

Burmese

also known as “Burmans”, “Myanmarese”

Data source: eHRAF

Secondary source

Entered by Emily Pitek, Human Relations Area Files

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** Secondary Source entry, prepared from a literature review by a Ph.D. RA*

Entry tags: Religion, Buddhist Traditions

The Burmese (otherwise known as Burmans) inhabit the central plain of Burma, which is located in the Union of Burma (renamed Myanmar as of 1990). From 1885 to 1948 the British held control over Burma, after which Burma gained independence. The Burmans live in village communities, which are administered by an elected headman. The headman is the primary link between the village and the Union of Burma. Buddhism is deeply ingrained within Burmese society; “... Buddhism, as the villagers understand it, is the master artifice for giving unity, coherence, and meaning to their personal lives and to the world in which they live (Nash, 1965:104).” While the Union of Burma and village politics remains secular, Buddhism permeates all other aspects of Burman society. This entry focuses on the village of Nondwin around the time of 1960 as an example of a typical rural Burmese community.



Date Range: 1940 CE - 1965 CE

Region: Village of Nondwin, Sagaing Region, Burma

Region tags: Asia, Southeast Asia, Myanmar

Village of Nondwin, Sagaing Region, Burma ca. 1960

Status of Participants:

✓ Elite ✓ Religious Specialists ✓ Non-elite (common people, general populace)

Sources

Print sources for understanding this subject:

– Source 1: Divale, W. 2004. Codebook of Variables for the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample. *World Cultures: The Journal of Cross-Cultural and Comparative Research*.

Online sources for understanding this subject:

– Source 1 URL: <http://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=ap04-034>

– Source 1 Description: Nash, M. (1965). *Golden Road To Modernity: Village Life In Contemporary Burma*. New York: Wiley.

– Source 2 URL: <http://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=ap04-035>

– Source 2 Description: Nash, M. (1963). Burmese Buddhism In Everyday Life. *American Anthropologist*, 65(2), 285-295.

– Source 3 URL: <http://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=ap04-000>

– Source 3 Description: Nash, M., & Abate, T. (2012). Culture Summary: Burmans. New Haven: Human Relations Area Files.

General Variables

Membership/Group Interactions

Are other religious groups in cultural contact with target religion:

– Yes

Notes: Although the principal ethnographic sources do not discuss religions besides Buddhism, it can be assumed that the Burmans have had cultural contact with other religions as a result of British occupation and colonialism. This cultural contact does not seem to have greatly influenced Buddhist beliefs of the Burmans.



Is there violent conflict (within sample region):

– Yes

Notes: SCCS Variable 1649 (Frequency of Internal Warfare) indicates that "internal warfare seems to occur almost constantly and at any time of the year"; additionally, SCCS Variable 1654 (Pacification) indicates that the society is "inferred to be unpacified" (Ember and Ember, 1992; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).



Is there violent conflict (with groups outside the sample region):

– No

Notes: SCCS Variable 1650 (Frequency of External Warfare) indicated that "external warfare seems to be absent or rare"; additionally, SCCS Variable 1654 (Pacification) indicates that the society is "inferred to be unpacified" (Ember and Ember, 1992; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

Does the religious group have a general process/system for assigning religious affiliation:

– No

Notes: The villagers of Nondwin are born into a community where Buddhism is simply the way of life and society, rather than an institution to be assigned to. "Buddhism is not a separate compartment of belief and practice, but a system of symbols, psychological attitudes, and ritual behavior forming the warp against which the woof of daily life is woven" (Nash, 1965:104).

Does the religious group actively proselytize and recruit new members:

– No

Notes: See Nash, 1965:104

Does the religion have official political support

Answer 'yes' also in cases where the religious and political spheres are not distinguished from one another, but the religious group's activities are tied up with, and supported by, the functioning of the society at large.

– No

Notes: Myanmar (Burma) does not have an official religion, although most follow Buddhism. The villagers of Nondwin are all of the Buddhist faith, including secular leaders, but secular leadership duties do not overlap with religious activities. Although religion is coterminous with the Burman society, specifically in the village of Nondwin, political activity remains a distinct realm.

Is there a conception of apostasy in the religious group:

– No

Notes: "For the villager, there is no single word or idea corresponding to religion or to Buddhism. If you ask, as I did, people what they believe in, or why they do what they do in devotion and ritual, you get the manifest designation of the religious sphere. A villager replies 'bokda batha' to the question of religious belief. This means that he tries, within the limits of his knowledge and temperament, to follow the path that the Shin Hpaya (Lord Buddha) taught. There are, of course, great differences among villagers in knowledge and in devotion to the middle way to salvation. But there is no public disbelief, and, so far as I could learn, no skepticism. Everyone appears to subscribe to, and honor, and hold convictions as to the truth of the teaching of the Buddha, and hold that the following of this teaching is the moral path, the aim of existence, and the highest unquestionable good" (Nash, 1965:104).

Size and Structure

Number of adherents of religious group within sample region (estimated population, numerical):

– Estimated population, numeric: 553

Notes: "Nondwin is an old village, long settled. Everybody in it is a Burman and a Buddhist...The population of Nondwin in 1959 was given as 553, with a nearly perfect split between males and females (276 and 277 respectively). They lived in 116 houses" (Nash, 1965:14).

Number of adherents of religious group within sample region (% of sample region population, numerical):

– Estimated population, percentage of sample region: 100

Notes: "In Nondwin, everyone is a Buddhist, and as far back as memory and record go, its people have always been Buddhists" (Nash, 1965:104).

Are there recognized leaders in the religious group:

– No

Notes: Monks are religious specialists and scholars, but are not considered to be leaders in the sense that a priest might be. "Monks do not have power in any direct, temporal sense over people in the community, and as a rule they do not try to get it" (Nash, 1963:288).

Scripture

Does the religious group have scriptures:

Scripture is a generic term used to designate revered texts that are considered particularly authoritative and sacred relative to other texts. Strictly speaking, it refers to written texts, but there are also "oral scriptures" (e.g. the Vedas of India).

– Yes

Notes: "The Buddhist knowledge of a villager rests only slightly on written materials. It relies chiefly on oral transmission for continuity. These ideas are rooted in the body of scripture which the monks supposedly study and preserve. (Village monks rarely study any scripture other than the 227 monastic rules, and they do practice, sometimes, some of the specialized meditational devices of the higher learning; these are hardly ever communicated to the laity.) In a village household books are a rarity. If there is a book, it is a popularized version of the essentials of the religion given here, plus one or two of the better known thok, like the heart and the diamond sutras. The villager carries on his Buddhism without the consultation of books and with little reference to the written word" (Nash, 1963:288).

↳ Are they written:

– Yes

Notes: (Nash, 1963:288)

↳ Are there formal institutions (i.e. institutions that are authorized by the religious community or political leaders) for interpreting the scriptures:

– No

Notes: "If there are problems of meaning or questions, the villager goes to a monk who explicates scripture for him or provides a number of anecdotes or analogies to resolve them. The village is a united whole in the matter of belief. There are no doubters, no heretics, no theologic debate, and no exploration of alternative meanings. This is rooted in the conception that there are great variations in individual abilities to encompass Buddhism. Differences in interpretation, if they exist, are not matters of contention, for they do not necessarily indicate that a doctrine has alternate meanings, but only that individuals have varying capacities to understand the import of a particular doctrine" (Nash, 1963:290).

↳ Is there a select group of people trained in transmitting the scriptures:

– Yes

Notes: "The Buddhist knowledge of a villager rests only slightly on written materials. It relies chiefly on oral transmission for continuity. These ideas are rooted in the body of scripture which the monks supposedly study and preserve. (Village monks rarely study any scripture other than the 227 monastic rules, and they do practice, sometimes, some of the specialized meditational devices of the higher learning; these are hardly ever communicated to the laity.)" (Nash, 1963:288).

↳ Is there a codified canon of scriptures:

– Yes

Notes: "There is the great tradition of the Pali Canon, the learned monks and abbots in nearby Sagaing and the famous teaching centers in Mandalay where the Tipitaka (the three baskets of the Pali Canon of Theravada Buddhism) are coned and expounded. But this great tradition of scholarship and knowledge hardly touches the village monk or the villagers. It forms the backdrop and historical continuity against which village Buddhism is formed, but it does not

directly nor immediately influence village belief and practice" (Nash, 1965:105).

Architecture, Geography

Is monumental religious architecture present:

– Yes

Notes: "In Nondwin there are two kyaungs [monasteries] at the outskirts of the village" (Nash, 1965:140).

Are there different types of religious monumental architecture:

– Yes



Temples:

– Yes

Notes: "Buddhism is a pervading force in Burmese society. Even to the casual eye, the hillsides dotted with pagodas, the hosts of saffron-robed monks, and the innumerable monasteries proclaim the strength and depth of Buddhist belief and practice in Burma" (Nash, 1965:104).



Altars:

– Yes

Notes: "Household Altar: There is a major altar to the Buddha in the compound. It is individuals, not a family unit, who offer respect and devotion to the Buddha. But having an individual altar means that conjugal families are not joined into a single social group" (Nash, 1965:45).

Beliefs

Burial and Afterlife

Is a spirit-body distinction present:

Answer "no" only if personhood (or consciousness) is extinguished with death of the physical body. Answering yes does not necessarily imply the existence of Cartesian mind/body dualism, merely that some element of personhood (or consciousness) survives the death of the body.

– Yes

Notes: The Burmans believe in reincarnation of the soul. Upon death, the soul parts from the body to be reborn into its next being. See Nash, 1965, pages 107-108 for further discussion on the afterlife and reincarnation.



Spirit-mind is conceived of as non-material, ontologically distinct from body:

– Yes

Notes: "It is this butterfly soul essence that goes on from existence to existence, and for the villager it is a material thing, the vehicle of metempsychosis, the carrier of continuous kan

[merit]" (Nash, 1965:153).

Belief in afterlife:

– Yes

Notes: The Burmans believe in several worlds of existence, of which the soul travels through the process of reincarnation. Eventually, after being reborn through all the possible states of existence, the soul will reach Neikban (Nirvana). Only the Buddas have achieved Nirvana as it takes millions of years to attain. See Nash, 1965, pages 107-108 for further discussion on the afterlife and reincarnation.

Reincarnation in this world:

– Yes

Notes: The Burmans believe in several worlds of existence, of which the soul travels through the process of reincarnation. Eventually, after being reborn through all the possible states of existence, the soul will reach Neikban (Nirvana). Only the Buddas have achieved Nirvana as it takes millions of years to attain. See Nash, 1965, pages 107-108 for further discussion on the afterlife and reincarnation.

↳ In a human form:

– Yes

Notes: See Nash, 1965:107.

↳ In animal/plant form:

– Yes

↳ Reincarnation linked to notion of life-transcending causality (e.g. karma):

– Yes

Notes: "Kan is the product of individual effort. Every person has built his own store and quality of kan. Only he can add to or subtract from it. His own spiritual state is his own work. This particular life is the result of all previous lives, of all previous good deeds and misdeeds. And this particular existence is an opportunity to add to or subtract from the individual moral nucleus which will be reborn in some form in another existence. So everyone in Nondwin knows that he is responsible for his own state and his future states" (Nash, 1965:106).

Are there special treatments for adherents' corpses:

– Yes

Notes: See questions below for more details on the treatment of corpses among the Burmese.

↳ Cremation:

– Yes

Notes: "Another elaboration, the closest imitation of a royal style, is the cremation rather than burial of the dead. Monks are always cremated in a flaming pyre of kerosene-soaked logs, and some rich or especially pious people may be so treated" (Nash, 1965:155).

Specific to this answer:

Status of Participants: ✓ Elite ✓ Religious Specialists

↳ Mummification:

– No

Notes: No evidence for the presence of mummification is found in the principal ethnographic sources.

↳ Interment:

– Yes

Notes: "The immediate family accompany the body to the grave. There, a final wail is permitted before the body is lowered into a common grave, where other bones may be disturbed to make room for it, and the unmarked grave is covered" (Nash, 1965:155).

↳ Corpse is flexed (legs are bent or body is crouched):

– I don't know

Notes: Details are not provided on the specific position in which corpses are interred.

↳ Corpse is extended (lying flat on front or back):

– I don't know

Notes: Details are not provided on the specific position in which corpses are interred.

↳ Corpse is upright (where body is interred in standing position):

– I don't know

Notes: Details are not provided on the specific position in which corpses are interred.

↳ Corpse is interred some other way:

– I don't know

↳ Cannibalism:

– No

Notes: No evidence for the presence of cannibalism is found in the principal ethnographic sources.

↳ Feeding to animals:

– No

Notes: No evidence for feeding corpses to animals is found in the principal ethnographic sources.

Are co-sacrifices present in tomb/burial:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of co-sacrifices in tombs/burials

Are grave goods present:

– Yes

Notes: "The villagers put up to 3 kyats of 'ferry money' with the deceased, for there is a belief that a river must be crossed between existences and that the ferryman must be paid" (Nash, 1965:153).



Other grave goods:

– Yes

Notes: "The villagers put up to 3 kyats of 'ferry money' with the deceased, for there is a belief that a river must be crossed between existences and that the ferryman must be paid" (Nash, 1965:153).

Are formal burials present:

– Yes

Notes: See Nash, 1965, pages 151-154 for a detailed description on Burman burial practices.



In cemetery:

– Yes

Notes: "The immediate family accompany the body to the grave. There, a final wail is permitted before the body is lowered into a common grave, where other bones may be disturbed to make room for it, and the unmarked grave is covered" (Nash, 1965:155).

Supernatural Beings

Are supernatural beings present:

– Yes

Notes: Previously human spirits as well as non-human supernatural beings are present among the Burman belief system. These beings are not described in substantial detail. See questions below for available information.



A supreme high god is present:

– No

Notes: SCCS Variable 238 (Religion: high gods) indicates that a high god is absent or not reported in substantial descriptions of religious beliefs (Murdock, 1967; retrieved from Divale, 2004).



Previously human spirits are present:

– Yes

Notes: Previously human spirits are present but not described in substantial detail. See questions below for available information.

↳ Human spirits can be seen:

– No

Notes: "The most inclusive kind of spirit is a ghost called Thaye (literally, brave he). Thayes have their origin in the death of a person in cold blood. These ghosts are harmful; they cause falls, spills, bone breaks, and even accidents leading to death of the victim. They operate at night. These ghosts are frequently invisible, but they can take animal, or larger than human, form" (Nash, 1965:175).

↳ Non-human supernatural beings are present:

– Yes

Notes: Non-human supernatural beings are present but not described in substantial detail. See questions below for available information.

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have deliberate causal efficacy in the world:

– Yes

↳ These supernatural beings can reward:

– No

Notes: "The nats, at all levels, are chiefly evil powers. They can, if angered or ignored, punish and bring trouble to human beings. At the very best they can safeguard an individual against trouble from other nats or malignant spirits" (Nash, 1965:168).

↳ These supernatural beings can punish:

– Yes

Notes: "The nats, at all levels, are chiefly evil powers. They can, if angered or ignored, punish and bring trouble to human beings" (Nash, 1965:168).

↳ These supernatural beings have indirect causal efficacy in the world:

"Indirect causal efficacy" refers to not being seen as consciously, directly and actively intervening in the human world, but their overall well being or general attitude has effects on, e.g., quality of harvest, success in war, health, etc.

– Yes

Notes: "The bomagyi nat is the 'rice mother,' and she is responsible for the increase of rice stored in the godown after harvest. Some people in Nondwin have a natkadaw and offer bomagyi food in October, but only a few of those who have rice in the godown do this. And these same people with paddy in the godown will light a candle or two to bomagyi at the pagoda festival lighting" (Nash, 1965:176).

Supernatural Monitoring

Is supernatural monitoring present:

This refers to surveillance by supernatural beings of humans' behaviour and/or thought particularly as it relates to social norms or potential norm violations.

– No

Notes: Generally, supernatural beings are not involved with punishment and rewards, rather, supernatural concepts such as Kan are responsible. Note that nats will punish or harm humans, but this is not necessarily due to social/moral norm violations. "Kan is the product of individual effort. Every person has built his own store and quality of kan. Only he can add to or subtract from it. His own spiritual state is his own work. This particular life is the result of all previous lives, of all previous good deeds and misdeeds. And this particular existence is an opportunity to add to or subtract from the individual moral nucleus which will be reborn in some form in another existence. So everyone in Nondwin knows that he is responsible for his own state and his future states" (Nash, 1965:106).

Do supernatural beings mete out punishment:

– I don't know

Notes: Supernatural beings are not involved with punishment and rewards, rather, supernatural concepts such as Kan are responsible. "Kan is the product of individual effort. Every person has built his own store and quality of kan. Only he can add to or subtract from it. His own spiritual state is his own work. This particular life is the result of all previous lives, of all previous good deeds and misdeeds. And this particular existence is an opportunity to add to or subtract from the individual moral nucleus which will be reborn in some form in another existence. So everyone in Nondwin knows that he is responsible for his own state and his future states" (Nash, 1965:106). Punishment can happen in the afterlife: "And lastly, there is the loka of the hells, where there are suffering animals, monsters, people in flames, and many sorts of punishments and inflictions to bear. This is the place of expiation for the lives badly led, and this is a possibility for those now in the loka of people" (Nash, 1965:108).

Do supernatural beings bestow rewards:

– Yes

Notes: Supernatural beings are not involved with punishment and rewards, rather, supernatural concepts such as Kan are responsible. "Kan is the product of individual effort. Every person has built his own store and quality of kan. Only he can add to or subtract from it. His own spiritual state is his own work. This particular life is the result of all previous lives, of all previous good deeds and misdeeds. And this particular existence is an opportunity to add to or subtract from the individual moral nucleus which will be reborn in some form in another existence. So everyone in Nondwin knows that he is responsible for his own state and his future states" (Nash, 1965:106).



Is the cause/purpose of supernatural rewards known:

– Yes

Notes: See questions below for more information on the causes of supernatural rewards.



Done only by high god:

– No

Notes: A high god is not present among the Burmans.

↳ Done by many supernatural beings:

– No

↳ Done through impersonal cause-effect principle:

– Yes

Notes: "This particular life is the result of all previous lives, of all previous good deeds and misdeeds. And this particular existence is an opportunity to add to or subtract from the individual moral nucleus which will be reborn in some form in another existence" (Nash, 1965: 106).

↳ Supernatural rewards are bestowed out in the afterlife:

– Yes

↳ Reward in the afterlife consists of reincarnation in a superior realm:

– Yes

Notes: "The thought of the final stage when rebirth no longer takes place—Neikban, as the Burmese call Nibbana, the blowing out of desire that causes rebirth—is remote from villagers. Mention of it as a possibility only elicits smiles. Nibbana is something that the Buddha (three previous Buddhas, Gotama the fourth and historical Buddha, and the fifth one Arimittiya now in the Tusita heaven awaiting the right moment to become manifest) only has achieved. It takes millions of years, and a movement through all the possible states of existence" (Nash, 1965:107).

Messianism/Eschatology

Are messianic beliefs present:

– Yes

Notes: "The apocalypse is the end of the present world and the coming of the fifth Buddha to begin the next world" (Nash, 1965:112)

↳ Is the messiah's whereabouts or time of coming known?

– Yes

Notes: "The apocalypse is the end of the present world and the coming of the fifth Buddha to begin the next world. The next Buddha, Arimittiya, is now in one of the levels of nat (upper) country. The present Buddha, Gotama, founded an era of 5,000 years' duration. It is now just about half over" (Nash, 1965:112).

↳ Alive, identified:

– No

Notes: "The next Buddha, Arimittiya, is now in one of the levels of nat (upper) country. The present Buddha, Gotama, founded an era of 5,000 years' duration. It is now just about half over" (Nash, 1965:112).

↳ Coming in this lifetime:

– No

Notes: Coming in about 2,500 years (Nash, 1965:112).

↳ Coming on specified date:

– No

Notes: Coming in about 2,500 years but a specific date is not known (Nash, 1965:112).

↳ Coming in unspecified time in near future:

– No

Notes: Coming in about 2,500 years (Nash, 1965:112).

↳ Coming in unspecified time in distant future:

– Yes

Notes: "The apocalypse is the end of the present world and the coming of the fifth Buddha to begin the next world. The next Buddha, Arimittiya, is now in one of the levels of nat (upper) country. The present Buddha, Gotama, founded an era of 5,000 years' duration. It is now just about half over" (Nash, 1965:112).

↳ Coming has already passed:

– No

Notes: (Nash, 1965:112).

↳ One in a line of many past and future messiahs:

– Yes

Notes: See Nash, 1965:112 for a description on the cycle of Buddas.

↳ Is the messiah's purpose known:

– Yes

Notes: See question below for more details on the messiah's purpose.

↳ Messiah is a priestly figure who restores religious traditions:

– Yes

Notes: "The present Buddha, Gotama, founded an era of 5,000 years' duration. It is now just about half over. At the end of the historical Buddha's reign, there will come

increases in immoral behavior and increasingly bad times. People will start to die younger and younger. They will fall away from the teaching, and finally they will live no more than ten years of age. Then they will begin to live longer, to be more and more moral; prosperity will become the norm again. And then the next Buddha will arrive and his virtue or reign will sustain the world for one million years" (Nash, 1965:112).

Is an eschatology present:

– Yes

Notes: "The present Buddha, Gotama, founded an era of 5,000 years' duration. It is now just about half over. At the end of the historical Buddha's reign, there will come increases in immoral behavior and increasingly bad times. People will start to die younger and younger. They will fall away from the teaching, and finally they will live no more than ten years of age. Then they will begin to live longer, to be more and more moral; prosperity will become the norm again. And then the next Buddha will arrive and his virtue or reign will sustain the world for one million years. Then the cycle of falling away from the morality of the middle way, decreasing span of life, and bad times will begin again, and there will appear in the sky seven suns at once and the world will forever end" (Nash, 1965:112).

↳ Eschaton in this lifetime:

– No

Notes: "The apocalypse is the end of the present world and the coming of the fifth Buddha to begin the next world. The next Buddha, Arimittiya, is now in one of the levels of nat (upper) country. The present Buddha, Gotama, founded an era of 5,000 years' duration. It is now just about half over" (Nash, 1965:112).

↳ Eschaton at specified time in future:

– No

Notes: About 2,500 years in the future, but specific date is not known (Nash, 1965:112).

↳ Eschaton at unspecified time in near future:

– No

Notes: (Nash, 1965:112)

↳ Eschaton at unspecified time in distant future:

– Yes

Notes: "The present Buddha, Gotama, founded an era of 5,000 years' duration. It is now just about half over. At the end of the historical Buddha's reign, there will come increases in immoral behavior and increasingly bad times. People will start to die younger and younger. They will fall away from the teaching, and finally they will live no more than ten years of age. Then they will begin to live longer, to be more and more moral; prosperity will become the norm again. And then the next Buddha will arrive and his virtue or reign will sustain the world for one million years. Then the cycle of falling away from the morality of the middle way, decreasing span of life, and bad times will begin again, and there will appear in the sky seven suns at once and the world will forever end" (Nash, 1965:112).

↳ Eschaton at some other time:

– No

Notes: About 2,500 years in the future (Nash, 1965:112).

↳ Restoration of the world:

– Yes

Notes: "At the end of the historical Buddha's reign, there will come increases in immoral behavior and increasingly bad times. People will start to die younger and younger. They will fall away from the teaching, and finally they will live no more than ten years of age. Then they will begin to live longer, to be more and more moral; prosperity will become the norm again. And then the next Buddha will arrive and his virtue or reign will sustain the world for one million years" (Nash, 1965:112).

↳ Will anyone survive the eschaton:

– Yes

Notes: At the very end of the world, everyone will survive in the afterlife. "Every living thing will at that time be born for eternity into the level of existence it merits" (Nash, 1965:112).

↳ Everyone in the world will survive the eschaton:

– Yes

Notes: At the very end of the world, everyone will survive in the afterlife. "Every living thing will at that time be born for eternity into the level of existence it merits" (Nash, 1965:112).

Norms and Moral Realism

Is there a conventional vs. moral distinction in the religious group:

– Yes

Notes: See questions below for more information on moral norms.

↳ Are specifically moral norms prescribed by the religious group:

– Yes

Notes: "Everyone appears to subscribe to, and honor, and hold convictions as to the truth of the teaching of the Buddha, and hold that the following of this teaching is the moral path, the aim of existence, and the highest unquestionable good" (Nash, 1965:104).

↳ Specifically moral norms are implicitly linked to vague metaphysical concepts:

– Yes

Notes: Supernatural beings are not involved with punishment and rewards, rather, supernatural concepts such as Kan are responsible. "Kan is the product of individual effort. Every person has built his own store and quality of kan. Only he can add to or

subtract from it. His own spiritual state is his own work. This particular life is the result of all previous lives, of all previous good deeds and misdeeds. And this particular existence is an opportunity to add to or subtract from the individual moral nucleus which will be reborn in some form in another existence. So everyone in Nondwin knows that he is responsible for his own state and his future states" (Nash, 1965:106).

↳ Specifically moral norms are linked to impersonal cosmic order (e.g. karma):

– Yes

Notes: "Kan is the bundle of ideas tied in with destiny, fate, luck, and life chances. It means to the villager the whole sum of his past deeds, the moral balance of good and evil which goes on from existence to existence, now taking one corporeal form, now another. A person's kan is strengthened by adding kutho and weakened by accumulating akutho. Kutho is merit, and akutho is demerit. Some people have kuthokan kaunde, a good destiny and proper moral balance, while others have kuthokan makaumbu, a bad fate or a preponderance of past bad deeds over merit earning activities" (Nash, 1965:105).

↳ Specifically moral norms are linked in some way to an anthropomorphic being:

– Yes

Notes: "Everyone appears to subscribe to, and honor, and hold convictions as to the truth of the teaching of the Buddha, and hold that the following of this teaching is the moral path, the aim of existence, and the highest unquestionable good" (Nash, 1965:104).

↳ Specifically moral norms are linked explicitly to commands of anthropomorphic being:

– No

Notes: "If a villager does not observe the precepts, he does not sin, for these are not divine commandments" (Nash, 1965:113).

Are there centrally important virtues advocated by the religious group:

Virtues here are normatively-desirable, internalized habits, dispositions or behavioral ideals.

– Yes

Notes: "The middle way, bokda batha, the true wisdom, is a means of ultimately breaking out of the cycle of change and pain and false attachment to an ego. But it is proximately the chief guide to morality and the bench mark against which the building of kan, the unending accumulation of kutho and akutho go on. The main teaching is embodied in the Mekgin Shitpa, roughly translated as the Eight Virtues, and more commonly called by non-Buddhists the Noble Eightfold Path" (Nash, 1965:113).

↳ Generosity / charity:

– Yes

Notes: Nash, 1965:148.

↳ Selflessness / selfless giving:

– Yes

Notes: "By sacrificing something of the self, by concentrating on something other than the self, the bundle of sensation and desire that is the self is purified, made less demanding...Giving, then, can be seen as the means, the positive volitional acts of building kutho, of refining the nature of the self. The act of freely giving is in a strict sense the Buddhist rite of sacrifice" (Nash, 1965:115).

↳ Ritual purity / ritual adherence / abstention from sources of impurity:

– Yes

Notes: "The daily giving to the sangha then is a ritual statement of the relation of the laity to the sangha (and reciprocally) and of the relation of human beings to the teaching of the Buddha, all placed in the sacrificial idiom of continually giving to purify the self, until that too is finally given" (Nash, 1965:138).

↳ Humility / modesty:

– Yes

Notes: Nash, 1965:148.

↳ Contentment / serenity / equanimity:

– Yes

Notes: Nash, 1965:148.

↳ Faith / belief / trust / devotion:

– Yes

Notes: "The eightfold path of virtue is: right belief, intention, speech, conduct, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration" (Nash, 1965:113).

↳ Wisdom / understanding:

– Yes

Notes: Nash, 1965:148.

↳ Other important virtues advocated by the religious group:

– Yes [specify]: "The eightfold path of virtue is: right belief, intention, speech, conduct, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration" (Nash, 1965:113).

Practices

Membership Costs and Practices

Does membership in this religious group require celibacy (full sexual abstinence):

– Yes

Notes: "...monks must be celibate..." (Nash, 1963:285).

Specific to this answer:

Status of Participants: ✓ Religious Specialists

Does membership in this religious group require fasting:

– Yes

Notes: "...[monks] must not eat after midday..." (Nash, 1963:285).

Specific to this answer:

Status of Participants: ✓ Religious Specialists

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of adults:

"Adults" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition of a human who is 18-years-old or older and who is legally responsible for his/her actions, then please specify that difference in the Comments/Sources: box below.

– No

Notes: No evidence is found for the presence of human sacrifice. Further, taking a life (animal or human) reduces one's merit and decreases the chances of a more favorable reincarnation (Nash, 1965:157).

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of children:

"Children" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition, please specify that different in the Comments/Sources: box below.

– No

Notes: No evidence is found for the presence of human sacrifice. Further, taking a life (animal or human) reduces one's merit and decreases the chances of a more favorable reincarnation (Nash, 1965:157).

Does membership in this religious group require self-sacrifice (suicide):

– No

Notes: No evidence is found for the presence of human sacrifice. Further, taking a life (animal or human) reduces one's merit and decreases the chances of a more favorable reincarnation (Nash, 1965:157).

Does membership in this religious group require participation in large-scale rituals:

i.e. involving two or more households; includes large-scale "ceremonies" and "festivals."

– Yes

Notes: The annual pagoda is a particularly important ritual, and "Nobody can, or wants to, opt out of this communal ritual" (Nash, 1965:119).

↳ What is the average interval of time between performances (in hours):

Performances here refers to large-scale rituals.

– I don't know

↳ Are there orthopraxy checks:

Orthopraxy checks are mechanisms used to ensure that rituals are performed in a standardized way, e.g. through the supervisory prominence of a professionalized priesthood or other system of governance, appeal to texts detailing the proper procedure, etc.

– Yes

Notes: An old man is the devotion leader, and is called "Neikban Pointer" (Nash, 1965:119).

↳ Does participation entail synchronic practices:

– I don't know

↳ Is there use of intoxicants:

– I don't know

Society and Institutions

Levels of Social Complexity

The society to which the religious group belongs is best characterized as (please choose one):

This question refers to the wider society in which the religious group is located.

– A state

Notes: SCCS Variable 237 indicates that the Burmans have three levels of jurisdictional hierarchy beyond the local community, which is indicative of a state society. (Ethnographic Atlas column 33, Murdock, 1967; retrieved from Divale, 2004).

Welfare

Is famine relief available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– I don't know

Is poverty relief available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: Although government welfare programs are available, they do not make a large impact on the rural Burmese. "From what I could see in Nondwin, the rural welfare program was chiefly hortatory

and symbolic. It did not have the resources, the personnel, the tools, or the vision to significantly affect, let alone transform, the life of Nondwin villagers...The welfare program, in short, was not massive enough, not sustained enough, not placed enough in villagers' hands to make any sort of impact on the economic structure of the community or its image of the modern world. Its chief yield to the peasants of Nondwin was symbolic; there was in existence a national government of Burmans, dedicated to the welfare of Burmans, and perhaps, with luck, it might even be really useful" (Nash, 1965:99).

Is institutionalized care for the elderly and infirm available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– I don't know

Education

Is formal education available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group:

– Yes

Notes: "The education of the youth of the village is now largely in the hands of the state agency" (Nash, 1965:94).



Is extra-religious education open to both males and females:

– Yes

Notes: "In the state school are 70 students, 15 girls and 55 boys" (Nash, 1965:94).

Bureaucracy

Do the group's adherents interact with other institutional bureaucracies:

– Yes

Notes: "In a centralized nation, local political identity depends in great measure on the agreement of supra-local bureaucracies to relate in a manner which will define the status of the local society. So, from the Prime Minister to the village headman, there is an unbroken line of political and administrative authority, and the village is the smallest political cell in the structure of the Union of Burma" (Nash, 1965:74).

Public Works

Does the religious group in question provide public food storage:

– No

Notes: SCCS Variable 20 indicates that food is stored in individual households (Murdock and Morrow, 1970; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

Is public food storage provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the

religious group in question:

– No

Notes: SCCS Variable 20 indicates that food is stored in individual households (Murdock and Morrow, 1970; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

Does the religious group in question provide water management (irrigation, flood control):

– No

Notes: "Nondwin (which means mud pit or mud hole) depends on rain water for its farming. Like other villages off the major rivers in Upper Burma, it has little irrigated land" (Nash, 1965:12).

Is transportation infrastructure provided for the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: "Moreover, government services are extended to Nondwin on the basis of the community status as a political and administrative entity. The Ministries of Education, Agriculture, and Defense, tax collectors, road builders, and political parties treat it as a unit, the courts and judges recognize its legal status, and, of course, for the descending line of civil servants, it is the last unit of administrative responsibility" (Nash, 1965:73).

Taxation

Does the religious group in question levy taxes or tithes:

– No

Notes: The religious group does not levy taxes or tithes, but donations to the monks are expected. "...giving is woven into the daily life of the community. This giving is tied to the upkeep of the brotherhood of monks. There is one spectacular giving for the maintenance of the sangha, called kahtein. Kahtein is the time to present to monks the necessities they need in order to live the monastic life. Kahtein can be individual, but there is usually a community organized kahtein" (Nash, 1965:132).

Are taxes levied on the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: The villagers of Nondwin are subject to government taxes (see Nash, 1965:74).

Enforcement

Do the group's adherents interact with an institutionalized police force provided by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: Government police are present in the village of Nondwin (see Nash, 1965:93).

Do the group's adherents interact with an institutionalized judicial system provided by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: The village of Nondwin interacts with government judges and courts. "Moreover, government services are extended to Nondwin on the basis of the community status as a political and administrative entity. The Ministries of Education, Agriculture, and Defense, tax collectors, road builders, and political parties treat it as a unit, the courts and judges recognize its legal status, and, of course, for the descending line of civil servants, it is the last unit of administrative responsibility" (Nash, 1965:73).

Does the religious group in question enforce institutionalized punishment:

– No

Notes: "A man who violates morality norms, or an official who is venal, or a monk who breaks his vows, does not get censure directly. After all he is responsible for his own fate, all will balance out in the end, and why should I get involved and get into trouble by telling him to mend his ways? is the way a villager reasons. Gossip there is, personal rating too, but community public opinion, organized sanctions, or pressures to conform there are not" (Nash, 1963:293).

Are the group's adherents subject to institutionalized punishment enforced by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: Because the villagers of Nondwin interact with government judges and courts, it can be assumed that these judicial systems enforce institutionalized punishment. "Moreover, government services are extended to Nondwin on the basis of the community status as a political and administrative entity. The Ministries of Education, Agriculture, and Defense, tax collectors, road builders, and political parties treat it as a unit, the courts and judges recognize its legal status, and, of course, for the descending line of civil servants, it is the last unit of administrative responsibility" (Nash, 1965:73).

↳ Do the institutionalized punishments include execution:

– I don't know

Notes: Not enough information available to determine with certainty.

↳ Do the institutionalized punishments include exile:

– I don't know

Notes: Not enough information available to determine with certainty.

↳ Do the institutionalized punishments include corporal punishments:

– I don't know

Notes: Not enough information available to determine with certainty.

↳ Do the institutionalized punishments include ostracism:

– I don't know

Notes: Not enough information available to determine with certainty.



Do the institutionalized punishments include seizure of property:

– I don't know

Notes: Not enough information available to determine with certainty.

Are the group's adherents subject to a formal legal code provided by institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: The villagers of Nondwin are subject to government laws, judges, and courts. "Moreover, government services are extended to Nondwin on the basis of the community status as a political and administrative entity. The Ministries of Education, Agriculture, and Defense, tax collectors, road builders, and political parties treat it as a unit, the courts and judges recognize its legal status, and, of course, for the descending line of civil servants, it is the last unit of administrative responsibility" (Nash, 1965:73).

Written Language

Does the religious group in question possess its own distinct written language:

– No

Notes: "The Burmans speak Burmese (a Tibeto-Burman language) and live in the central plain of Burma, in the Union of Burma, which was renamed Myanmar in 1990. 'Burman' is the name of the people of this region, while 'Burmese' refers to the language and culture of these people and to other citizens of Myanmar" (Nash and Abate, 2012).

Is a non-religion-specific written language used by the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: SCCS Variable 149 (Scale 1- Writing and Records) indicates that true writing and records are present among the Burmans (Murdock and Provost, 1971; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

Food Production

Does the religious group in question provide food for themselves:

– Yes

Notes: The villages of Nondwin rely primarily on intensive, irrigated agriculture, with animal husbandry providing a secondary source of subsistence. Source of information from Ethnographic Atlas (Murdock, 1962-1971), retrieved from Divale, 2004; Variables 203-207, 232.



Please characterize the forms/level of food production [choose all that apply]:

– Pastoralism

– Large-scale agriculture (e.g., monocropping, organized irrigation systems)

Notes: The villages of Nondwin rely primarily on intensive, irrigated agriculture, with animal husbandry providing a secondary source of subsistence. Source of information from Ethnographic Atlas (Murdock, 1962-1971), retrieved from Divale, 2004; Variables 203-207, 232.

Is food provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– No

Notes: "This village has not been the particular concern of any government agency, and nothing in its history singles it out from the run of villages around it. The Agricultural Rural Development Corporation had, during my stay, made some visits and attempts to foster the growing of onions, but special government services are not located in or tendered to Nondwin. In this area of Sagaing the land redistribution program has not been carried out, and the ownership and tenancy patterns follow the natural lines of the economic structure of the community rather than governmental plan" (Nash, 1965:14).