

ONOMASTIC TREASURE OF BURMESE PERSONAL NAMES AND NAMING PRACTICES IN MYANMAR

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Abstract

This paper discussed names and onomastics from a Myanmar perspective. This study aimed to remark the use of personal names and naming practices among Myanmar people in Southeast Asia. At birth, Burmese names provide more insights into social, cultural and political events. The basic function of Burmese names is to identify individuals, and the derivative function is to express psychological desire and inheriting cultural significance. Presently in Myanmar, people are so concerned about children with unusual names that they are regulated. When we study the complexity and variety of naming in Myanmar Culture, this study applied multiperspectivising that approach names are classified successively according to different criteria. This method of this study simplifies complexity and strengthens the variety. After sorting out and exploring the ways and meanings of Burmese people's names, this paper explains the psychological significance of people's wishes and beliefs reflected by names and the operating mechanism of Myanmar people's cultural psychology in naming practice. Naming practice also reflect Myanmar people's cognition of the laws of nature, characteristics of things and social attributes. In addition, the importance of using astrological formulas in Burma's nomenclature system is discussed.

Keywords: Onomastics, Anthroponymy, Name, Meaning.

INTRODUCTION

Naming of people is a universal phenomenon, the anthroponomic systems of different cultures are nonetheless reminiscent of one another in many respects. Myanmar people are called Burmese (the official names of the people have not been changed along with the country's name). Bamars. Later Burling (2003) and Satarupa Dattamajumdar et al (2017) stated that the majority ethnic group in Myanmar is the Burmans and Myanmar language is a combination of noun (singular and plural) and adjective. It refers to the Burmese people's language and culture. The Burmese language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language family, and Burmese people makes up 68% of the population. The majority ethnic groups speak Burmese and live mainly in the central area. Karen, Kachin, Qin and other tribal groups living around the hilly plains region.

Due to the differences in the knowledge structure, cognitive style, experiences, aesthetic taste and individual desire of different Myanmar people, there are many different and complex phenomena in naming people, but in general there are still many common characteristics. For example, when Myanmar people naming people, they attach great importance to gender and respect the elderly. Seniority and social status are also considered as part of their nomenclature. In addition, Burmese people like to add their birthplace before their name to indicate their historical origin and place of residence. The Myanmar people also give names to baby according to their own understanding of some objects' characteristics, because these characteristics represent their wishes and intentions for the child, and they want the child's personality to be similar to these awesome characteristics.

Historically, a person's name contains many meanings and information. The name is descriptive, always evolved from nouns and adjectives (Reaney, 1967). Before the 14th century, most of people had only one name (such as Robert and Henry).

Until 1920s, Myanmar people preferred using one or two words in their names. This generation is described to be mostly dominated by elder people and the following table shows the names of elder people. The names are divided to include both men and women.

Table 1
Myanmar Personal Names

No	Men	Women
1	U Ba	Daw Myint
2	U Ni	Daw Shwe
3	U Mya	Daw Swe
4	U Sein	Daw Yi
5	U Zaw	Daw Aye
6	U Hla	Daw New
7	U Than	Daw Mya
8	U Thant	Daw Yu
9	U San	Daw Win
10	U Soe	Daw Kyi
11	U Min	Daw Maw
12	U Thein	Daw San
13	U Lin	Daw Kyin
14	U Thaw	Daw Tint
15	U Htun	Daw Tin
16	U Ngwe	Daw Yin
17	U Win	Daw Than
18	U Aung	Daw Mi
19	U Hla	Daw May
20	U Thin	Daw Aye
21	U Po	Daw Ohn
22	U Khin	Daw Su
23	U Tha	Daw Myine
24	U Cho	Daw Nyunt
25	U Han	Daw Mar

Burmese people don't have family names, but everyone has a first name. "Daw" is a term of respect or address for women. "U" is a term to show respect for men. Women have their own names and retain them even after marriage. Children are usually named after the day of the week they were born, which is indicated by certain letters of the Burmese alphabet. For example, Monday is denoted by Kyaw, Khin, Kyu, etc; and Tuesday is denoted by San, Su, Sint, etc.

The Burmese do not ordinarily have surnames. The usual pattern for the name of a man or a woman is simply the courtesy title (T), followed by the given name (X) which is composed of one element, two elements, or three.

Men's Names

U NU

T X

Ko BA THAN

T X

Women's Names

Daw THIN

T X

Ma HLA HLA

T X

Bo KHIN MAUNG GALE

T X

Myanmar people are usually called by their entire name. It's not necessarily for them to have any common elements in the family given names. Five names above could apply to members of the same family.

Use of Astrological Formula in Names

The name of a Burman infant is ceremoniously chosen by the family members according to a set astrological formula for apportioning the characters of the Burmese syllabary among the days of the week. The roman letters representing the Burmese characters assigned to the days of the week are:

<u>Birthday of the Infant</u>	<u>Possible Initial Letters of Given Names</u>
Sunday	Any vowel
Monday	K, G, Ch, Ng
Tuesday	S, Z, Ny
Wednesday (until noon)	L, W
Wednesday (noon until midnight)	Y, R (in Arakan), Sh
Thursday	P, B, M
Friday	Th, H
Saturday	T, D, N

As the chart shows, the given name of an infant born on Sunday should begin with a vowel; that of a Monday child with K, G, Ch, or Ng, etc. An initial H does not necessarily mean the child was born on Friday since the letter H may be used in transliteration to represent another character besides the one represented in the chart above.

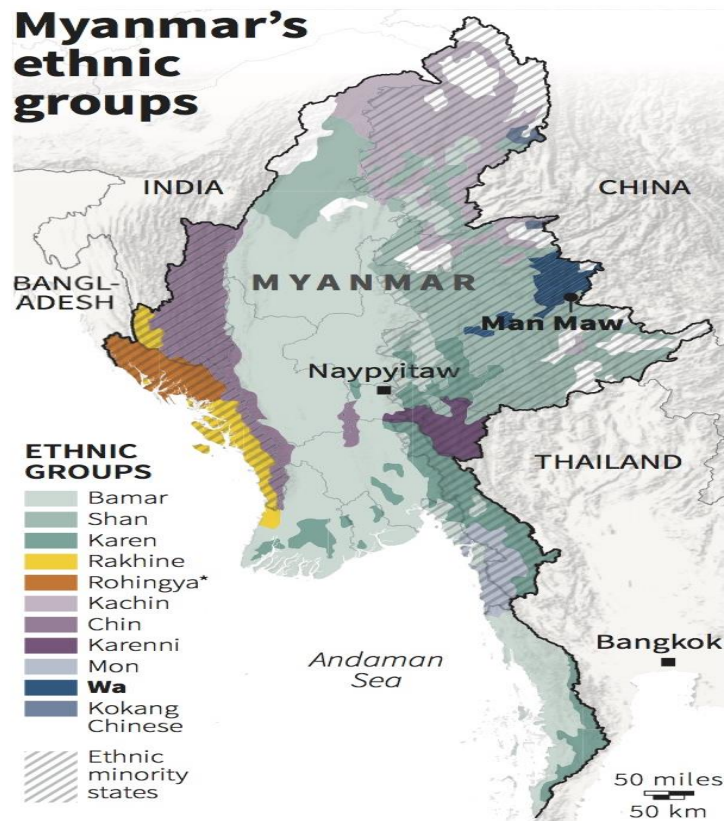
Using the chart, it can be deduced that Maung NGWE KAING
T
X

was born on Monday because the initial letters of his given name are Ng and K; that Ma NE TUN
T
X

was born on Saturday because of the initial N and T, and so forth. In the two examples above, both elements of the given names follow the chart. Some Burmese families apply this formula only to the first element. Example: Ma KWE YO.

T X

The K of KWE shows she was born on Monday; the YO does not follow the chart. Only a small percentage of Burman families, however, would altogether ignore the time-honored astrological procedure in naming their children.



* Includes other Rakhine Muslim minorities
 Source: GeoEPR, ETH Zurich

Figure 1. Myanmar's Ethnic Groups

Source: Burma- insurgency and politics of ethnicity (Matin Smith_2017)

METHODOLOGY

This paper focuses on the semantic analysis of Burmese names to attract readers' attention to the designation of names in Myanmar. Mouton (2001) commented that “the research design is a blueprint of how one intends to conduct the research and direction it will take”. Through library research method, general information regarding the historical background of the naming practice in Myanmar is obtained. Moreover, database such as Google Scholar (<https://scholar.google.com>) was used in seeking relevant information. This paper mainly used the qualitative approach as it is in the interpretative paradigm. This study aimed to contribute to an understanding of the human culture in different contexts and of a perceived situation.

DISCUSSION

Burmese Naming System

One of the Blogger Maung Ba Kaung wrote about himself that “I was born at home on Saturday, at 10 in the morning. A few days later, acquainted astrologer of my mother from the village, made *Zar Tar* and inscribed my name, Tun Ba Kaung, on it. At least that is how I know the time I was born, according to my *Zar Tar* record. When I am educated and could understand the information written in *Zar Tar*, it becomes my precious treasure as possession of traditional value that belongs to me from my infancy. *Zar Tar* is a stack of palm leaves smeared with residual oil and folded into a handy packet. It is an old-fashioned birth certificate, declare the name of newly born babies, usually prepare by monks and astrologers, by going through the complex calculations of the location of stars, sun, and the date and time of the birth of new babies”.



Figure 2. Zar Tar

Source: <http://manuscriptevidence.org/wpme/sanskrit-and-prakrit-manuscripts/>

The choice of name is extremely important to Myanmar people. They believe that names can represent longevity, wealth, health, virtue, devotion to work, parents' dreams and hopes for their children, symbols of grand and important events, etc. Some people even have long stories behind their names. To some extent, giving names to Myanmar people is same as giving names to different places. For example, monuments, tombstones or signs have been built to give names to places so that historical information can be passed down from generation to generation. We can only study the origins of the few surviving historical names, while names elsewhere remain a mystery and some of them even distort their original meanings (Maung Ba Kaung,2008).

Parents naturally want to do everything well for their children, starting with a carefully chosen name that places great hope in the child's future as a decent person. The belief is that the meaning and syllables of the name affect the wheel of fortune of the owner of the name. Sometimes people around always give others nicknames. Usually, the nickname has the rhythm, and sometimes nicknames can be offensive, like a pet name given by friends. But in Myanmar society, it is not common to call friends or others by nicknames. Myanmar people choose their names from various forms: Some of them choose one-word names, most typical Burmese families prefer two-word or three-word names, and four-word names are not common. In general, a word can be one syllable, but there are still many excellent words that make up one syllable and have beautiful meanings. (Maung Ba Kaung, 2008).

For example, one-syllable words are Thant, Win, Tun, etc. Two-syllable words are Nanda, Oakar, Ohmar and so on.

Basically, the first syllable on behalf of which day the person was born. Therefore, as long as you know the person's name, you can know the day of the week when the person was born. For example, the first syllable of the name “Tun Ba Kaung Tun” means that the one born on Saturday. (Maung Ba Kaung, 2008).

Named with Two Elements

During around 1950s, people in this period preferred two words included their names. Each name will be started with prefix “Ko” for men and “Ma” for women. The prefix “Ko” refers to older brother and it can be used for a young man of student age. If you first met a young man when he was at student age and got to know the prefix “Ko”, then even many years later you will still use “Ko” with his name because both of you still stand in the same relationship with each other. There are analogies with the custom among English speakers of using “Mr” with the surname for some relationships and first name for others. For women’s names, the equivalent of “Ko” is “Ma” defines as older sister.

Names of the Males

1. The name “Ko Kaung Thu” can be meant like the word “Kaung” is good and the other word “Thu” is person. So, People may assume the name of the person is mentally nice.
2. The name “Ko Maung Maung” in which the word “Maung” defined as younger brother of woman. The same meaning of these two words “Maung Maung” are used to be more emphasized.
3. The name “Ko Ba Thaung” can be defined as the word “Ba” for paternal status and the other word “Thaung” for ten thousand.
4. The name “Ko Ba Sein” can be remarked as the word “Ba” for paternal position and the other word “Sein” for diamond.
5. The name “Ko Hla Maung” can be referred to the word “Hla” for handsome and the other word “Maung” for younger brother of woman.
6. The name “Ko Myint Aung can be defined as the word “Myint” for high and the other word “Aung” for both success and achievement. So, Myanmar society assumes that naming these two words together may be getting higher level of achievement comparing with competitors.
7. The name “Ko Kyaw Thu” can be meant as the word “Kyaw” for famous and “Thu” for people. Therefore, people thought the owner of this name can be known by so many people either the whole country or worldwide. Sometime people’s thinking would be right because we have one of the famous actor whose name is “Kyaw Thu”.
8. The name “Ko Chit Kaung” can be referred to “Chit” for either love or favorite and the other word “Kaung” for good.
9. The name “Ko San Hlaing” can be defined as the word “San” for ideal and the other word “Hlaing” for be abundant and plentiful.
10. The name “Ko Mya Maung” can be meant by the word “Mya” for emerald and the other word “Maung” for younger brother of woman.

Name of the Females

11. The name “Ma Khin Hla” in which the first word “Khin” refers to friendship and the other word “Hla” defines beauty for women.
12. The name “Ma Myint Kyi” in which the first word “Myint” means level of height and the other one “Kyi” indicates that to be clear.
13. The name “Ma Mya Win” in which the first word “Mya” remarks emerald and the other word “Win” defines pale yellow color and known as compound.
14. The name “Ma Yin Shwe” in which the first word “Yin” sometimes defined as chest and sometimes it refers to either politeness or be courteous depend on using different alphabet with character even the pronunciations are the same. the second word “Shwe” indicates as gold.
15. The name “Ma Tin May” in which the first word “Tin” defines as set, keep, retain or get. The second word “May” refers to mother.
16. The name “Ma Saw Yin” in which the first word “Saw” refers to earliness and the second word “Yin” sometimes defined as chest and sometimes it refers to either politeness or be courteous depend on using different alphabet with character even the pronunciations are the same.
17. The name “Ma Khin Myine” in which the first word “Khin” defined as friendship and the second word “Myine” refers to be rich in variety as indicating with positive points.
18. The name “Ma Tin Myine” in which the first word “Tin” means as set, keep, retain or get. The second word “Myine” cites to be rich in.
19. The name “Ma May Thet” in which the first word “May” refers to mother and the second word “Thet” remarks as either breath or life.
20. The name “Ma Win Shwe” in which the first word “Win” means the color of pale yellow and also known as compound. The second word “Shwe” defined as gold.

Honorific Expressions and Meaning

With “U and Daw” when every name is started, “U” is honorific in Myanmar, roughly equal to “Mister”. The word “U” tend to be used the launch of men’s names when they are graduated as well as they start their career job such as government servant or company staff or doing business themselves. Also “U” is the same as a word meaning “uncle” and “Daw” means “aunt”. This word “Daw” conveys esteem or respect when used in addressing or referring to a woman, like both Miss and Mrs. So, it is possible to use not only single but marital status for a woman either with the same situation those of above mention men’s name. Besides, “U” and “Daw” appear as elements in personal names for men and women.

This paper is presenting the meaning of the words in the names which are included on the table. The word “Ba” means as paternal position so it cannot used in women’s name except describing father’s name as family name for women. The word “Myint” refers to high, so people name their child with this word to be getting positive higher or height level of condition within his or her life time. The word “Ni” cites red color so parents give their child’s name with this word to be brave. The word “Shwe” defines as gold, so people give their child’s name with this word to be rich throughout his or her life time. The word “Mya” refers to emerald that is why it can be valued something like gold, also Myanmar people assume that paying this word “Mya” as a name always remains cool in someone’s life span owing to emerald’s unique color. The word “Swe” cites either relative or friendship. Therefore, people assume that owner of this name can be friendly with others in the society. The word “Sein” relates with diamond so Myanmar people like this word to be named due to the value of diamond and its remarkable characteristics such as highest hardness and transparency. The word “Yi” refers to laugh. Therefore, people want to give their children this word “Yi” as a name to get pleasure whole of their life.

The word “Zaw” can be defined as both excellence and exploitation. It can be used when parents want their child to be smart. The word “Aye” refers to calm. People use this word as a name to stable their life status. The word “Hla” means handsome for both men and women. The word “Nwe” couldn’t be meant anything else but it could be combined to the other words. When it relates with the word “bin” (the meaning of “bin” is both plant and tree in English) that means creeper or vine plant. People prefer to be named with the word “Nwe” especially for women, but this word is very rare for men due to beautiful intangible feature of creeper and vine. The word “Than” remarks million for positive trend as well as hair or head louse for negative perspective. When people use this word in name, they assume million as optimistic view and owner of this name could be wealth in his or her life, because everyone in Myanmar community consider that the word “million” could be known as money or buck. The word “Thant” defines both clean and purify. Therefore, Myanmar people view that owner of this name might be not only physically clean but mental also. This word “Thant” has very famous history for worldwide people by knowing. The word “Yu” alone doesn’t mean anything else but people tend to be named with this word mostly use for women due to it’s beautiful pronounce. The word “San” conveys popularity which can be named as both men and women. The word “Win” refers to pale yellow in color.

The word “Soe” alone couldn’t be assumed anything else but when it combines with other words, the meaning tends to be either administration or governance. The word “Kyi” defines purity so the owner of this name can be assumed mentally clear. The word “Min” defined as king. The word “Maw” remarks not only pride but also prestige. The word “Thein” indicates hundred thousand. Therefore, people want to apply this word as a name to be wealth. The word “Lin” refers to light. People use this word as a name with the expectations to be shine throughout their life. The word “Kyin” alone couldn’t be defined anything else but it could be related with the other words meant pain for gold and fell pain, and this word tend to be used as a name for both men and women. The word “Thaw” alone doesn’t mean anything else, but when it combines with another one or two words, the meanings can be changed to Asoka tree or Asoka flower. The word “Tint” means proper as well as befitting. The word “Htun” refers to either light or shine. The word “Tin” means set, keep, retain or get. The majority in Myanmar society use this word to be named as an optimistic view. The word “Ngwe” defined as silver. The word “Yin” refers to both breast and chest. On the other hand, it means polite or courteous by using different alphabet and characters even the pronounces are the same. The word “Aung” means either success or achievement but it only used as man’s name, and it’s rarely for using by woman in this generation. Both the words “Mi” and “May” indicate mother. The word “Thin” means pleasant aroma. The word “Po” refers to extra or surplus of positive things such as money, wealthy, education and so on. The word “Ohn” indicates either coconut or pillow depend on the spelling of alphabet with characters. The word “Khin” means friendship. The word “Su” defined as collection or mass. The word “Tha” remarks pleasure. The word “Myine” means to be rich in variety as indicating with positive points. The word “Cho” defined as sweet. The word “Nyunt” indicates that be the best. The word “Han” defined as either comfort or convenience. The word “Mar” means hardness. The word “Oo” has the same pronounce with the spelling of “U”. Nonetheless, their meaning is different from one another base on usage. “Oo” here refers to either foremost or vanguard.

The word “Saw” always refer to early with positive view as an early bird. The word “Htay” means wealth. The word “Hlaing” defines to be abundant and plentiful. This word used to be unique comparing with other words because the royal family preferred to be named with this word when they were in monarchy system. The word “Lwin” means bright when it is used in color. The word “Kywe” indicates porcelain. The word “Htar” defined as both place and keep. The word “Wun” remarks not only minister but also senior government servant, it refers either burden or load too. The word “Nyo” defined as brown color. The word “Ye” refers to bravery but it often indicates red color. The word “Nyein” remarks peace. The word “Nyi” defined as little or younger brother. The word “Pu” refers to be short. The word “Pe” also means either father or daddy. The word “We” sometimes defined as plenty of, and it sometimes refers to distribution. The word “Thaung” indicates that ten thousand. The word “Khaing” defined as firmness. The word “Tha” refers to be exceeded. The word “*Myo*” means relatives and it sometime similar to the word “*Swe*”. The word “*Chit*” refers to love. The word “*Ngwe*” defined as silver. The word “*Saw*” means chief. The word “*Thet*” means either breath or life. The word “*Htoo*” means different from others such as habit, behavior, character, acting, and the like. The word “*Thin*” refers to aroma of something. The word “*Han*” means appearance. The word “*Chaw*” defined as both be handsome for man and be pretty for woman like the same meaning of the word “Hla”. The word “*Kaung*” defined as goodness. The word “*Htin*” means visible. The word “*Pwint*” refers to blossom. The word “*Ni*” remarks red colour. The word “*Htaik*” defined as be worthy. The word “*Yeh*” refers to bravery. The word “*Si*” means orderliness. The word “*Toe*” is in the increase. The word “Moe” refers to rain. The word “Nu” defined as either tender or delicate. The word “Phyu” refers to white in color.

CONCLUSION

This paper focuses on the individual names and naming habits of Myanmar people. Naming is considered as an important thing in Myanmar society. Therefore, people sometimes choose names based on the names of family members. Traditionally, naming a child after a distinguished or respected person was considered an honor to the child because it was believed that the name bearer would gradually imitate that distinguished figure. According to Elena C. C & Cosmin C. B et al (2015), general knowledge matters because informed people will be able to understand that cultural diversity assimilation implies accepting other people’s cultural values while keeping our own specific values and identity. Culture and civilization could support the improvement of the education and training systems so that people be equipped with skills that match the requirements of a 21st century society.

Myanmar people express their psychological wishes, beliefs, ideas and intentions through the cultural mechanism of naming, which also reflects cultural change and culture adaptation. This paper also pointed that naming the newborn is not independent of the social events. The environment in which a child is born is responsible for many of the reasons behind naming a person. Therefore, naming practices of Myanmar people not only reflects the essence of great objects, but also explains the natural law and the changes of the Myanmar society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study suggested that nomenclature should be continued to strengthen the traditions, culture and customs of Myanmar. The contact with the cultural values makes us rethink how we see our historical traditions, how we develop human character and personality, our identity and more provides better understanding of facts, develop social skills, improves the quality of our people, develop the civic feeling, etc. These practices will ensure that the younger people understand and will be proud of their traditions, cultures and customs, which is most important to the younger generation. By retaining the naming habits and practices, Myanmar people’s culture and tradition can be sustained. At the same time, their language, customs, rituals and psychological patterns can also be preserved and developed. Similarly, a rich understanding of cultural values and its impact on the minds of humanity is central to effective our skills of leadership and citizenship that we believe.

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