachanuphap, Prince, 1991, p. 216

<sup>155</sup> Frank, Andre Gunder, 1998, p.102

<sup>156</sup> O'Connor, 2008, p. 95

<sup>157</sup> Collis, 1975, p. 34

<sup>158</sup> Turnell, 2009, p. 106

<sup>159</sup> Turnell, 2009, p. 123

born in the city. In 1901 there were 8,872 male Chinese and 2,146 females<sup>160</sup>, reflecting a heavy gender imbalance with more than four males to every female. By 1931 (the last available figure) there were 19,917 males to 10,707 females<sup>161</sup>, or just less than two males to one female. No doubt if not for World War Two this figure over time may have reached a more even balance. The rise in the percentage of Chinese women no doubt comes from more and more Chinese girls being born in the city plus a few Chinese women moving to Rangoon to work or marry.

Many Chinese men also married Burmese women<sup>162</sup> and perhaps their children could also have been classified as Chinese. They were also of course the owners of businesses connected to rice, teak and retail, in control of one fifth of the commerce in the whole country, and yet partially because they did not hold prominent positions in society, unlike in Malaya and Thailand the Burmese nationalists were far less opposed to them than the Indians.<sup>163</sup> This may also have been slightly connected to the fact that a number of Chinese were Buddhists. However of course there were a certain number of Chinese Muslims resident in Rangoon from the late nineteenth century onwards.<sup>164</sup>

The Chinese in Rangoon added two things that helped the economy of the city expand; they provided young male physical laborers who did basic jobs for low pay and they also offered talented business men who provided capital and more importantly, something the Burmese were not usually able to offer; connections to markets in China, Siam, the Straits Settlements and other areas where there were populations of Chinese people. This was important of course for selling rice and teak overseas.

## 4.2

### The Eurasians

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<sup>160</sup> Richell, 2006, p. 266

<sup>161</sup> Richell, 2006, p. 266

<sup>162</sup> Richell, 2006, p.3 and Kratoska, 2001, (c) p. 86

<sup>163</sup> Kratoska, 2001, (c) p. 86

<sup>164</sup> Berlie, 2008, p. 38



Should Eurasians be included in a chapter on immigrants and if so why? It sounds strange perhaps, but in the case of Rangoon many Eurasians were born in other British colonies so they were immigrants in the truest sense. Rangoon had many kinds of Eurasians. Most had a western father and an Asian mother. Some were born in Rangoon others elsewhere in Burma or overseas. Some had a Burmese mother, many had Indian blood and sometimes the „Indian“ mother was born in India or Malaya<sup>165</sup>, later on in Rangoon perhaps. The father of the Eurasians would rarely have been Burmese or Asian with a European mother for the simple fact that there were not many European women in Rangoon for much of the period in question. In fact women in general were always fewer in numbers than men, making having a wife or girlfriend in some decades something of a status symbol.

The number of Eurasians increased from 1,487 in 1881 to 4,674 by 1901 according to Pearn<sup>166</sup> who uses the phrase „Anglo-Indian“ to describe the people who may actually in some cases be half Burmese. However we shouldn“t forget that Burma was part of British India at the time. These people did not fit comfortably into either Burmese or British society at the time but they often found good employment as they usually understood two cultures and were often bilingual. The endured a number of social problems, for a better understanding the novel „Burmese Days“ by George Orwell provides insight into the kind of problems they likely faced. Despite the fact that it is fiction, „Burmese Days“ is based on reality, so much so that the publishers initially worried it was non-fiction which delayed its publication in Britain by one whole year. They were worried that they may be sued by people in Burma and so the novel was actually released in America before Britain.<sup>167</sup>

According to professor Ronald Daus, the term „Eurasian“ is thought to have been popularized in around 1820, by Hastings, from Britain, who was the Governor General of India, to describe people with European-Asian mixed blood. He wished this to replace a number of different terms in existence at the time including „Anglo-Indians“, „Indo-Britons“, „descendants of Europeans“ and „Christian natives“.

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<sup>165</sup> Koop, 1960, p.19

<sup>166</sup> Pearn, 1939, p. 234 and p. 255

<sup>167</sup> Orwell, 2011, p. vii

However the term did not become popular in India, yet it did find favor in places further east such as Burma, Hong Kong and Singapore, although not until the 1870s, five decades later, when it began to appear more in everyday speech and on census records.<sup>168</sup>

Daus goes on to explain how the „Eurasians“ were treated by the British in their colonies during this period of history.

“Of the European colonial powers, the British treated their subjects of mixed blood whom they themselves had fathered with total and utter contempt. In his 1934 novel, *Burmese Days*, George Orwell describes how the British in Burma treated the Eurasians. By Victorian moral standards, the British saw the Anglo-Eurasians as by-products of their own sinfulness, undisputedly a disgrace to the entire nation. Apart from moral isolation, there was social isolation, too. It was bad enough for a European to behave like a native, but now the products of his behaviour had the audacity to want to associate themselves publicly with the masters.”<sup>169</sup>

The above quotation provides us with details regarding the social position of „Eurasians“ in India and Singapore, and from Orwell, in a small, semi-fictional town in British Burma. But how about Rangoon during this period of 1852-1942? Was the situation there the same for the „Eurasians“? How many were there and what did they do?

The number of the Eurasian population went from 1,487 in 1881 the earliest available figure for Rangoon<sup>170</sup> to 9,878 in 1931 the last available figure.<sup>171</sup> According to Koop they were heavily involved in setting up railway, telegraph and postal systems as they were already trained in this from working in India or Malaya.<sup>172</sup>

Later on after the railway, telegraph and postal systems had been put in place the Eurasians were usually working in offices or in some capacity as “technical experts”<sup>173</sup> One reason that they were able to obtain such jobs was that they were deemed “politically

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<sup>168</sup> Daus, 1989, p. 68

<sup>169</sup> Daus, 1989, p. 68

<sup>170</sup> Pearn, 1939, p. 234

<sup>171</sup> Pearn, 1939, p. 287

<sup>172</sup> Koop, 1960, p.19

<sup>173</sup> Ikeya, 2012, p. 24

reliable”.<sup>174</sup>No doubt aside from this and any connections they may have had if their father was British they also benefitted from skills and qualifications gained either in India, Malaya or later on in Rangoon.

Next we should take a look at the small Japanese community in colonial Rangoon, they were small in number but played a large part in the downfall of the city and also provide us with an idea of why other small communities of foreigners arrived in Rangoon and how they were able to make a commercial niche for themselves.

### 4.3

#### The Japanese

Japanese people have made their presence felt in Burma for at least five centuries. According to Myint-U, in the sixteenth century “Japanese renegade samurai” were competing along with Persian princes and Portuguese pirates for power and influence at the court of Arakan in western Burma.<sup>175</sup> One century later Japan shut herself away from the outside world, thus beginning a period of two and a half centuries, known as sakoku-rei (“seclusion policy”) where virtually no one entered or left the country. This policy was eventually ended in 1868.<sup>176</sup> In 1853 and 1854, Commodore Perry and other Americans visited Japan and forced them to sign the 1854 Kanagawa Treaty which played an important part in this policy change by the Japanese.<sup>177</sup>

In the decades following the end of their long period of isolation the Japanese were again to be found in Burma and elsewhere in Southeast Asia, in modest numbers, living and working or just visiting for a short time to conduct business. The Japanese community in Rangoon, although modest in size, had a huge impact on the last few years of the period of history studied in this thesis.

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<sup>174</sup> Koop, 1960, pp.18-19

<sup>175</sup> Myint-U, 2006, p. ix

<sup>176</sup> Frederic, 2002, p. 813

<sup>177</sup> Frederic, 2002, p. 775

The largest Japanese trading company of the late nineteenth century was Mitsui Bussan. They were also the first Japanese trading company to open offices in the Southern Seas, starting with Hong Kong in 1886 followed by another in Singapore in 1891. In this part of the world they traded under the name Mitsui Yoko.<sup>178</sup> Japan was and is a large consumer of rice using it not only as a staple food but also in the production of sake, a popular alcoholic beverage which is made from broken rice.<sup>179</sup> Considering this and the fact that Rangoon was a top exporter of rice their paths were bound to cross, and they did.

Mitsui Yoko first sent people to Rangoon in 1890 to make inquiries about purchasing rice. Early purchases were sent on chartered ships, but within a few years they sent their own ships to cut costs. In 1897 Japanese rice production fell sharply and so in 1898 they had to import unusually high volumes of rice from Rangoon as well as from the rival rice exporting cities of Bangkok and Saigon.<sup>180</sup>

According to Cheng Siok-Hwa, prior to the 1890s rice was not exported from Burma to Japan, or at least not in any quantity large enough to register.<sup>181</sup> This view is also held by Swan.<sup>182</sup> The annual average export from 1891-1901 was 39,000 tons, compared to around 1,000 tons of rice exported to China per year during the same period.<sup>183</sup> Once this trade link had been established, and the transportation costs as just mentioned had decreased, the volume of trade increased by over four times, to an annual average of 170,000 tons a year during the first decade of the twentieth century. This was never bettered as the amounts of rice exports fell and rose again in the next few decades due to various factors.<sup>184</sup>

However it was not only large Japanese companies that were active in Southeast Asia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Bad harvests and famines in this period aside from encouraging large trading companies to travel to Southeast Asia in search of rice also

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<sup>178</sup> Swan, 2009, p. 28

<sup>179</sup> Siok-Hwa, 2012, p. 108

<sup>180</sup> Swan, 2009, p. 28

<sup>181</sup> Siok-Hwa, 2012, p. 217

<sup>182</sup> Swan, 2009, p.29

<sup>183</sup> Siok-Hwa, 2012, p. 217

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

had an impact on common folk in rural areas. The families of young women sometimes encouraged them to travel overseas and earn money from prostituting themselves.<sup>185</sup>

At first China was a popular destination for the women, hence the name for these women, karayuki san, Kara being a name for China, yuki meaning to go and san being an honorific word, similar to miss/ms/mrs/mr, hence Miss go to China. Later, helped by a sophisticated network of middlemen known as zegen, or „flesh traders“, the women went from the countryside of Japan to port cities such as Kobe or Nagasaki and then were shipped to large overseas ports such as Hong Kong and Singapore.

This became a multi-million dollar business as the women met the demands of immigrant laborers in Hong Kong and the ports of Southeast Asia.<sup>186</sup>

According to Francis Warren

“The Japanese had little trouble excusing the migration of women, prostitution and the spread of brothels throughout Southeast Asia in the name of capitalism and the state from 1895 to 1920. The overriding acceptance of the national need for prostitution and the 'flesh' trade overseas reflected the nature of Japanese society and an extreme nationalism. Some zegen who sent young women overseas as prostitutes managed to justify their activities under the banner of imperial glory, asserting that the sex trade was benefitting everyone.”<sup>187</sup>

As odd as this may sound, it was actually true, as the popular Japanese prostitutes who catered mainly to Chinese men in Singapore, encouraged some Japanese men to migrate and set up businesses in the city in the same area. Dentists, doctors, photographers and other tradesmen from Japan set up their businesses in Singapore, pinning their hope of success on the Japanese karayuki San.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Warren, 2008, p.256

<sup>186</sup> Ibid

<sup>187</sup> Ibid

<sup>188</sup> Ibid

This appears also to be the case in Rangoon. Yoe, writing in 1882, mentions that there were Japanese in Rangoon<sup>189</sup>, a rare early mention, although he does not tell us who they were and what they were doing. De Lajonquiere, a visitor to the city, mentions seeing Japanese prostitutes in 1904 in his report<sup>190</sup>. Japanese prostitutes were mentioned in various government reports in 1916 and 1917<sup>191</sup>, and in 1922 "A large number of Japanese prostitutes left Rangoon on advise of their Consul".<sup>192</sup>

This echoed what had happened a few years earlier in Singapore and Hong Kong as the Japanese government considered these women a "national disgrace" and wanted them to return to Japan so that the country would be taken more seriously politically by western nations by demonstrating that its economy was maturing.<sup>193</sup> Although Warren tells us that in Singapore even after Japanese prostitutes had been banned in Singapore they still continued to ply their trade secretly.<sup>194</sup>

It is not clear if this was also the case in Rangoon. Anyhow, echoing what happened in Singapore, a number of Japanese men set up small businesses in Rangoon in the twentieth century, including as dentists, doctors and photographers<sup>195</sup>. Even the professions of some of the men were the same as in another important British port in Southeast Asia. So, nothing would have seemed unusual to the police or other authorities regarding this small community.

In „Report on Rangoon Town Police for the Year 1922“, aside from the mention of Japanese prostitutes, Japanese and European ships are singled out as being the worst offenders for illegal importation of arms<sup>196</sup>. „The Criminal Investigation Department Manual Part 1 Crime, Arms, Note Forging, Counterfeiting, Crime Classification, and Finger Print Branches“, issued to police officers across Burma in 1925 mentions "Cases, however, occasionally occur, which are

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<sup>189</sup> Yoe, 1882, p. 547

<sup>190</sup> De Lajonquiere, 1904, p. 165 and p.168

<sup>191</sup> Larkin, 2003, p. 71

<sup>192</sup> Rangoon: Superintendent, 1923, p. 24

<sup>193</sup> Warren, 2008, p. 279

<sup>194</sup> Warren, 2008, p. 282

<sup>195</sup> Cernea, 2007, p. 80

<sup>196</sup> Rangoon: Superintendent, 1923, p. 16

committed by Europeans, Indians, Chinese, Japanese, etc...”<sup>197</sup> This suggests that there were a number of Japanese citizens up to no good in Rangoon and elsewhere at that time.

Also writing in 1925, Israel Cohen recalled his meeting with some of the Jewish community in Rangoon, including one British man who had a Japanese wife.<sup>198</sup> It is not mentioned what she did or how she came to be in the city. The reputation of the small Japanese community began to improve from around this time. Maurice Collis, a former District Magistrate of Rangoon in the late 1920s and early 1930s in his memoirs of the time mentions how non Europeans were banned from joining the most prestigious clubs in the city, no matter how much they were worth or what their position may be.

Collis writes “Even the Japanese consul was as much an outsider as the rest. All the battleships of his country could not have secured his election to the Pegu Club.”<sup>199</sup> Aside from reminding us that Rangoon was a plural society with the Europeans ranked above all, it is no doubt significant that the Japanese consul was picked out as an example, suggesting that by the late 1920s the Japanese had a more respectable place in Rangoon society.

This would have echoed the opinion of the Japanese that the British Government had adopted after the 1904-1905 war when Japan defeated Russia. Impressed by the performance Britain, still worried that India (of which of course Burma was a part) would be invaded by Russia, asked Japan to defend Afghanistan and Persia. Japan refused.<sup>200</sup> By the end of that decade, unlike Britain, Australia, Canada and New Zealand all feared an invasion by Japan in the future.<sup>201</sup>

Next we should take a look at the visit to Rangoon in the 1870s by King Chulalongkorn of Siam, a visit that had significance for relations between Burma and Siam and provides evidence that by the 1870s Rangoon could be seen as a foreign city on Burmese soil and so too could the smaller commercial city of Moulmein in Burma.

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<sup>197</sup> Rangoon: Superintendent, 1925, p.7

<sup>198</sup> Cernea, 2007, p. 28

<sup>199</sup> Collis, 1975, p. 52

<sup>200</sup> James, 1998, p.338

<sup>201</sup> James, 1998, p. 340-341

## 4.4

### **King Chulalongkorn in Rangoon: a visitor to a Burmese City or a Foreign City?**

King Chulalongkorn of Siam was only 15 years old on accession, and this period of his life, until he reached his so-called „majority“ at age 20 and took full control of the Kingdom saw him travel to the British colonial territories of Burma, India, Malaya and Singapore and Dutch Java. These journeys of study were intended to help make his nation prosperous and progressive to ensure future success.<sup>202</sup>

In fact these destinations were not the first choice of King Chulalongkorn. He desired to visit Europe in 1871 to gain knowledge to help Thailand while he still had free time as he had not taken on full responsibilities as King. However this was not allowed, as it was deemed to be too dangerous and time consuming a journey, hence a compromise was reached.<sup>203</sup> Instead Chulalongkorn would visit British and Dutch colonial possessions in Asia to become familiar with „modern administration“.<sup>204</sup>

Of course, for the focus of this paper King Chulalongkorn’s visit to Burma is the most important of his early journeys overseas. In 1862 Rangoon became the administration center for British Burma<sup>205</sup> and by the time of the visit by King Chulalongkorn in 1872, had a population of 98, 745 people<sup>206</sup>. So a much smaller city than Bangkok, but never the less an important one, that was growing in importance and size.

But before reaching Rangoon, King Chulalongkorn and his entourage visited the city of Moulmein, arriving by ship at 10 p.m. on the evening of Monday, January 1<sup>st</sup> 1872.<sup>207</sup> The royal visit to Burma was part of a larger journey, coming after trips to British – controlled Malaysia

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<sup>202</sup> Baker and Phongpaichit, 2005, P. 52

<sup>203</sup> Wyatt, 1969, PP. 40-41

<sup>204</sup> Wyatt, 1982, P. 192

<sup>205</sup> Charney, 2009, P. 19

<sup>206</sup> Charney, 2009, P. 22

<sup>207</sup> Piemmettawat, 2000, P. 62



and Singapore and on the way to British India.<sup>208</sup> The next day, aside from meeting various British dignitaries and giving a speech to British merchants and Burmese citizens in Moulmein, King Chulalongkorn was given a tour of a saw mill by the British.<sup>209</sup> The choice of a saw mill is significant, and in the Chapter **City of Trade** more is written on how important logging was to relations between British Burma and Siam.

As you can gather from the above paragraph, the first visit to Burma by a Thai monarch in many centuries was more about meeting British and British ideas than the Burmese. This theme continued as the Royal ships continued their journey up to the city of Rangoon. The Siamese fleet arrived at Rangoon on the morning of Friday, January the 5<sup>th</sup>, 1872. They were met by “...the Government SS Nemesis, which had been despatched by the Chief Commissioner of British Burma with a deputation to meet the King and welcome him to British territory”.<sup>210</sup>

The Thai party was very pleased with the welcome, which included “Royal salutes fired”,

“...which were answered by the Siamese war steamers in a manner which shewed their acquaintances with the ceremonial observances in this respect of European nations”.<sup>211</sup>

This information shows three things about the visit; firstly that the Thais were meeting with British Burma more than Burma, secondly that they were trying to behave in a European way, in terms of customs and lastly that the young Thai King was treated with a lot of respect in his visit to Burma. He was welcomed as an important guest, rather than the descendant of a historical enemy or a young person of no importance. I believe the British could see that establishing good relations with King Chulalongkorn and Thailand would be important for British Burma and in a wider sense the British Empire.

During the visit to Rangoon and later to British India, King Chulalongkorn was accompanied by Edward Bose Sladen, who at the time was aged 44 and a major in the army. He had previously fought in the second Burmese war of 1852-54, as Britain took control of central

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<sup>208</sup> Piemmettawat, 2000, P. 60

<sup>209</sup> Ibid

<sup>210</sup> Piemmettawat , 2000, P. 14

<sup>211</sup> Ibid(n.b. the spelling in this and other sections is taken directly from the book and is Victorian English spelling, so is different from modern English spelling)

Burma, including Rangoon and Moulmein and later had various administrative posts in different parts of Burma. He would later go on to become Chief Political Officer during the third and final Burmese War, as Britain took full control of Burma. In fact he went on to receive the surrender of King Thibaw in 1885.<sup>212</sup>

So, there can be no doubt that the man in charge of overseeing the visit by King Chulalongkorn to Rangoon, Mr. Sladen, was important and very knowledgeable about Burma, administration and warfare. I am sure he would have been able to answer any questions the inquisitive, young Thai monarch had on these topics.

From the reports written by Sladen to his superiors, we learn the following about the visit Rangoon, by the young King.

“Being Buddhist by creed, it became a part of the programme that the King should visit the far famed Shwe Dagon Pagoda at Rangoon and a ceremonial was improvised for the occasion on the afternoon of Saturday the 6<sup>th</sup> January. It was remarked, however, during their visit that the Buddhism of Siam and Burma was not identical as regards many of the outward and visible signs of reverence with which orthodox followers of the creed in Burma are accustomed to do obeisance at the sacred temples. The Siamese party entered these temples with their boots on and their offerings were made without any special regard to the observances which are a cherished portion of Buddhist ritualism as practiced by the people of Burma.”<sup>213</sup>

“The above deviation in their form of worship gave rise in the Burman mind to an idea that their Siamese co-religionists, in adopting European manners and customs, had become imbued to some extent also with a European anti-ritualistic element, to the prejudice perhaps of some sound orthodox Buddhism. But the Burmese race as a rule is too good natured and was too tolerant on the present occasion to seriously regard any heterodoxy in this respect on the part of their foreign visitors.”<sup>214</sup>

From the above quotation we can learn a number of things. The Shwe Dagon Pagoda, arguably the most well-known pagoda in Burma, would I am sure have been known in Thailand at the time, at least in name. King Chulalongkorn was known to be a follower of Buddhism.

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<sup>212</sup> Piemmettawat , 2000, P. 5

<sup>213</sup> Piemmettawat , 2000, P. 5

<sup>214</sup> Piemmettawat, 2000, P.16

It is not known whether the idea for the visit to the pagoda came from the British, the Burmese or the Thai side. Since King Chulalongkorn was a guest in British Burma at the time, as a guess we can suppose that the British proposed the idea, thinking that it would appeal to the King and his entourage. This however is mere supposition and it is equally possible the Thais proposed it as the pagoda was well known to them.

The first thing we can know for sure is that the Thais were able to convince the British that Burmese Buddhism and Thai Buddhism were quite different, when, in fact they both practiced Theravada Buddhism at that time and also today, in the two countries. Following on from this in the quote, we learn that King Chulalongkorn and his fellow Thais entered the Shwe Dagon Pagoda wearing boots and without showing correct Buddhist etiquette in terms of making an offering.

Again, some of the British present, who were knowledgeable about the correct way to behave in a Theravada Buddhist temple, from their experience living in Burma, thought this might be cultural differences between the countries. However Sladen noticed that the Burmese were not pleased with this conduct and thought perhaps the Thais had become too westernized.

Luckily, the Burmese present that day were not offended, or if they were, for whatever reason chose not to display it and the first visit by a Thai monarch to Burma since the Sukkothai era passed without incident. Without the presence of the British, who were controlling the city at the time, I think the outcome may perhaps have been quite different.

King Chulalongkorn, when he made his official visit to the Shwe Dagon Pagoda in 1872, was put in quite a difficult situation I believe. On the one hand, personally as a Buddhist, it is certain that he would have wished to show proper respect in the temple. On the other hand he was a guest of the British, in their territory and the British soldiers did not remove their boots when entering sacred Burmese buildings. He would have been keen, no doubt, to follow their lead and copy their customs, to show them that he was „modern“ and „sophisticated“.

Finally, although it is an old and important Buddhist temple, it should be pointed out that it is a temple built by and for the Burmese. Perhaps both the British and the Thais felt superior to the Burmese and as such, neither side over-worried about offending the locals.

Perhaps King Chulaolngkorn felt guilty about his transgression of Buddhist etiquette for after exiting the pagoda and being shown the poor condition of the platform of one of the pagodas in the temple grounds he promised to pay for the repair of the dilapidated building at his own expense.<sup>215</sup>

As mentioned before in his youth King Chulalongkorn went overseas to learn about modern, western administration first hand. Not only this, but the King ordered an investigation into the financing of public education in Burma, Java and the Malay States.<sup>216</sup> Later on Prince Damrong visited Burma in 1890/1 to study foreign education, as part of a larger tour that also saw him visit Europe and Egypt.<sup>217</sup> In Burma he found John Van Someren, head of Education in British Burma, who was originally recommended as a foreign advisor to the Thai Ministry of Public Instruction. He was later rejected on the grounds that he was too old.<sup>218</sup>

Although Thailand was open-minded enough during this period to look to British controlled Burma for ideas to improve their educational system, it seems that they did not take much from their investigations. Indeed Wyatt writes says they “...seem to have had little influence on the course of educational development”.<sup>219</sup>

During his tour of British Burma in 1872 King Chulalongkorn made a few speeches to the local population and also received a speech from Burmese citizens in Moulmein. According to the speech, King Chulalongkorn was greeted in a very warm and respectful way by the Burmese, hardly as an enemy.

“We would like to address a welcome to the King of White Elephants who is full of might and justice, like a stream flowing from heaven.”<sup>220</sup> The speech continues in this way until going on to say that “...you have established close and friendly relations with the British Government, which is mightier than any other country.”<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Piemmettawat, 2000, P.18

<sup>216</sup> Wyatt, , P. 342

<sup>217</sup> Ibid, P. 138

<sup>218</sup> Ibid P. 264

<sup>219</sup> Ibid P.138

<sup>220</sup> Piemmettawat, 2000, P. 82

<sup>221</sup> Ibid

This point is crucial. Firstly, there is the probability that this speech was checked by the British prior to being delivered, to make sure there were no inappropriate ideas. Or perhaps the Burmese used self-censorship out of politeness or fear of getting in trouble with their colonial rulers. Either way, I think this is crucial to understanding why relations between Burma and Thailand were able to improve during this period. That is to say that the two great historical enemies were dealing with each other through another power. Also it shows that Moulmein was still important on some levels in the early 1870s, although by then its fortunes were beginning to fade.

So, in a sense Britain acted on occasions as a kind of referee, ensuring that the interactions between Burmese and Thais were by and large very smooth.

Following the above mentioned speech King Chulalongkorn made a speech to the Burmese people. In his speech he thanked the Burmese for their welcome, the first visit to Burma by a Thai monarch in many centuries. King Chulalongkorn went on to say that he wished for continued good trade with Burma, which was under the control of Britain.<sup>222</sup> Charney, writing in 2009, describes the city of Rangoon, which King Chulalongkorn also visited, and later sent others to in order to study from the British as follows “...Rangoon was a foreign city erected on Burmese soil.”<sup>223</sup>

These ideas explain how the Thai royalty and elite was able to on the one hand visit Burma to get new ideas, meet the Burmese people and go to their sacred temples and at the same time tell their citizens that Burma and the Burmese are the enemy. That is to say that King Chulalongkorn and the Thai government drew a distinction between British Burma and Burma prior to that period.

Also of course, they visited Burma to meet British people and British ideas and temporarily adopted British customs, for example wearing western clothes and wearing boots in the Shwe Dagon Pagoda to fit in.

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<sup>222</sup> Piemmettawat, 2000, P. 82

<sup>223</sup> Charney, 2009, P. 18

The shoe problem was obviously a major issue and this is demonstrated not just by how many times it is mentioned in books written in the last few decades, but also by the regularity with which it is mentioned in accounts by visitors who spent a day or two in the city.

Finally in this chapter it is worth looking at entertainment within Rangoon and how this was also foreign.

## 4.5

### **City of Foreign Leisure and Pleasure**

What did people do to let off steam in Rangoon? After a hard week of labor or a hard day at the office people wanted to relax but unlike the physical planning of the city or its infrastructure these things, like many businesses, often happened more organically as much of the entertainment was owned and operated by foreign individuals both British and non British.

The city of Rangoon was very foreign when it came to entertainment, for the simple reason that the money was held mainly by Europeans and small numbers of wealthy Indians, Chinese and other Asians.

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis there were many means of being entertained, both legally and illegally, moral and immoral in Rangoon if you had the financial means. The section on the Chinese in the immigration mentions how wealth still denied Asians, Burmese, Chinese, Japanese or Indians access to the most important leisure clubs due to racist rules created by the British. This helped create what J. S. Furnivall termed a „plural society“<sup>224</sup>, meaning that different ethnic, racial, religious and national groups came together in Rangoon often only for the purpose of making money.

However the section on the Chinese also shows one rich Chinese man was able to get heavily involved in horse racing, a popular pastime in colonial Rangoon.

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<sup>224</sup> Kratoska, 2001 (C), p.33

The topic of illegal drugs as entertainment is mentioned in the **Crime and Racial Tension** section of the next Chapter. Prostitution also is found in that chapter. Children from the contact between European male customers and Asian prostitution, is mentioned in the subheading **Eurasians** in this chapter. Cinema, a popular form of entertainment across the globe from the early twentieth century, appeared in Rangoon too as well.

This caused special problems for the colonial authorities and is discussed in the next chapter. The choice of the first film ever screened in Rangoon, the topic, Japanese defeating a Western power and who showed the movie, the Japanese, by chance, is highly significant considering what happened later on.

To earn money for entertainment the natural resources of Burma were exploited and exported by foreigners. How this was done is explored in the chapter **City of Trade**.

## Chapter V

### **Racial Tension, Cosmopolitan Crime and the Downfall of the City**

It is easy to imagine that a large cosmopolitan port city that became prosperous but kept a large gap between the rich and poor had a lot of crime of various kinds. This required a special kind of police force; i.e. a largely foreign one. For example in 1921 there were 117 Burmese constables and 1, 168 Indians.<sup>225</sup> Until 1921 Rangoon offered a significantly better salary than being a police force to attract talented officers both British and Indian to move from India to a less desirable position. When, in 1921 the salary was lowered to being a mere one rupee better than India there were many resignations, 231 in 1922.<sup>226</sup>

It is impossible in this thesis to look at every crime committed during the 90 year period, but the 1920s is a good decade for looking at crime for a number of reasons. By this period the city had money, a large population, mainly foreign, and most companies, institutions and the infrastructure were in place. It is also a good decade to look at because it came between the two world wars and Rangoon was not affected by financial depressions, earthquakes or (much) anti-Government action. Also, of course it is good to look at as there are plenty of records from official sources available for the period as well as some modern writing on the topic. One reason that we have some writings about police procedures during this decade is that arguably the most famous British police officer in colonial Burma was employed in various towns, including Insein near Rangoon, at this time. That officer of course was Eric Blair, better known later on for writing both fiction and non-fiction under the name George Orwell, including of course the novel „Burmese Days“ and several essays about his work in the country.

The topics of racial tension and crime cannot be discussed separately as they are often inter-twined; for example a physical assault with a racial motive and the fact that there are many police officers from overseas patrolling the streets of Rangoon.

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<sup>225</sup> Rangoon: Superintendent, 1923, p.6

<sup>226</sup> Rangoon: Superintendent, 1923, p. 4



Of course, also having a population of people from across the globe also meant criminals came to Rangoon from overseas and committed crimes, for example the smuggling in or out of firearms, illegal drugs and women. All of this helped to create tension.

This all placed a strain on the police force, leading to, for example, the hospitalization of 800 police in 1922, an increase from 561 the year before. This was due to over work owing to a labor shortage that couldn't meet the demand of the constantly increasing population and bad housing and drainage causing health problems.<sup>227</sup>

There were many different crimes committed in Rangoon during the British colonial period of course. One way to categorize them into something relevant for this thesis would be into crimes that involved the port directly and crimes that involved racial hatred.

1921-1922 saw a large increase in crime in the city, due probably in part due to a lack of police as mentioned before. Opium increased by nine percent, illegal firearms by a third and brothels five times.<sup>228</sup>

Illegal importation of firearms, for example during this period was mainly controlled by Japanese and Europeans, specifically French and Germans. The reason that there were so many firearms coming from Western Europe was due to economic difficulties there meaning that revolvers could be brought very cheaply and sold for a profit in Rangoon where they were used by criminals.<sup>229</sup>

Opium came from India and a number of Chinese were involved in illegal gambling clubs.<sup>230</sup> There were also problems for the police with international brothels many of which at this time were run by Chinese and Japanese and featured women from those countries.<sup>231</sup>

Aside from problems involving the import of illegal products and women the police were of course also occupied dealing with problems due to a lack of racial harmony.

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<sup>227</sup> Rangoon: Superintendent, 1923, p.5

<sup>228</sup> Rangoon: Superintendent, 1923, p. 13

<sup>229</sup> Rangoon: Superintendent, 1923, p.16 and p. 17

<sup>230</sup> Rangoon: Superintendent, 1923, p.21 and p. 22

<sup>231</sup> Rangoon: Superintendent, 1923, p. 24

Perhaps one of the worst years for this was 1930 when there were communal riots due to a combination of factors; depression, a poor response to an earthquake, racial tensions and the arrest of famous Indian protestor Gandhi. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of May there was a dock strike as Burmese replaced Indian dock workers.<sup>232</sup> This dock strike escalated into a riot in which hundreds of Indians were killed and injured by Burmese in disturbances that lasted for five days. In the aftermath only two Burmese were convicted due to a general lack of evidence.<sup>233</sup>

There were of course many other racial problems in Rangoon both big and small, sometimes a minor incident between two people who were of different races, but on a number of occasions far more serious and involving for example Buddhist versus Muslim or Burmese and Indian money lenders. Of course there was also a lot of rebellion against the British government by the Burmese sometimes with a racial element.

As a consequence of this censorship became a very serious issue in Rangoon. The censorship took many forms, for example, censoring written material that might cause conflicts between Buddhists and Muslims.<sup>234</sup>

Also there was a lot of censorship of movies, for example the film „The Life Of Buddha“ was banned in Rangoon due to the Buddha being portrayed by a human, in particular an Indian one offending the Burmese.<sup>235</sup>

In her article „The Self-Conscious Censor“ Emma Larkin goes on to mention a number of other examples of how and why films at the time were censored, even more so than in India, so as not to offend the multi-ethnic, multi-religious citizenship of Rangoon. Not only films, sometimes there were even riots over print articles between different religious groups.

Anti-colonial print articles in the vernacular press were also used by the Japanese from the 1930s as one way to gather support for them.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Charney, 2009, p. 25

<sup>233</sup> Collis, 1975, pp.140-159

<sup>234</sup> Larkin, 2003, p. 67

<sup>235</sup> Larkin, 2003, p. 77

<sup>236</sup> Cernea, 2007, p. 80

## 5.2

### The Downfall of Rangoon

As mentioned in Chapter Four, Australia, Canada and New Zealand by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century all feared future invasion by Japan in the future after the Japanese defeated Russia in 1905. This view was not shared at that time by Britain<sup>237</sup>

Back in Rangoon in the 1930s the small Japanese community continued to do business and as time progressed, quietly put in place everything they would need for the future to aid them in taking Rangoon and Burma as part of their Southern Advance in the early 1940s to “liberate” Southeast Asians from colonial rule.

This of course required huge amounts of money, so it was vital to put Japanese banks in the area to funnel funds from Tokyo and elsewhere. The Yokohama Specie Bank was established in 1880 to counter the West and was the first Japanese bank allowed to operate overseas. By 1919 it was handling 44 percent of the total Japanese trade transactions. It was effectively controlled by the Japanese government from its inception and became increasingly active in Southeast Asia, competing aggressively with British exchange banks, as well as aiding the Japanese military invasion of Manchuria in the 1930s.<sup>238</sup>

It is not clear exactly when the Rangoon branch first opened its doors but by the late 1920s it was ranked as one of the biggest banks in Burma and was one of four banks owed a substantial sum of money following the collapse of the Chinese company, Beng Huat, the biggest rice exporter at that time.<sup>239</sup> This suggests that the Yokohama Specie Bank had been around for at least a few years prior to that. However the establishment of a bank in Rangoon by people from another country was unlikely to draw much attention in that period as by 1941 Rangoon, aside from hosting seven different British banks and a handful of Indian banks, boasted branches

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<sup>237</sup> James, 1998, p. 340-341

<sup>238</sup> Turnell, 2009, p. 115-116

<sup>239</sup> Turnell, 2009, p. 124

of banks from China, Netherlands and the USA.<sup>240</sup> However once Japan had attacked Pearl Harbor in America on 7 December, 1941, the staff were asked to leave Burma.<sup>241</sup>

A few weeks later on 24 December, 1941, the Japanese began the aerial bombing of the city of Rangoon.<sup>242</sup> It would be several more months until the Japanese arrived by land to finally take over the city. During this period most of the community of British and other Europeans and the Jews from the Middle East, along with some other foreigners including many Indians fled the city. Indians could not take ships or planes and trains were often reserved for bank staff and their money. The foreign population that fled the city went at first to Mandalay or India. As the numbers of people abandoning the city increased some were forced to walk.<sup>243</sup>

So, the Burmese were abandoned by many foreigners and banks had closed their doors and other services broke down in the city. Finally the Japanese arrived. On March 7 1942 the Japanese invaded Rangoon and then took over the country for a brief time. The details are best described by Corporal Toshio Miura who was there that day in his own words.

“Corporal Toshio Miura, Radio Unit, 33 Division, Rangoon

In the evening of 7 March 1942 I was walking towards Rangoon following the right-hand column, 215<sup>th</sup> Regiment. It was a forced march.....Major Yamanoguchi...my section leader and I went in his big saloon car. An Indian was driving the car. There were four of us including the major’s messenger. We entered Rangoon, and the staff officer said that nobody before us had entered the city. Japanese planes were still bombing the oil tanks. At half past ten, I keyed out a message that the staff officer had written: the first official report of the occupation of Rangoon. This news was soon broadcast throughout the world.”<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Turnell, 2009, p. 106

<sup>241</sup> Turnell, 2009, p. 116

<sup>242</sup> Cernea, 2007, p. 80

<sup>243</sup> Cernea, 2007, pp. 80-95

<sup>244</sup> Tamayama, Kazuo and Nunneley, John, 2000, p. 45

This brief description has many interesting points that tell us a lot about Rangoon from 1852 to 1942. Firstly, that there were Indians and secondly that there was oil. Knowing the history this is of course not surprising. The final sentence is also of great importance; “This news was soon broadcast throughout the world.”<sup>245</sup> This suggests that at the time this was big news, meaning that Rangoon was known around the world and important.

The downfall of the city of Rangoon was caused by foreigners. The Japanese had a modestly sized community there before the war that would not have attracted too much attention from the colonial authorities but the small community was able to spy on the British, set up a bank and help spread anti-British sentiment amongst the Burmese including the infamous 30 comrades.<sup>246</sup> The Burmese in Rangoon were happy to see the British and Indians leave in many cases but would not have derived much pleasure from the violent and destructive way it was carried out and soon realized that one small group of foreigners, the British, were simply replaced with another foreign ruler, the Japanese.

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<sup>245</sup> Tamayama, Kazuo and Nunneley, John, 2000, p. 45

<sup>22</sup> See Cernea, 2007, pp. 80-95 or Myint-U, 2006, Chapter Ten

## **Conclusion**

The title of this thesis is „Rangoon as a Foreign City on Burmese Soil 1852-1942“ and the goal is to prove that is the case, i.e. that Rangoon was controlled by foreigners, full of foreign companies, alien architecture, many mosques, Hindu temples and churches, packed with immigrants and many new ideas and products from outside Burma. Even the name Rangoon was created by the British.

However if it is to be considered as a foreign city on Burmese soil than surely it is wise to discuss the opposite possibility, that Rangoon is a Burmese city on Burmese soil. Given the factors mentioned above what can be offered as a counter argument?

Aside from The Secretariat, the command center of the British Government, the most dominant and physically imposing building of the city, and indeed the reason that the city existed in one form or another for over two thousand years is the Shwe Dagon Pagoda, still standing proud on the hill now.

### **Rangoon as a Burmese City on Burmese Soil 1852-1942?**

This of course should be explored as an idea however odd it may sound it was of course still literally on Burmese soil and had a large Burmese population and the most important pagoda in Burma standing proud on the hill. For the people living in the city their view would have depended on where they were born and who their parents were. Burmese born in the city may have seen a modern metropolis full of alien ideas and people. Jews arriving from Baghdad for example or Japanese coming from Japan, possibly after living in Singapore, would have thought of it not as Burmese, Indian or British, simply cosmopolitan.

Indians arriving in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century if they were from a large Indian city, would have found a home from home, or if they were from the countryside would have an experience not so different from living in Calcutta or Delhi, full of Indians and their

culture and language, but also with foreign architecture and modernity and a cosmopolitan population, controlled by the British.

So far we have considered the views of the Burmese, the Indians and smaller immigrant communities and their offspring. Another group of people, with a valid viewpoint, not yet explored, is the short term visitor. As Rangoon grew rich and modern it received visitors from across the globe, arriving for various reasons. Some came on religious pilgrimage, to see the Shwe Dagon, others for business and later, in the twentieth century, rich visitors arrived from foreign countries for a holiday.

So, what did they find? Before the final Anglo-Burmese War they would have to tell people they were visiting Burma, after that they could say, until 1937 that they were visiting India, at least technically, although Burma was still a province, so they could also say they were visiting Burma. When they arrived by ship in Rangoon did they consider the city to be Burmese?

We are lucky that Rangoon received many visitors during this period and among them some very famous ones, including royalty from Britain and Siam, famous authors and explorers from Europe and even Hoover, a future American president. This means we have a lot of evidence about what they saw and sometimes first-hand accounts of their views about the city.

The Shwe Dagon, aside from being one of the largest, and certainly the highest structure in the city, had another feature that made it stand out, it was on top of a hill and could be seen from far away, usually the first thing people saw from a distance arriving by sea.

W. Somerset Maugham, arriving in 1923, noticed the chimneys and smoke of the Burmah Oil Company before the golden spire of the Shwe Dagon.<sup>247</sup> For Chilean poet Pablo Neruda who worked in the city for a brief time and arrived in 1927, he noticed the “golden funnel” of the Shwe Dagon first.<sup>248</sup> When, in 1857, the last Emperor of Delhi arrived as a political prisoner, one of the British officers accompanying him wrote that he saw the pagoda from a distance of twenty miles away at sea.<sup>249</sup> Prince Damrong of Siam visited Rangoon in 1936 and noticed the oil refineries first.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Maugham, 1995, p. 7

<sup>248</sup> Neruda, 1977, p. 75

<sup>249</sup> Dalrymple, 2007, p. 452

<sup>250</sup> Damrongrachanuphap, 1991, p. 22

Future American president, Herbert Hoover arrived in 1905 on the way to operate a lead mine in Shan State.<sup>251</sup> This project required money from London, an American was in charge and 20,000 workers were required to extend the train lines in Shan State.<sup>252</sup> A project that helped the hinterland to connect more to Rangoon, so natural resources could be exported. Hoover also spotted the Shwe Dagon before anything else when he drew near to the city by ship.<sup>253</sup>

In these and many other examples foreign visitors to Rangoon whether they were from the West or from Asia noticed the Shwe Dagon, a symbol of the rich Buddhist history of the city and indeed of Burma, before anything else. However, by the 1920s some people began to notice signs of commerce and western modernity before they saw the Shwe Dagon, or even perhaps at the same time. This is emblematic of the problem. As Rangoon developed under the British, the Shwe Dagon, Buddhism, Burma and the Burmese became less and less important, but still there and looming large.

Many foreign visitors would have been curious to see inside the She Dagon, a huge building that even in 2013 could be said to dominate the city as its most imposing and well-known building. However, visiting the Shwe Dagon, requires, by Burmese custom, the removal of footwear. This was a major issue from 1852 to 1942 as the British did not wish to adopt this or any other Burmese custom as they found it demeaning and the Burmese saw the wearing of footwear inside the pagoda as an insult. This caused friction between the Burmese and the British and other Europeans and is mentioned many times in travelers' accounts of visits to the city.

In fact in the book „The Traveller's History of Burma“, Gerry Abbot devotes a whole chapter to the boycotts of visits to Burmese temples by the Europeans due to the so-called „Shoe Question“ and Burmese protests against the westerners who entered pagodas wearing shoes or boots. Abbot speculates that in 1273 a senior ambassador of Khublai Khan and his party were executed in the town of Pagan for refusing to remove their shoes. This incident may have led to the sacking of the city by the Mongols as revenge.<sup>254</sup>

Whether the story is true or not, the fact that the story exists highlights how seriously the shoe issue can be taken in Burma. A visitor to Bagan or Rangoon in 2013 will be confronted by

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<sup>251</sup> Pearce, 1965, p. 88

<sup>252</sup> Pearce, 1965, p. 91

<sup>253</sup> Pearce, 1965, p. 88

<sup>254</sup> Abbot, 1998, p. 134



signs in English and in picture form outside all temples reminding them that it is forbidden to enter a Buddhist temple wearing shoes or even socks.

Amongst other visits to the Shwe Dagon by well-known people, the visit by a young Chulalongkorn, the future king of Siam, was very important and significant. However, as mentioned in this thesis on the section exploring that visit in depth, King Chulalongkorn visited a foreign city and mainly interacted with British people and modern British administration and technology and doesn't appear to take any Burmese ideas back to Siam.

### **Rangoon as an Indian City on Burmese Soil?**

After exploring that idea that Rangoon during the period of 1852 to 1942 could still be viewed as a Burmese city we should concentrate on the common view that it was a foreign city, specifically an Indian, in fact British Indian city.

India had influenced Burma in some ways since the time of the Buddha, and of course the Burmese religion, Buddhism, originated in India. Indians had also been living and trading in various places in Burma for centuries, so it may seem that there was potential for good or at least cordial relations between Burmese and Indian people in Rangoon, and if circumstances worked out then it does not seem far-fetched to expect many of the single Indian men who arrived in the cosmopolitan port city to marry with the local ladies.

Sometimes, this was how it worked out, however the relations between the dominant group of the city, the Indians, and the second largest group, the Burmese, were often not good. There was not a large amount of social interaction between the two in the early days as much as anything this was due to language differences. The Indians came from many different places in their country and spoke various languages as their mother tongue. Despite this many of them would have been able to speak so-called Hindustani, the lingua franca of India.

Hindi, the most common language in India and Urdu, a popular language used by Muslims in northern parts of India are in fact very similar and mutually understandable, perhaps in the same way that the Thai spoken in modern day northeast Thailand is close to the language of Laos with some differences in vocabulary, but basically a close cousin.

So many, but not all of the Indians could often communicate with each other and crucially for social and commercial mobility in the foreign city of Rangoon many of the British government workers and traders would also be able to speak Hindustani if they had spent time in India before, which was common in the early days of this period and even in the 1920s British police officers working in British Burma were expected to learn Hindustani and if they already knew that, like George Orwell, then and only then would they be encouraged to become fluent in Burmese or other languages of Burma. These police officers were not studying Burmese, Shan or Karen languages to be polite, they learnt for the purpose of being able to spy on them and understand what was being said about the British.

The British and Indians were able, since the early days of 1852 to work together and the wealthy Indians were also able to socialize with the British to a limited extent. Indians who could speak Burmese would have existed later on, but were never the standard. As time progressed and more Burmese went to foreign schools in Rangoon they would have had the chance to learn English. However, this was also not the situation of most Burmese, and new Indian immigrants arrived every year, often they did not speak English and were not highly educated so they had no common ground with the new generation of educated Burmese.

Most days there was not open hostility between Indians and Burmese in Rangoon from 1852 to 1942. However there were several deadly clashes during the period, the worst occurring in 1930 when there were hundreds of casualties. Why did Burmese physically assault Indians in Rangoon in large numbers on more than one occasion? This is not so easy to answer as there were usually two reasons, firstly some incident that had occurred that day or the day prior and then secondly there was simply lingering resentment from years and later decades before.

The Indians were the main target for resentment because they were the largest immigrant group, but that was not the only reason. They were a living, physical reminder of many things that were embarrassing to the Burmese. They showed them that the city of Rangoon, originally a religious pilgrimage site had become a foreign commercial city. They also represented the shameful fact that Burma had been colonized and became from the late 1880s until 1937, a part of British India. The streets of Rangoon became filled with the sounds of Hindustani (and to a lesser extent English) and richer people were spending handfuls of Rupees, originally Indian currency, but later also the money of Burma.

Although the Shwe Dagon was still the most important religious building in the city by the 1940s and indeed many decades before Rangoon contained many churches, mosques and Hindu temples. This was not new for Burma and could be ignored or tolerated to some extent. However the mosques, aside from physically dominating some areas downtown would also have contributed extra noise in the early morning during the call to prayer for the Muslim community. This would have no doubt irritated the Burmese Buddhists who lived within earshot.

In the minds of Burmese who lived in the countryside and did not come in regular contact with Indians in 1852 the Indians would not perhaps have been badly regarded as after all they were from the land of the Buddha.

However in Rangoon where Burmese saw Indians everyday perhaps even the fact that almost all the Indians would have been Hindus, Muslims or even Jains rather than Buddhists would have been a source of slight anger as it could be seen that they had shunned Buddhism.

The Chinese were more tolerated as they were often Buddhists and were fewer in number than the Indians and so there were less extremely wealthy Chinese than Indians. In nationalist movements in the twentieth century in Rangoon, Burmese focused their anger on a small percentage of Indians who had done well, rather than the masses who stayed only a few years and either returned to India with minimal profit or died in the streets from some combination of disease, poverty and overwork. The Burmese also forgot or at least tolerated the successful Chinese who were smaller in sheer numbers, but perhaps not as a percentage.

The main argument for why Rangoon could not be classed as an Indian city would be that it contained many European style buildings was governed by the British and had a large community of people from across Asia. However, the same would have true of many large Indian cities of the time such as Delhi and Calcutta. So perhaps it would be more accurate to describe Rangoon as a British Indian city on Burmese soil, and technically this was indeed the case after Upper Burma was annexed until 1937, Rangoon was run as part of British India with Rangoon merely the capital of a province of India.

## Final Remarks

Foreigners came from across the globe to Rangoon to seek their fortunes, simply to save a modest amount of money, because they were sent to work here by their superiors or just for a short visit. Many of course also simply used Rangoon as an entry port and quickly moved on to elsewhere in Burma. But it is a mistake to think that the traffic did not flow the other way and perhaps it would be wise for somebody to study and write more about Burmese overseas migration during the colonial period.

Compared to the huge numbers of people who poured into Rangoon and Burma from overseas, the number of Burmese who went to another country was small, but not invisible. For example Penang had a community of Burmese fishermen from the late eighteenth century. In the eighteenth century the community expanded and built the first Buddhist temple on the island, Dhammikarama, which is still standing today and the Burmese New Year, Thankyan is still celebrated in this area nowadays in mid-April. The Burmese living here in the nineteenth century would probably have also worked in the brick making factory in this area. Later on they were joined in this area by Chinese who intermarried with the Burmese and also by a small Thai community and a number of Eurasians. Aside from the Burmese style temple the legacy of this heritage is also preserved in the names of the roads, names which were given by the colonial authorities; Burmah Lane, Burmah Road, Rangoon Road and many others.<sup>255</sup>

So, in Penang the Burmese were able to create a Burmese village on Malay soil, although technically at that point it could also have been called a Burmese village on British soil, and indeed in 1845 Queen Victoria of Britain donated some more land to this area for the construction of a Thai Buddhist temple. The Burmese in Penang took fish from Malayan waters, took some jobs that local people could have done and constructed a building for an alien religion on Muslim soil.

Burmese were also taking jobs and natural resources away from the locals in Thailand during the period when Britain controlled Burma as many of them were involved in the teak industry in northern Thailand, both as laborers and sometimes as company owners.<sup>256</sup> Of course

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<sup>255</sup> Khoo, 2007, p.52-p.54

<sup>256</sup> Suehiro, 1989, p. 57-p.58

compared to what was done to the Burmese in Rangoon and beyond by the British, Indians, Chinese and others these are very minor issues.

A small number of Burmese created and continue to create small Burmese „villages“ on foreign soil as part of larger towns and cities allowing them to perhaps to some extent recreate their homeland and make a modest amount of money. What the British did was take a small Burmese Buddhist pilgrimage town with modest industry and a small foreign population of traders, craftsmen and turn it into a large modern commercial, cosmopolitan British Indian city on Burmese soil, an event that even long after independence still causes the country pain, and embarrassment. This can be shown very clearly by a visit to the city of Rangoon in 2013.

Any visitor to Rangoon in 2013 finds themselves not in Rangoon, but Yangon, an older, Burmese name for the city. Although it is still the most populated and commercial hub of the country, the capital is now in Naypyidaw, a city built from scratch last decade, far physically and mentally from Rangoon. One thing that is also striking about a visit to the Rangoon of 2013 is despite the fact that the buildings constructed by British and other foreigners are all around inside the national museum in Rangoon there is no mention of the colonization of the city and the country. Instead visitors are confronted with the throne of the last King of Burma, Thibaw, and many other items owned by him and other royals. As visitors walk around the huge museum they encounter much of the history of the country prior to the capture by the British, no mention of the tragic fate of King Thibaw as a political prisoner who died in India, and no mention at all of the time when Rangoon was a foreign city on Burmese soil or why this happened. The last room of the museum shows the new modern capital of Naypyidaw, almost as if 1852 to 1942 was just a bad dream that never happened.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> This is based on a visit to the National Museum of Myanmar in Yangon, Myanmar, by Simon Nicholas Duncan on August 6, 2013

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## **Vitae**

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