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MYANMAR OR BURMA: EXPLORING THE DUAL NARRATIVES OF NATIONAL IDENTITY DILEMMA

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Abstract. This article explores the dual narratives surrounding the national identity dilemma in Myanmar, focusing on the naming issue – “Myanmar” versus “Burma.” It analyzes which name best represents indigenous linguistic practices and aligns with current acceptance within internal and external communities. Common perspectives portray “Myanmar” as an illegitimate name imposed by the military government in 1989, while “Burma” is considered legitimate due to its historical usage. Others argue that neither name possesses true legitimacy due to their lack of ethnic neutrality. Using linguistic and historical analyses within a postcolonial framework, this study treats the naming issue as a vital aspect of national identity formation, broadening the scope of cultural studies to include semantic and onomastic as crucial to cultural identity. Using primary and secondary sources as well insider views of empirical evidence, this article employs a qualitative research approach based on an inductive methodology. It explores varying academic perspectives from scholars, and it then analyzes the reflection of indigenous linguistic practices, historical regional contexts, part of decolonization process, and their current acceptance of “Myanmar” vs. “Burma” through historical, linguistic, and semantic lenses. The study concludes that the naming issue primarily involves linguistic and phonetic considerations, despite its politicization and association with identity concerns. Historically, “Mranma,” “Myanma,” and “Myanmar” served as official names in the Burmese language, while colloquial terms like “Bama” or “Barma” were used interchangeably. The accent of “Myanmar” is closer to the indigenous and Eastern geographical contexts, and “Burma” is more aligned to the Western geographical contexts of historical Myanmar civilization. The official name “Burma” in English was introduced during colonization, and while some still use it, Myanmar is working to reclaim its indigenous naming traditions as part of the decolonization process.

Keywords: Myanmar, Burma, nation, identity, decolonization

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Научная статья

МЬЯНМА ИЛИ БИРМА: ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ ДВОЙСТВЕННЫХ ТРАКТОВОК ДИЛЕММЫ НАЦИОНАЛЬНОЙ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТИ

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Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются дискуссии о названиях Мьянмы, противопоставляются «Мьянма» и «Бирма» в связи с языковыми практиками коренных народов и современным восприятием названия страны. Проблема названия государства высту-

пает как жизненно важный аспект формирования национальной идентичности. Автор с помощью лингвистического и исторического анализа выявляет взгляды на особенности легитимности названия с помощью качественных методов, а именно использования индуктивной методологии в русле постколониальных подходов. Выявляется значение ономастики и номенклатуры в формировании национальной идентичности и культурологии.

Ключевые слова: Мьянма, Бирма, нация, идентичность, деколонизация

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Introduction

Myanmar, also known as Burma, is recognized for its diverse population, which includes rich histories, languages, religions, and ethnic nationalities. Myanmar regained its Independence in 1948 and currently, it is also entangled in internal political and armed conflicts, rooted in its incomplete nation-state and national identity formation. In 1989, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) changed the country's English name "Union of Burma" to the "Union of Myanmar" by claiming the latter represented all indigenous peoples. While most countries and other major international organizations have accepted the new names, some governments, activist groups, and media outlets still use the old names primarily as a form of protest against military regimes. The conventional wisdom or manipulated discourse suggests that "Myanmar" is an illegitimate name imposed by the military government in 1989, while "Burma" is viewed as legitimate due to its historical usage; or that neither name is truly legitimate due to their lack of ethnic neutrality.

Politicized media representations and discourse – resilient for over 30 years – surrounding this naming issue are now readily accessible on international and social media, where they are influenced, consciously or unconsciously, by political and racial perspectives [1–5]. Moreover, various external and internal entities are placing excessive emphasis on such as ethnonationalism [6,7], diversity [8], conflict [9], and new identity formation [10] including the fundamental issue of what to call the country, Myanmar or Burma [11]. Some recent scholarly accounts, based on controversial historical interpretations and irrelevant organizational details, it seems as if, appear intentionally to exaggerate and complicate the process of national identity formation in Myanmar [12].

While "Myanmar" is the officially recognized term by the United Nations, politicized debates and discourse surrounding the country's name significantly influence public perceptions of collective national identity. First, they play a crucial role in national identity formation, as the debate between the names "Myanmar" and "Burma" underscores deeper questions related to the nation's fundamental identity. Second, these debates emphasize cultural pride and heritage, as they involve a choice between colonial narratives and the affirmation of indigenous identity. Third, these discourses influence political dynamics by elucidating the tensions between historical legacies and contemporary governance, thereby shaping public perceptions of leadership and national identity. Fourth, they have the potential to galvanize civil society and activism; as citizens engage with the naming issue, it can serve as a rallying point for broader discussions concerning

autonomy, rights, and representation. Finally, they can affect global perceptions and advocacy, particularly through the framing of the struggle between autocracy and democracy. Consequently, the politicization and influence on Myanmar's national identity formation constitute a significant impediment to achieving satisfactory nation-building and collective national identity.

Therefore, it is important to explore the dual narratives surrounding the national identity dilemma in Myanmar, specifically regarding which name more accurately reflects indigenous linguistic practices and aligns with contemporary acceptance and efforts at collective national identity formation. While academic insights exist on the naming issue, Myanmar or Burma, they also require further inductive reasoning and clarification to mitigate potential exaggeration, misinterpretations, and manipulation by vested interests. A comprehensive analysis of naming controversies from a postcolonialist perspective, integrating diverse perspectives without prejudice regarding the agents of change, remains absent from the Myanmar (Burma) Studies on nation building and collective national identity building. Therefore, this article aims to address this gap.

Using primary and secondary sources as well as insider views of empirical evidence, this article employs a qualitative research approach based on an inductive methodology. Firstly, it explores varying academic perspectives from three native Burmese speakers and three non-native speakers and, it then analyzes the reflection of indigenous practices, historical regional contexts, the context of ethnicity, and their current acceptance of "Myanmar" vs. "Burma" through historical, linguistic, and semantic lenses. It draws on insights from scholars selected through a thorough review of their academic status and contributions to the history of Myanmar. The research also partly traces the evolution of national identity and Myanmar's efforts to reclaim its indigenous naming traditions as a part of decolonization.

From the point of methodology, this exploration contributes to the identity literature, highlighting the complexities of nomenclature and its role in the decolonization process. Additionally, the research enriches identity studies by highlighting the impact of politicized media representations on public perceptions. It illustrates how a country's name shapes collective identity and expands cultural studies to include semantic and onomastic as a crucial element of cultural identity. Using linguistic and historical analysis within a postcolonial framework, the study addresses Myanmar's naming issue as part of national identity formation and decolonization.

Moreover, from a broader perspective, this study will provide an in-depth understanding of specific instances and complex issues related to national identity, colonial history, and ethnic diversity concerning the country's naming issues. It serves as an illustrative example of how colonial legacies persist and affect identity formation, offering a concrete illustration of broader global themes such as post-colonialism and nationalism. Additionally, it will enhance comparative insights and policy implications that can inform policymakers and practitioners about the complexities of national identity and ethnicity in addressing similar issues in other contexts. The study will also trace historical continuity over time, revealing how past events shape present conflicts and societal attitudes, which is crucial for addressing ongoing crises and issues, not only in Myanmar but globally.

Exploring the Historical and Linguistic Dimensions of ‘Myanmar’ vs. ‘Burma’: Insights from Scholarship

Perspectives from prominent scholars who are native speakers: Dr. Than Htun, an influential Myanmar historian with a Ph.D. in history, who earned Ph.D. from the University of London’s School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), stated in ancient times, “Myanmar” referred to ethnicity. Over time, as people settled, places were named “Myanmar Su,” “Myanmar Ywar,” and “Myanmar Pyay.” The Mon stone inscription (မွန်ကျောက်စာ ၉ ခ/၄၂၊ ဒီ ၄၂ အိပ်ချ် ၁၂) from 1102 AD refers to “Myanmar” as “Mirmar” (မိရ်မာ). During the reign of King Hti Hly (1084–1113), carpenters from the “Mon”, “Pyu”, and “Mirmar” communities contributed to the new palace, marking the earliest reference to Myanmar in stone (all) inscriptions. In Myanmar (ethnic) inscriptions from 1312 AD and 1342 AD, “Mammar” (မမ္မာ) appears, and in AD 1238, “Myanmar Pyay” is found, where “Pyay” in ancient Burmese means the king’s capital [13. P. 103–104].

Thant Myint-U, a Burmese-American historian and grandson of former United Nations Secretary-General U Thant, who earned his Ph.D. in history from Cambridge University, noted on this issue that, about a thousand years ago, the term “Myanma” appeared in inscriptions describing the people and language of the Irrawaddy River valley. Over time, kings identified as *Myanma* kings, and their realm as *Myanma Pyi* (Myanma country) or *Myanma Naingngan* (Myanma lands). By the 17th century, it was commonly pronounced “Bama.” When Europeans arrived, they referred to the country as variants of “Burma,” such as “Birmanian” for the Portuguese and “Birmanie” for the French, likely derived from “Bama.” Under British rule, “Burma” became the official English name, while it remained *Myanma Pyi* in Burmese. Controversy arose in 1989 when the military government changed the country’s English name to Myanmar, claiming it represented all indigenous peoples – a claim disputed by many minorities who do not identify with the term. The change was driven by the government’s nativist agenda to strengthen its ethno-nationalist image. In Myanmar, personal names, place names, and ethnonyms are evolving, reflecting the unstable identities within Burma. He uses “Burma” out of habit, feeling it is more fitting for English speakers [14. P. xvii].

Michael A. Aung-Thwin, a prominent Burmese American historian and emeritus professor at the University of Hawai‘i, explained his views by presenting three reasons [15. P. 7–8]. First, the terms “*Mranma*” and “*Myanma*” are spelled in old and modern Burmese scripts [16. P. 196–197], respectively, as adjectives modifying the nouns that follow. For instance, “*Myanma Pyay*” (or “*Pyi*”) refers to the country, “*Myanma Lu Myo*” refers to the people, and “*Myanma Saga*” refers to the language. Second, “Myanmar” is not a new term created by the military government in 1989 to replace “Burma,” as often claimed by the international media and some scholarly works. In fact, its Old Burmese equivalent, “*Mranma*”, has been used to refer to the state and country since at least the early twelfth century, if not earlier. Similarly, the country’s place names were anglicized by the British; for example, “Yangon” became “Rangoon,” “Pyi” was referred to as “Prome,” and “Muttama” was called “Martaban.” For Burmese speakers, who make up over 87 percent of the population, these Burmese names have always been recognized and used. Third, many former colonies have reverted to indigenous

place names post-independence as a response to colonial rule. Examples include Sri Lanka and India, where cities like Bombay and Calcutta have returned to their original names. However, Myanmar faces backlash for using “Myanmar” over “Burma,” indicating that the continued use of “Burma” by some nations is primarily political. The term “Burma” lacks legal standing internationally, is foreign in origin, and perpetuates existing tensions.

Perspectives from prominent scholars who are non-native speakers: David I. Steinberg, an American historian, former U.S. Foreign Service Officer and Distinguished Professor of Asian Studies Emeritus at Georgetown University, remarked that several countries have altered their names (for example, Siam to Thailand and Ceylon to Sri Lanka), but none has generated as much controversy as the transition from Burma to Myanmar, which has unfortunately become a proxy for political alignment. In July 1989, the military government officially renamed the state from the Union of Burma to the Union of Myanmar. The military has consistently referred to the country as Myanmar throughout all of Burmese history, avoiding the terms Burma, Burmese (for the language or its citizens), and Burman (instead using *Bamah* for the majority ethnic group). This shift has not been accepted by the political opposition. While the United Nations and most countries have recognized the name change, the United States has resisted it in solidarity with the opposition, which the Burmese government interprets as an affront [17. P. xviii–xx].

Robert H. Taylor, Pro-Director and Professor of Politics at SOAS and later Vice-Chancellor of Buckingham University and a notable and dedicated scholar of Myanmar’s history and politics, stated that from 1974 to 1988, Burma was officially named *Pyihtaungsu Hsoshelit Thammata Myanma Naingngantaw*, translating to the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma. Notably, the term “state” did not appear in the official English title, but in the Burmese version, “*Naingngantaw*” denotes the recognized institution of the state. “*Naingngantaw*” is derived from “*naing*,” meaning “to prevail” or “to be competent,” and “*ngan*,” meaning “to be sufficient.” The suffix “*taw*” adds a sense of dignity. Historically, “*Naingngan*” referred to the outskirts of the Bagan kingdom and evolved by the nineteenth century to signify a kingdom or country under a single authority. By the mid-twentieth century, it came to mean “nation,” linking the concepts of state and nation in contemporary Burma [18. P. 7–8].

Emeritus Professor Donald M. Seekins of Meio University’s College of International Studies (Okinawa, Japan), who holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Chicago, noted that in 1989, SLORC enacted the Adaptation of Expressions Law, changing the Romanization of geographical and ethnic names. Despite this, many, including Seekins, prefer the older British colonial Romanization. The choice between “Burma” and “Myanmar,” or “Rangoon” and “Yangon,” has become politically sensitive. Many older names exhibit less linguistic consistency than those established post-1989; for example, the pronunciation of a town northeast of Rangoon aligns more closely with the post-1989 name Bago than the older name Pegu. The military government claims that “Myanmar” is ethnically neutral and represents all groups, akin to using “British” for the UK, which is inaccurate. In Burmese, both Myanmar and Burma (*Myanma*, *Bama*) refer primarily to the dominant Burman (*Bamar*) ethnic group, comprising about two-thirds of the population. Thus, no name is truly ethnically neutral for the country or its people. [19. P. xi–xiv].

Table 1. Inductive Approach Analysis (From the Specific to the General)

Scholars (Native and Non-native Speakers)	Perspectives on representation of “Myanmar”		Perspectives on representation of “Burma”		Induction on Distinct Perspective
	In Burmese language	In English language	In Burmese language	In English language	
Dr. Than Htun	Nation-state and ethnic sense	–	Nation-state and ethnic sense	–	Mentions both the origin of ethnic sense and developing process of a nation-state
Thant Myint-U	Country and ethnic sense	Country	Country and ethnic sense	Country (habitually prefers)	Neutral/Myanmar does not mean all ethnic groups
Michael Aung-Thwin	Nation-state and people	<i>Myanma Pyi/Pyay/Pran</i>	Synonym with “ <i>Myanma</i> ”	Colonial Terms	Myanmar is a historical term/ the state has the authority to define
David I. Steinberg	Country/no comment on ethnic issue	Country/no comment on ethnic issue	Country/no comment on ethnic issue	Country/no comment on ethnic issue	Neutral/none of name changings are controversial like Myanmar
Robert H. Taylor	Nation-state and people	Nation-state and people	Nation-state and People	Nation-state and People	Neutral/the state has the responsibility and authority to define
Donald M. Seekins	Country and ethnic sense	Country	Country and ethnic sense	Country	Myanmar does not mean all ethnic groups/no name ethnically neutral

Based on the results of inductive research drawing from the perspectives of prominent scholars and academicians in Myanmar history, it can be concluded that, first, most academicians maintain a neutral stance, accepting that both “Myanmar” and “Burma” refer to the name of the country in both Burmese and English. However, they hold differing views on its ethnic implications and use the name according to their personal practices and chronological context. The exaggerated and politicized perspectives on media, evident in some academic accounts, seem to stem from these implications.

Analyzing the Reflection of Indigenous Practices and Historical Regional Contexts

In this section, the article analyses the reflection of historical regional contexts, indigenous linguistic practices of this dual narratives of national identity dilemma. First, the term “*Bama*” in Burmese is used colloquially, often as an informal synonym for “*Myanma*”, throughout the historical and modern contexts of Myanmar. According to accounts of indigenous practices, the Burmese Archaic Words Dictionary and grammatical methodology show that the term “*Brahma*” (ဗြဟ္မာ) has the same or equal meaning as nine derived terms, particularly “*Mamma*” (မိမ္မာ), “*Myanma*” (မြန်မာ), and “*Bama*” (ဗမာ), as illustrated in Figure 1, that was never appeared on this topic. Under the British rule, a well-

known organization, *DoBamma Asiayone* (We Burmese Organization) [21], extensively utilized the term “*Bama*” during the Myanmar independence movement as part of its efforts in nation-state building and the formation of collective national identity [22]. Indeed, in official accounts, its Old Burmese equivalent, “*Mranma*,” has been used to refer to the state and country since at least the early twelfth century [23]. Today, one can easily find a stone inscription from the early thirteenth century on the internet, as illustrated in Figure 2.

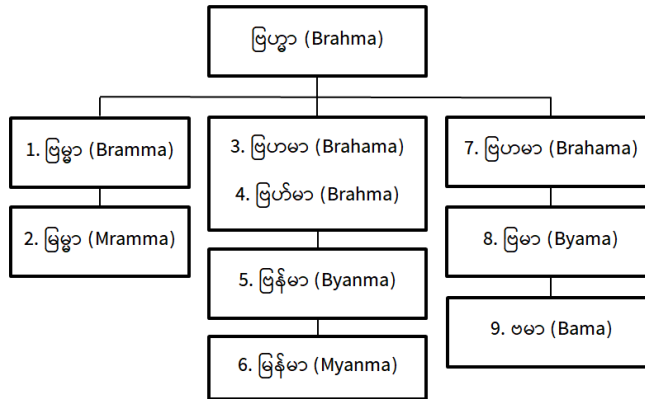


Figure 1. Possible Derivations of the Term “Brahma” to “Mamma,” “Myanma,” and “Bama” [20. P. 216–220]

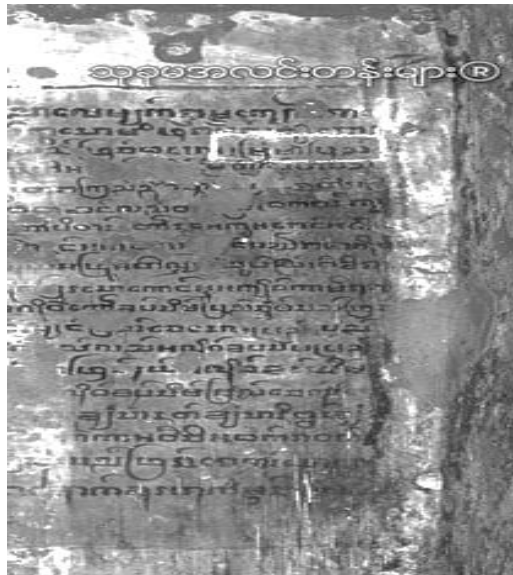


Figure 2. A Stone Inscription that Prescribes *Mammar* “မြမ္မာ” Authored by King Kya-Swar (1234–1250 AD)

Second, according to accounts of historical regional contexts, the British were not the originators of the accent of “Burma”. The Brahmaputra River (ব্রহ্মপুত্র নদী), as shown in Figure 3, originates from the Tibetan Himalayas and flows through China, India, and Bangladesh in present-day territories. Since the ancient times, the people lived in the area of today India referred to the people living on the opposite

bank (area or region) of the Brahmaputra River as “Brahma” (ब्रह्मा). During the British colonial period (even in today), Indians also called Myanmar “Brahmadesh” (ब्रह्मदेश) in their language, as shown in Figure 4.



Figure 3. The Brahmaputra River (ब्रह्मपुत्र नदी) from the map of British India [24. P. viii–1]



Figure 4. The Map Shows that Indians Refer to Myanmar as Brahmadesh (ब्रह्मदेश) [25]

When Europeans arrived, especially from the west and Bay of Bengal, they referred to the country using variants of “Burma”, such as “Birmanian” for the Portuguese, “Birmanie” for the French, and “Barma”, “Birma” or “Burma” for the British, likely derived from Indian pronunciation of “Brahma.” Subsequently, the

British variant of “Burma” became the official name for Myanmar in English, as Myanmar was gradually colonized by the British and became part of British India.

Taw Sein Ko’s “Burmese Sketches” in 1913 stated the interpretations of European scholars of great expertise based on their thorough investigations. Sir Arthur Phayre believes it derives from “*Brahma*,” meaning “celestial being,” and asserts that it was adopted only after the introduction of Buddhism and the unification of several tribes under a single chief. In contrast, Mr. Hodgson suggests that the name “*Mran-ma* (မြန်မာ)” can be traced back to the native word for “*man*”.

Meanwhile, Bishop Bigandet posits that it is a variation or corruption of “*Mien*”, a name the Myanmar people brought with them from the Central Asian plateau [26. P. 1].

The latter two interpretations also align with the account of Ser Marco Polo regarding the Kingdoms of Bagan, referred to as the “Kingdoms of *Mien* and *Bangala*” in his records. The text states that “... there was a certain king called king of MIEN and of BANGALA, who was a very puissant prince, with much territory and treasure and people and he was not as yet subject to the Great Kaan”. Editor also noted by the confirmation of the Myanmar’s today north-east neighbor China’s history and by stating that “MIEN is the name by which the kingdom of Burma or Ava and is known to the Chinese. M. Gamier informs me that *Mien-Kwe* or *Mien-tisong* is the name always given in Yunnan to that kingdom, whilst the Shans at Kiang Hung call the Burmese *Man* (pronounced like the English word)” [27. P. 62–78] Therefore, it can be concluded that the accent of “Myanmar” is more close to the indigenous and Eastern geographical contexts and “Burma” is more aligned to the Western geographical contexts of historical Myanmar civilization. This is new insight for this dual narratives of national identity dilemma: Myanmar vs. Burma.

Analyzing the Context of Ethnicity, Decolonization, and Their

Acceptance

In the context of ethnicity within the dual narratives of the national identity dilemma, many argue that the terms “Myanmar” (မြန်မာ) and “Burma” (ဗမာ) do not encompass all the ethnic groups within Myanmar's territory. This perspective may hold some truth, particularly when viewed from a selective or racial standpoint. When the destruction of Sirikhattara or Sri Ksetra (one of the most prominent Pyu Kingdoms that flourished for over 1,000 years between 200 BC and AD 900) [28] around in 128 A.D., it is recorded that the inhabitants were divided into three groups: the *Pyu*, the *Kanyan*, and the *Mranma*. The King *Supannanagarachinna*’s nephew, *Samuddaraja*, gathered the remnants of his tribe and established the settlement of state by relocation three times. For the third time he removed to *Yon-hlut-kyun*, where he was joined by the inhabitants of 19 *Pyu* villages to establish Pagan [26, p. 1], now widely known as Bagan [29]. Therefore, Myanmar is directly derived from the ancient *Pyu* Kingdoms, marking the rebranding of civilization historically known as *Myanma Pyi* or *Myanma Naing-ngan-taw*. In other words, from a new perspective, this development signifies an evolution in nation and national identity building and rebranding of civilization.

Moreover, from a consolidated perspective, it is difficult to deny that 95 percent of verifiable Myanmar history and 85 percent of pre-colonial history [16.

P. 195] demonstrate a longstanding reality in which all indigenous ethnic groups coexisted under the civilization of “*Myanma Pyi*”, “*Myanma Naingngan Taw*,” or “*Myanmar*.” In fact, the process of nation-state building and national identity formation is an oscillating phenomenon – active, rather than passive. Even during the colonial period, the name “*Myanmar Pyi*” (မြန်မာပြည်) was persistently used in Burmese as the country’s official name, as illustrated in Figure 5. The term “*Bama Naingngan taw*” (ဗမာနိုင်ငံတော်) was officially used for only about a year and seven months during the Japanese occupation. Today, Myanmar’s official name is the “*Republic of the Union of Myanmar*,” not simply “*Myanma Pyi*,” as in the past.



Figure 5. The Persistent Use of “*Myanma Pyay*” on an envelope issued by the Burma Philatelic and H.E. Club, commemorating the separation from India on April 1, 1937.

As part of Myanmar’s decolonization process, the SLORC changed the official English name from “Burma” to “Myanmar”, while the Burmese script *Myanmar* “မြန်မာ” remained unchanged¹. Conventional wisdom, including the views of some scholars mentioned above, describes the Myanmar military’s preference for the name Myanmar “မြန်မာ” as ethnically neutral². However, the article found that the official rationale for the change is not rooted in a sense of neutrality but rather in the concept of collectiveness³, returning to the historical “*Myanmar Naingngan taw*” and decolonizing and distancing from the imperialist label “Burma”. It seems that the change aims to foster the process of

¹ State Law and Order Restoration Council, Law No. 15/89, dated June 18, 1989.

² Another question arises: how many of the 195 countries officially recognized by the United Nations have ethnically neutral names? The safe answer is majority of the countries names are not perfectly ethnically neutral. A thorough analysis would require extensive research on the etymology and historical usage of each country’s name.

³ Refer to the State Law and Order Restoration Council, Order No. 2/89, dated June 18, 1989, which mandated the change of the term Burma (ဗမာ) to Myanmar (မြန်မာ) in the national anthem. The reason for this change is that the term Burma (ဗမာ) refers primarily to one racial group, while the national anthem is intended to represent all national races within the Union of Myanmar. Therefore, it was necessary to substitute Bamar (ဗမာ) with Myanmar (မြန်မာ) to encompass all national races.

decolonization, modern nation-state building, and a collective national identity building, and address controversies related to terminology, about unifying diverse national “races” under a single governance, similar to federations like that of England, Scotland, and Wales. The name change was recognized by the United Nations and parallels other historical changes, such as “Persia” to “Iran” and “Ceylon” to “Sri Lanka”. Many agree that the 1989 terms reflect everyday language more accurately, though some prefer the older Romanization from the colonial era.

Today, empirically, the U.S. Embassy sends official letters using the name “Myanmar” [30], and the U.K. Embassy lists its location as “Yangon, Myanmar”, acknowledging “Burma” in brackets [31] despite political disagreements with the term. Many visitors line up at the Republic of the Union of Myanmar embassies for visas, reflecting everyday acceptance of the name amidst politicization in some literature and media. Most people in Myanmar readily answer “Myanmar” when asked about their country in both Burmese and English. Public support for national teams is evident as fans chant “Myanmar...Myanmar...Myanmar”, and even most of the non-residents (except some groups from western countries) typically use “Myanmar” instead of “Burma”, highlighting broader recognition and acceptance of the name and Myanmar’s significant level of collective national identity building and decolonization related to naming issues, although challenges remain.

Conclusion

Based on these observations and inductive approach, this article concludes that the naming issue is primarily a matter of linguistics, and pronunciations, despite its exaggeration, politicization and association with identity concerns. Historically, “*Mranma*”, “*Myanma*”, and “*Myanmar*” have served as official names in the Burmese language, while colloquial terms like “*Bama*” or “*Barma*” have been used interchangeably. The accent of “Myanmar” is closer to the indigenous and Eastern geographical contexts and “Burma” is more aligned to the Western geographical contexts of historical Myanmar civilization. The official name “Burma” in English was introduced during colonization, and while some still use it habitually or politically, Myanmar is working to reclaim its indigenous naming traditions and the indigenous national identity of “Myanmar” as part of the decolonization process. Finally, this research offers new insights into Myanmar’s national identity building, contributing to identity studies in political science, sociology, and cultural studies through a postcolonial linguistic, semantic, and onomastic lens. It highlights the impact of a country’s name on collective national identity formation and decolonization, emphasizing the role of language, pronunciation, and identity in healing and nation-building.

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