

Learning with The Irrawaddy, No. 38

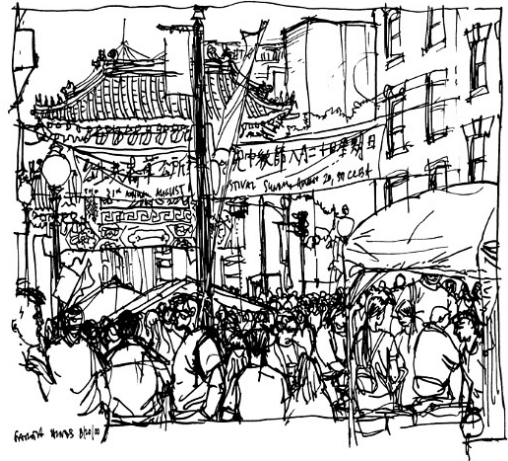
To accompany the **September 2009** issue of The Irrawaddy magazine.

Selected article: *A Visit to Chinatown*

A. Activities before reading

Activity 1 Discussion

- What different ethnic groups live in your area?
- Who is the majority group? Who are the minority?
- Which groups are wealthy? Which groups are poor?
- How do the majority groups feel about the minority groups?
- How do the poor groups feel about the rich groups?



Activity 2 Cartoon

Look at the drawing on the right:

- What do you notice about the place in the picture?
- Based on this picture, write a definition of 'Chinatown'.

Activity 3 Vocabulary

Match the following words with the correct definition

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| 1. Colleagues (<i>n</i>) | a. A time of economic well being |
| 2. Bounded (<i>adj</i>) | b. a set number |
| 3. Sentiment (<i>n</i>) | c. people you work with |
| 4. Boom (<i>n</i>) | d. an inward flow |
| 5. Bastion (<i>n</i>) | e. located within specific limits or boundaries |
| 6. Influx (<i>n</i>) | f. a strong and safe place |
| 7. Quota (<i>n</i>) | g. feeling, beliefs or judgements |

Activity 4 Vocabulary Practice

Fill in the blanks to practice using your new vocabulary

In July 2009, there was an (a)_____ of refugees into the country. The President decided there must be a (b)_____ on the number of people who could enter the country as refugees. "This country is a (c)_____ for our people!" he said. Because the refugees all needed to buy new things, there was a (d)_____. The President made some money but he was not happy. In fact, he had no (e)_____ at all. He used the money to make his country (f)_____ by barbed wire. His (g)_____ told him it was a bad idea, but he didn't listen.

B. Activities during reading

Activity 5

Reading Comprehension

- a. Look at the map on the last page and mark where Chinatown is located in downtown Rangoon.
- b. What percentage of downtown Rangoon does the author say is occupied by Chinatown?
- c. When was Chinatown created?
- d. What are some advantages of Chinatown?
- e. What are some disadvantages of Chinatown?
- f. Where do most Chinese immigrants come from?
- g. How many Burmese live in Rangoon? How many Chinese?

Activity 6

Summarising

Match the one-sentence summaries to the paragraph number they best describe.

- a) The government has not placed any limit on the number of Chinese immigrants allowed into Burma.
- b) Chinatown has vibrant street life, which attracts many people.
- c) Burmese culture is at risk of becoming overwhelmed by the growing influence of Chinese culture.
- d) Some people blame the government but other people say everyone is responsible for preserving Burmese culture from outside influences.
- e) Chinatown is quite large, quite old and is full of many kinds of businesses.
- f) Some people worry that eventually there will be too many Chinese people in Rangoon and it will become like Mandalay.
- g) It seems likely that the growing number of Chinese immigrants will continue to rise.
- h) Some residents of Rangoon enjoy Chinatown for its food.
- i) The government won't do anything to stop the Chinese in Burma because the Chinese government supports the Burmese regime.
- j) Chinese business owners in Chinatown have been very successful.
- k) There are many Chinese migrants in Mandalay and many Chinese businesses.
- l) Because businesses have been successful in Chinatown, more Chinese migrants are setting up there.
- m) Chinese immigrants don't cause problems in other countries, so living together is possible.
- n) Chinatown has the benefit of being culturally different than the rest of Rangoon.
- o) Despite the good food in Chinatown, it is still important to keep Burmese culture alive in Rangoon.

Activity 7

Topic Sentence

Pick the topic sentence which best describes the main idea of the article:

- a) Chinatown is a good place to eat food and own a business.
- b) The Burmese culture in Rangoon may be lost to Chinese influence.
- c) The Burmese regime should do more to stop Chinese immigrants.
- d) Mandalay is too Chinese.

c) Activities after reading

Activity 8 Interpreting Quotes

Match the quote with the person who said it and how they feel.

1. "I'm not choosy, so long as the food is ok."
2. "I started this street-side restaurant with two tables 30 years ago but my business has grown and grown."
3. "We should keep in mind that they're going to swallow us up sooner or later."
4. "Rangoon will be no exception. There's nothing to stop the Chinese coming and no way to stem their increasing influence."
5. "The junta doesn't want to do anything to upset the Chinese Communist government, which shields them from international pressure."
6. "There are many Chinese who live in other countries who live harmoniously with their hosts. We just have to work harder to make sure we keep control over what matters and preserve our culture."

- a. An old Burmese man.
- b. The oldest Burmese man.
- c. A Chinese woman near 50 years old.
- d. The third Burmese man
- e. Theingi.
- f. A second old Burmese man.

- I. ... is sure that Rangoon will be taken over by the Chinese, like Mandalay.
- II. ...thinks that Burmese people need to work harder to keep their culture safe from the Chinese.
- III. ... thinks Burmese culture is in danger from Chinese culture.
- IV. ... thinks Chinese influence is good and has benefited from it.
- V. ... has no opinion if Chinese is better than Burmese.
- VI. ... thinks the government should do more to stop Chinese from coming to Burma but the government isn't.

Activity 9 Place each speaker's opinion on the scale below:

Pro-Chinese

Anti-Chinese

6

Activity 10 Bias

A good journalist researches important issues and explores all sides to the issue so that the reader can make up his or her mind. When journalists do this, we can say that they are **balanced** or **un-biased**.

Look at the previous activity and answer these questions:

- a) Did the journalist write a balanced article? How can you tell?
- b) Which side does the journalist favour?
- c) What kind of information would make this article more balanced?

Activity 11 Journalism

Imagine that you are a journalist in Pakistan who is doing research on new refugees from Afghanistan. As part of your research you interviewed many people. Their interviews are recorded below.

. **Pick which three quotes you will use to write the most balanced article about refugees you can.**

"I have tried everything for my family. I have tried to keep them safe and give them food. I have worked until I was weak from working. It hurts not to be able to provide for my family, but that is the truth. I have tried everything and now I must beg for help and permission to live in this strange new country."

Hakim, Afghan goat herder (69 years old)

"It really is too bad what is happening in Afghanistan. I take pity on all the people there who have lost their homes. They have really gone through some terrible suffering. We should feel proud to be able to offer those people somewhere safe to recover while our politicians work hard to help bring peace to Afghanistan."

Ghazala, Pakistani school teacher (32 years old)

"We don't want charity or people feeding us. We just want an opportunity to contribute to society. We want to work, we want jobs and we want a safe place for our children to go to school and grow up."

Hadiya, Afghan farmer (22 years old)

"We must be very careful about how we offer aid to our neighbours from Afghanistan. If we give too much, it will make the refugees lazy. Then they will not want to work the fields at home because it is a hard life. Instead they will want to live here in the refugee camps in Pakistan. We must provide assistance, but in a careful and thoughtful way."

Hussein, Pakistani shop owner (38 years old)

"Our people should stay in their own country to fight for what they believe in and defend their homes. If everyone becomes a refugee, there will be no one to fight and those with the most weapons will win. Then, there will be no where to go home to."

Amina, Afghan school teacher (56 years old)

"We should welcome our Afghani brothers and sisters with open arms. They need all the help and support we can give them in this difficult time."

Salim, Pakistani university student (21 years old)

"All Afghans are lazy people looking for free food. We should give them nothing!"

Bahaar, Pakistani (75 years old)

"We must absolutely refuse to allow these people into our country. They will eat all our food and take all our jobs. Life is difficult enough for us Pakistanis without us giving all our hard-earned food to strangers. Let them find their own food!"

Malika, Pakistani mother of three children (43 years old)

Activity 12 Research

Brainstorm a list of issues which are important to your community today. Issues are topics which people have very different opinions about so make sure to brainstorm topics about which people disagree.

Brainstorm a list of interview questions you might ask if you were a journalist who wanted to know about people's opinions on the issue.

Interview at least ten different people in the community about their opinions. To be sure you are getting a balanced picture, make sure you talk to many different kinds of people (old, young, male, female, etc). When you are finished, put a check mark beside the three quotes you would use to write a balanced article about the issue.

A Visit to Chinatown

1

Chinese influence is growing in Rangoon, but not everyone is happy about it. “I’m not choosy, so long as the food is okay,” said Theingi when asked if she preferred Burmese or Chinese restaurants. Hungrily tucking into some grilled pork ribs at a sidewalk food stall, she said she hadn’t really thought about whether she had any anti-Chinese feelings, adding that she came with her colleagues to eat in Rangoon’s Chinatown several times a month.

2

Chinatown – which translates as “*Tayote Tan*” in Burmese – is attracting people like Theingi, because, as in most cities where the Chinese have built a distinctive quarter, it offers a refreshing contrast to local culture.

3

First created by the British when they expanded the city in the 1850s, Rangoon’s Chinatown is bounded by Mahabandoola and Shwedagon Pagoda Road to the north and east, and Strand Road and Shwedaungdan Street to the south and west, respectively. Occupying about a fifth of the city’s downtown area, the crowded streets are packed with restaurants, gold and jewelry stores, game centers, cyber cafés, fashion shops, mini-marts, food stalls and fruit vendors.

4

Though not officially called *Tayote Tan*, the area is known as such by those who throng its vibrant street life. For the present it seems to matter little to most people what, if any, anti-Chinese sentiment there may be. For them, Chinatown is a place to go.

5

“I started this street-side restaurant with two tables 30 years ago, but my business has grown and grown,” said a Chinese woman in her early 50s as she prepared lunch for her customers. Today she owns five sidewalk food stalls and two fruit shops, and with the money earned she has bought two apartments for her children in Chinatown and one in Hlaing Tharyar, on the outskirts of the city.

6

The boom in business and rising property values has made Chinatown a center for Chinese migrants, but in a teashop nearby a group of Burman men saw the increasingly prosperous quarter as a threat to the former capital.

7

“We should keep in mind that they’re going to swallow us up sooner or later,” said an elderly Burmese man, warning that Rangoon’s residents should consider how the face of Mandalay, the country’s second largest city, has changed.

8

The last bastion of the Burmese kings before the entire country fell to Britain in 1885, Mandalay has fallen sway to a new wave of outsiders – Chinese migrants. The growing Chinese community in Mandalay continues to attract migrants from Yunnan Province in southwestern China, who are now deeply involved in many sectors of the local economy. Chinese-owned hotels, guesthouses, restaurants and small businesses have sprung up, and Chinese festivals are firmly embedded in the city’s cultural calendar.

- 9 The men agreed that the influx of Chinese migrants and their growing influence was probably unstoppable.
- 10 “Rangoon will be no exception,” one of them said. “There is no reason to stop the Chinese coming and no way to stem their increasing influence. They have settled all over the country, and it would be impossible to root them out. Rangoon’s 6.4 million Burmese are bound to fall under their influence.”
- 11 Another man thought the situation was made worse by the military government, which has no quota for Chinese migrants entering the country.
- 12 “The junta doesn’t want to do anything to upset the Chinese Communist government, which shields them from international pressure,” he said.
- 13 While many blame the military government for allowing the Chinese to come in such numbers, the oldest in the group said it was up to the Burmese not to let outsiders get too much influence.
- 14 “There are many Chinese in other countries who live harmoniously with their hosts,” he said. “We just have to work harder to make sure we keep control of what matters and preserve our culture.
- 15 “I enjoy going to *Tayote Tan* every now and then, but I wouldn’t want every town in Burma to look so Chinese,” the old Burman said.

