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All Authors	Kyaw Swe Nyunt
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## **Economic History of Myitkyina District ( 1993 – 2000 )**

Kyaw Swe Nyunt<sup>\*</sup>

### **Abstract**

Economic history is one of the most vigorous branches of historical research. To cover the Economic changes of Myitkyina district in brief, during seven years in a short space is a difficult task, especially if one wishes to use the results of recent research to correct or modify the ingrown generalization of paper writers. However, that is what has been attempted here. The subject matter has been divided into two or three major section. This paper is a guide to major developments and controversies.

### **Introduction**

From 1990 through 2000, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) encouraged all nationalities to take a more active role in economic development. Joint ventures accordingly established with both domestic and foreign business firms. In order to reflect the current economic situation of Myitkyina District the study period covers the fiscal years 1993/94, 1994/95, 1995/96, 1996/97, 1998/99 and 1999/2000.

### **Background**

Kachin State made up of three districts: Myitkyina, Bhamo and Putao. Myitkyina district is 19792.89 square miles in extent and lies between 24° 37' and 28° North Latitude and 96° 98' and 98° 20' Longitude East. The district is about 180 miles wide in East - West and 190 miles long in North - South. Myitkyina District is composed of nine townships – Myitkyina, Waimaw, Ingyanyan, Mogaung, Mohnyin, Pharkant, Tanai, Chipwi and Sawlaw.<sup>1</sup> Geographically, Myitkyina District is the most important of the three districts since it possess a large area of alluvial plain, along the upper course of the Irrawaddy River, including a large elongated Nanyin plain and Mogaung plain. There lowland areas are the most suitable land for wet rice cultivation of the district.

The total population of Myitkyina in 2000 is about 140000 and the central wards of the town are densely populated. The northern and

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<sup>\*</sup> Doctor, Assistant Lectures, History Department, Myitkyina University.

<sup>1</sup> *Knowledge of Myitkyina District*. The Office of Peace and Development Council, Myitkyina District, December, 1999. pp. 1- 2

southern parts of the town are less densely populated. The average density per square miles is 4628 and estimated increase in total population is 2% kachin groups such as Jingphaw, Gori, Dureng (၆၇), Law-waw, Rawang, Lashi (လချိတ်), Zai-War (အဇီး), and Lisus are found in Myitkyina. Baman, Kayah, Kayin, Chin, Mon, Rakhine and Shans are found in small numbers. The demographic factors are of great importance in the general progress of an area. Population data are necessary to know in drawing plans for long-term and short-term social, and management. It is also labour force in carrying out agricultural and other economic activities in time. The population data include total population, rate of population growth, population distribution and density, rural and urban population, sex ratio, strength of labour, condition of living, etc.

Though various kinds of production exist there, the economy of the district does not develop well, as the people use traditional method in farming and mining. The population of the district turned out to be approximately, as 677780 in 1992 - 93 and in 2000 as 835470. The approximate increase during the decennial 1992 and 2000 is 157690 or over 32 percent. By the year 2000 data, there is an amalgamation of nationalities in the district as follows:

Kachin	271072
Shan	167320
Myanmar	388115
Others	8963
<b>Total</b>	<b>835470</b>

The Kachins live in the Hills; the Shans and Myanmars in the plain; the Indians and Chinese who form small trading communities found in the towns of district and in the larger villages. Some Chinese call themselves Shan - Chinese. Social strata can be classified as Government servants, traders, craft men, agriculturist and laborers; living has risen greatly than the past, in recent times. It has been estimated that GDP of the district had risen in 2000 than that of 1988 and that in spite of the growth of population, average income per head has risen by twofold during

this time. Therefore, we can assume that the district has gradually improved and prospered, because it enjoyed political stability. Moreover, it was a period of economic, political and social reform.

The society in the district lived on their own way of life, enduring for centuries and observed the prescribed custom and tradition. The society based on subsistence agriculture, and rice was their staple crop. Before 1992, farming had been mainly for subsistence, the district being largely self-sufficient. After 1992, as population grow, it is necessary to increase the food supply. Although the climatic and soil conditions are favorable for agriculture, the topography of the district sets limits the area of cultivatable land. Nevertheless, the chief occupation of the inhabitants of the district is agriculture. For the time being, the main feature of agriculture changed fundamentally from subsistence farming to commercial farming. The farmers themselves were eager to expand their output of paddy and the profit got from it that made many people ready to invest capital in agriculture. The area of the district was 7,025,920 acres in 1911. About 33,234 (0.5% of the total areas) acres were under cultivation of which 8,573 acres were irrigated.<sup>2</sup> The area of the district had increased to 12,557,222 acres in 1998.<sup>3</sup> According to 1970, the total areas of the district were 1,607,686 acres and in 1993, it was about 4505935 acres.<sup>4</sup> The increased cultivation lands might be due to reclamation of cultivation land, in many places at the expense of forestland. Land reclamation is necessary, but should not carry out at the expense of forest, endangering our environment. Myitkyina district, Mohnyin, and Mogaung are the township with largest sown acreages and outputs of paddy. There is very little taungya cultivation in these townships and wet cultivation method is mostly employed.

The main Economic Activities of Myitkyina district are agricultural, livestock breeding, timber extraction, jade mining

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<sup>2</sup> W.A. Hertz. **Burma Gazetteer: Myitkyina District. VOL. A.** Rangoon, Superintended Government Printing and Stationary, 1960. Pt. II. Table IV. p. 100

<sup>3</sup> **Land Record Administration Report.** Department of Land Records (Myitkyina), December, 1998. (Hereafter : **Land Records**, 1998)

<sup>4</sup> **Land Records**, 1998

gold panning, and fish breeding. The majority of the population in Myitkyina district occupied with agriculture and livestock breeding. The most basic economical production of the district is agriculture and there are three main types in agriculture. These are shifting cultivation, terrace cultivation and irrigation cultivation. There is much acreage under terrace cultivation in Waingmaw Township, but irrigated cultivation is much more than terrace cultivation. Over half of the cultivated area in the township, paddy cultivation is under irrigation from Washaung Dam. The ratio of population and paddy product by township in Myitkyina district can be as follow: -

**Population and paddy product by Township in Myitkyina District  
(1992 - 93)<sup>5</sup>**

No.	Township	Paddy Product (Basket)	Population	Per Capita Production
1	Myitkyina	302084	183346	1.65
2	Mogaung	1422132	118022	12.05
3	Mohnyin	3639453	166256	21.89
4	Phakant	142825	42655	3.35
5	Tanaing	45735	15950	1.76
6	Waingmaw	950581	98091	9.69
7	N'Jang Yang	-	18977	-
8	Chipwe	69787	12851	5.04
9	Hsaw Law	9059	11682	0.78
	<b>Total</b>	<b>6581656</b>	<b>677780</b>	<b>9.71</b>

In 1992-93, Myitkyina District produced 6,581.656 baskets. Therefore, the district could produce 9.71 baskets of paddy for one person. In 1993-94, paddy production was about 7,908,917 baskets. It found that the district produced more paddy than the previous year. Another important cash crop that was given priority

<sup>5</sup> Zaw Ja. **Population Geography of Myitkyina District**. M.A, Thesis, University of Mandalay, May, 1998. p - 169.

again in the district was sugarcane. It is an important project crop and is refined at the Namti sugar mill, which is situated in Mogaung Township. Then, the newly introduced rubber was also cultivated as a commercial plantation in the district. The government and private individuals own them. Thus under the SLORC, the former subsistence economy of the district was transformed into commercial economy, three major cash crops for the domestic market, and providing handsome profits for the people. The cash crops of Myitkyina district are groundnut, sesame, green-pea, Soya bean, tea, potato, pulses, wheat and sugar-cane. Now rubber plantations are being raised in Myitkyina district. There are extensive rubber plantations, which are owned by the government and private individuals. The chief sugar-cane growing township in Myitkyina district are Myitkyina, Wainmaw, and Mogaung

Another resource of the district was forest. The type of natural vegetation in Myitkyina District varies with location, relief and soil type. As Myitkyina District is composed of lowland and high mountains, subtropical lowland forests and mountain forests are well-developed. The total forest area in the district is 5866955 acres which amounts to 47.1% of the total district area. Three main types of forests can be recognized in the Myitkyina District. These are:-

- (1) Tropical Ever-green Forests,
- (2) Tropical Deciduous Forests and
- (3) Mountain Forests

In 1996-97, the forests divided as follows: -

**The Forest of Myitkyina District (In acres)<sup>6</sup>**

<b>Township</b>	<b>Reserved</b>	<b>Unclapsed</b>
Myitkyina	328183	77378
Waingmaw	98433	619283
Mogaung	72576	290799
Hparkant	-	776612
Tanaing	-	1807077
<b>Total</b>	<b>919103</b>	<b>4947712</b>

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<sup>6</sup> *Knowledge of Kachin State*. State Peace and Development Council (Kachin) Myitkyina. 30 September, 1999. p - 39

According to this table, we can say that reserved forest areas are very small in the district. There are ten reserved forests<sup>7</sup> in the district and the total area was 919103 acres.<sup>8</sup> Timber production can be regarded as a large-scale enterprise in the district; other hardwoods are produced for local use, chiefly to other countries for building timbers and railways sleepers (ties). For the period, 1985 - 1993, the production of teak and hardwood is shown in the following table:<sup>9</sup>

**Production of Teak and Hardwood (1985 - 1993)**

<b>Years</b>	<b>Teak(Tons)</b>	<b>Hardwood(Tons)</b>
1985 - 86	2216	1227
1986 - 87	2520	1576
1987 - 88	5045	1489
1988 - 89	3239	79
1989 - 90	5356	-
1990 - 91	6433	162
1991 - 92	7394	174
1993 - 93	5755	2379

Myitkyina District is able to benefit from timber production; more jobs and income are available for the indigenous people. However, some problem of ecology can be measured. Therefore, timber should be systematically produced and the local government should maintain forests.

The governments also paid some attention to the mining of minerals mined in the district were jade and gold. Jade mine is located in Hparkant Township and Mawhan area in Mohnyin Township. Jade trade was flourished since 1830 - 1840 and all were exported to Unan (Yunan) which was center of Jade trade.<sup>10</sup> There are two types of Jade mining. The government undertakes one Jade mining and the other is Jade mining by joint venture

<sup>7</sup> Namsem, Tarlawgyi, Ayeindama, Uya-Hatha, Ma Law, Shwekaingmaw, Nansonti, Pugar, Taungbalaung and Namkuin

<sup>8</sup> **Monthly Report of Forest Department.** August, 2001. p - 2

<sup>9</sup> *Knowledge of Kachin State.* State Peace and Development Council (Kachin) Myitkyina. 30 September, 1999. p - 39

<sup>10</sup> Than Tun, Dr. **History of Tour.** VOL. II, Rangoon, Nantha Taik, 1968. pp.

between the government and private individuals. The government legally operated Formerly Jade mining. Myanmar is the only country that produces Jade, its production and values are as follows: -

**Production and Rates of Jade Mine<sup>11</sup>  
(1995 - 2000)**

<b>Years</b>	<b>Jade(Kilo)</b>	<b>Value(Kyats)</b>	<b>U.S \$</b>
1995 - 96	439790.13	112284234	1,212,056
1996 - 97	2968763.78	600457710	2,792,065
1997 - 98	3600512.95	756335380	3,111,338
1998 - 99	4219642.38	1368731815	2,165,152
1999 - 2000	3621849.05	1064950346	3,909,620

In 1995 -96, the production of Jade was 439790.13 Kilo and in 1998 - 99, it was about 4219642.38 Kilo. In four years, the production increased by 3779852 Kilo; at the rate of per year. This indicates that Jade production increased due to the government encouragement and control on black market. Other mineral resource also developed between 1993 and 2000, particularly gold production. The inhabitants of district got much profit from the gold panning. Gold panning is carried out along the Irrawaddy River and in Tanaing Township. It is not easy to estimate the amount of gold obtained, but there is widespread gold panning and mining in the district. Nevertheless, we can say that as a consequence of gold mines, it has caused to change the flow of river and accordingly distributed the waterway. It also caused floods in many areas in the district.

Although the SLORC administration had developed agriculture and mining in the district, the development of industry was found to be very little. Most people are the district as producing areas of raw materials and they never think to encourage

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<sup>11</sup> **Jade mine reports.** Jade Mine Office, Myitkyina. 2000



the development of industry in the district. However, some industries have developed on a small scale in the district. They were based on the processing of agricultural products, such as rice milling, saw milling and sugar refining. In 1999, 144 rice mills are operative in the district. These mills are mostly small, and locate at crossroads or riverbank location, not far away from any town. In 1993, the rice mills and installed of machines is shown in the following: -

**Rice Mills and their capacity<sup>12</sup>**  
(1993)

<b>Township</b>	<b>Number of Mill</b>	<b>Milling capacity Per Hour Rice (Tons)</b>	<b>Milling capacity per Hour (Paddy Baskets)</b>
Myitkyina	1	16	800
Waingmaw	5	25	2000
Mogaung	3	15	2000
Mohnyin	5	45	3600
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>8400</b>

In the district, there are private owned small - scale mills and huller mills. In 1995 - 96, there are 217 small - scale rice mills in the district. Out of them, most of mills are in Mogaung Township with 112 mills and the least in Hsawlaw Township with only three mills.<sup>13</sup> All rice mills are capable only to meet the local needs in Myitkyina District. There are eighty-two sawmills in 1996 - 97. Among them, the most are found in Myitkyina Township with forty - six mills and Mohnyin, Mogaung and Waingmaw Townships have 1810 and 8 respectively.<sup>14</sup> There were numerous sawpits, ordinarily owned and operated by Chinese and employing two to six workers each. Most sawmills are not well equipped and

<sup>12</sup> *Knowledge of Kachin State*. State Peace and Development Council (Kachin) Myitkyina. 30 September, 1999. p - 48

<sup>13</sup> Lwin Lwin Tun, *Economic Geography of Myitkyina District*. M.A, Thesis . Mandalay University. May, 1998. p. 172 (Hereafter: Lwin Lwin Tun, 1998)

<sup>14</sup> Lwin Lwin Tun, 1998. p. 176

the machineries are out of date. Thus, the production is not much high.

The Livestock bred in Myitkyina district includes cattle, buffalo, chicken, duck, goat, horse, donkey, and elephant. The Livestock that are bred on commercial scale are buffalo, cattle, goat and chicken. Buffaloes and cattle are raised in the grazing land to produce draft animals and meat and milk for consumption. Fish breeding is being carried out by the Department of Fishery and by the private businesspersons. Fishery is catching fish from the fish breeding ponds catching fish from the naturally occurring rivers and lakes.

Regarding to cost of living, it is too high as current price of essential commodities are soaring (skyrocketing). In 1990's commodities prices are as follow and it is to compare with current prices.<sup>15</sup> These are: -

Rice	2400 Ks/-per basket
Oil	700 Ks/-per Viss
Fish	300 Ks/-per Viss
Onion	50 Ks/-per Viss
Salt	13 Ks/-per Viss

Then, the prices of building materials are: -

Bamboos (Wabo)	1500 Ks/-per hundred
Thatche (Pyits)	1000 Ks/-per hundred
Came (Pyits)	2000 Ks/-per two hundred
Teak (Tons)	40000 Ks/-per tons

According to Kachin State Municipal' report, it also pointed out that disruption of communication and transportation during the monsoon, destroyed the flow of commodities and trade.

Transportation is important factor for the development of socio -economic life. Myitkyina district is more dependent than the other districts on the railway transport. In the district, major trading center is Myitkyina and other centers are Mogaung, Hopin and Mohnyin. Depending upon transportation, commodities prices vary from different regions.

In conclusion, the district socio - economic stagnated between 1980 and 1988. Since 1989, SLORC has introduced a

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<sup>15</sup> **Monthly Commodities price report.** Kachin State Municipal (MCDC) Myitkyina, June, 1990

number of economic reforms to get away from the socialist system and adopted the market -oriented economy. Thus commercial agriculture took the place of subsistence agriculture. However some industries still run on a small scale in the district. They were based on the processing of agricultural products. Some minerals, especially jade, have been exported to other countries. SLORC took special care for economic reforms and social status, the standard of living have somewhat improved.

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