

LESSON 7

Rice, capital, debt
and rural hardship
in Southeast Asia
from the nineteenth
to twentieth
centuries

Subject	History/Social Studies
Topic	Rice, capital, debt and rural hardship in Southeast Asia from the nineteenth to twentieth centuries: Were the Chettiars to blame for land alienation in Burma?
Level	Lower secondary
Key idea	Under European colonialism, rice cultivation shifted from subsistence to large-scale, export farming. As a result of the world economic crisis, fallen rice prices and unwillingness of the colonial governments to make policy changes, land alienation and peasant impoverishment increased in Southeast Asia.
Key concepts	Capital Capitalism Cash crop Cultivation Economic depression Globalization Interconnections International economy Natural resources Supply and demand
No. of periods/lessons	2 periods (1 period is approximately 50 minutes)
Facilities needed	Sources and handouts for distribution
Prerequisite knowledge	Students should have covered <i>Lesson 1: Introduction to rice cultures</i> , <i>Lesson 5: Spice, rice and the economic histories of Southeast Asia</i> and <i>Lesson 6: The spice trade, European control and regional response</i> to have knowledge about rice culture and the inter-connectedness of the region.

Learning objectives

By the end of the lesson, the students will be able to:

KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS	ATTITUDES
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Describe how land alienation occurred in Burma and how the Burmese peasants directed their anger over losing their land at moneylenders (the Chettiars in particular). 2. State the other causes that contributed to the problem of land alienation. 3. Recognize the multiple forces behind the issue of land alienation. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Engage in the study of sources and role play to investigate different perspectives when they are examining a contentious issue. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Realize how the development of the rice export industry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a double-edged sword. 2. Cultivate historical empathy and understand the conditions of possibility and the choices available to the historical actors.

Section	Lesson Development	Resources	Rationale
Introduction [10 minutes]	<p>1. Hook activity: Cloze (gap-fill) and reading inference task (optional)</p> <p>1.1 Students read Handout 1, research the meaning of the seven key words and fill in the gaps in the text. (<i>Answers to the cloze activity: export; migration; commodity; depression; foreclose; landlords; riots</i>)</p> <p>1.2 <i>Optional:</i> Complete a reading inference task. More able students read the text and try to define what they think 'land alienation' means. Guiding questions for the inference task:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who owned the land at first? (local peasant farmers) • Who came to own at least a quarter of the land? (Chettiar) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handout 1 	<p>The cloze activity highlights key concepts and vocabulary necessary for textual comprehension and will provide an opportunity for formative assessment.</p>
Development I [40 minutes]	<p>2. Teacher talk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Globalization in Southeast Asia is actually not a new phenomenon. In the earlier part of the unit, the students have learned how connected the region has been with other parts of the world through the spice trade. • This lesson uses rice cultivation as a historical case study of globalization in Southeast Asia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries against the backdrop of colonialism and rising capitalism. From this historical case study, students can continue to explore questions arising from globalization in today's context. • In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the development of the rice industry highlighted how Southeast Asia's economy changed from previous centuries. On the one hand, the region remained well-connected to the rest of the world and witnessed tremendous economic and social development. Throughout the region, but particularly on the mainland – in Burma, Thailand and French Indochina – large numbers of peasants became rice farmers. They formed big waves of migration within the country to grow rice in newly opened areas, for example, Burmese moving to the Irrawaddy River Delta, Thais and Vietnamese to the Mekong and Red River Deltas. Support these examples with Source 1 and Source 2. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Source 1: The rise of export industries in Southeast Asia • Source 2: Development of the rice industry in Burma • Source 3: A historian's observation about how the expansion of rice cultivation was a mixed blessing for Burma • Source 4: A historian's explanation about why indebtedness occurred • Source 5: A historian's explanation about why cultivators borrowed money from Chettiar 	<p>The use of the mini lecture sets the context quickly for the students.</p> <p>The use of sources supplements the teacher talk and enables the students to understand the information better.</p> <p>The use of the 3-2-1 graphic organizer at the check point helps students consolidate what they have learned from the first lesson and sets the context for the second part of the lesson.</p>

Section	Lesson Development	Resources	Rationale
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On the other hand, the economic growth did not benefit most Southeast Asians. This was partly because of the uncertain nature of the export economy and partly because of Southeast Asia's weak position in this economy. Growing rice for export tied farmers to an international economy based on capital, they might have underestimated the risk involved. The peasants borrowed money for seeds, fertilizers, basic equipment, labour, and also for personal and family expenses such as weddings, funerals, religious ceremonies, etc. Borrowing from local Chinese, Indian and Burmese moneylenders, farmers used their land as mortgage. The loans placed the peasants in debt in a vulnerable position should demand for rice fall. Support explanation with Source 3 to Source 5. <p>3. Discussion</p> <p>3.1 Using Sources 3 to 8, guide students' reading with the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why was increased rice cultivation a mixed blessing for Burma? Why did many cultivators get into problems with debt? Why did some cultivators borrow from Chettiars? Why did the Chettiars' share of land rise to 25 per cent by 1937? Why did bad feelings towards Chettiars and 'absentee landlords' grow? <p>4. Teacher talk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indian moneylenders (Chettiars) were particularly hated when the price of rice plummeted during the economic depression of the 1930s and the Chettiars began to foreclose on the land held by native Burmese who could not pay their debts. As a result, the Chettiars came to own nearly one-quarter of the cultivated land in Lower Burma. The Burmese farmers now owned no land and were reduced to tenants who rented the land from others to cultivate their crops. The moneylenders became 'absentee landlords', since unlike traditional landlords, they did not reside in the countryside but merely drew income from the rent of the lands. By 1939, 59 per cent of the cultivated land in Lower Burma was rented out to tenants, highlighting the seriousness of land alienation in Burma. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Source 3 – Source 8 	

Section	Lesson Development	Resources	Rationale
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The issue of land alienation generated social problems in Burmese society which reached a climax during the Great Depression, when anti-Indian riots broke out in Lower Burma. Support the points mentioned above with Source 6 to Source 8. <p>5. Exit pass</p> <p>5.1 Students reflect on what they have learned so far by filling in the table on the Handout 2. Elicit responses from the students to help them consolidate what they have learned.</p> <p>5.2 Summarize the lesson:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The traditional pre-colonial economy, which used to serve the locals, became largely transformed to serve the interests of the Western industrialized nations. As a result of this, the Southeast Asian economy no longer remained small, self-sufficient or independent, but expanded into a larger, growing export-oriented economy interdependent upon economic forces elsewhere in the world, especially in the West. As a supplier of raw materials and primary products, Southeast Asia was very vulnerable to the price fluctuations of these products in the global market. Southeast Asian economies were also heavily reliant on one or a few products, so price fluctuations for these products hit the Southeast Asian countries very hard. <p>5.3 Introduce the next part of the lesson by telling the students that they will learn more about land alienation in Burma and recognize the multiple forces and actors behind the issue.</p> <p>5.4 Identify students who will participate in the role play and distribute the role cards, Source 9 and Source 10 so that they can prepare for their role. Encourage them to search for additional information.</p> <p>Note: There are two sets of role plays. The first is between a Burmese cultivator and a Chettiar moneylender. The second features two British colonial government officials, a European merchant and a Burmese landowner. Select more able students to play the role of the Burmese cultivator and Chettiar moneylender.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Handout 2: Exit pass Source 9: Chettiar involvement prior to the 1880s Source 10: How the British colonial regime promoted economic development from the 1880s 	

Section	Lesson Development	Resources	Rationale
<p>Development II [35 minutes]</p>	<p>6. Role play 1</p> <p>6.1 Distribute Handout 5 to all students.</p> <p>6.2 Students who are playing the role of a Burmese cultivator and a Chettiar moneylender come to the front of the class. Give them time to read and familiarize themselves with the situation and motivations of their characters in Handout 3 if they haven't done so earlier.</p> <p>6.3 Introduce the characters to the students and inform them that they will get to interview a Burmese cultivator and a Chettiar moneylender. Emphasize that the Indian Chettiars were not the only moneylenders operating in Burma. There were Chinese and Burmese moneylenders offering credit as well.</p> <p>6.4 Students brainstorm three questions they would like to ask the two characters, respectively. Examples of guiding questions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the different reasons you might want to borrow/loan money? • Is it risky to borrow/loan money? • Who is it risky for? • Why would lenders and borrowers take the risk? <p>6.5 Discuss Source 9 and Source 10. Guide students towards a recognition of how the Chettiars' lending practices changed around the 1880s; they can ask questions about this during the role play.</p> <p>6.6 Begin the interview, facilitate the activity and intervene when necessary.</p> <p>6.7 After the activity, elicit responses from the students about what they have learned.</p> <p>6.8 Summarize key information from the role play:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The development of the rice industry made large-scale cultivation of paddy attractive to the Burmese rice cultivators who may not have understood that growing rice for export tied them to an international economy that is vulnerable to price fluctuations. • Prior to the 1880s, the Indian Chettiars had financed agricultural production indirectly through loans to indigenous moneylenders who in turn lent to cultivators at higher rates of interest. They actually provided very few loans directly to cultivators. When the British colonial regime introduced a new system of land tenure, there was more demand for agriculture credit. • Support explanations with Source 9 and Source 10. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handout 3: Role play 1 – role cards (for students acting in role play 1) • Handout 5: Land Alienation in Burma; were the Indian Chettiars to blame? (for all students) 	

Section	Lesson Development	Resources	Rationale
	<p>7. Role play 2</p> <p>7.1 Divide the students into groups of four.</p> <p>7.2 Distribute one copy of Handout 4 to each group. Each student reads their source (roles A to D) out to the three others in the group. Each group makes a list of who disagrees with whom and why, and get ready to share their list with the rest of the class.</p> <p>7.3 Set the scene for the class by explaining that the British colonial government actually realized the danger of land alienation and wanted to push through legislation to control the problem. However, there were other actors who opposed attempts at legislation for different reasons. The students need to ask the characters why they oppose such legislation.</p> <p>7.4 Begin the role play, facilitate the activity and intervene when necessary.</p> <p>7.5 After the activity, elicit responses from the students about what they have learned.</p> <p>7.6 Summarize key information from the role play:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In certain cases, colonial governments were unable, reluctant, or unwilling to introduce measures to reduce the peasants' exposure to the international economy, as these measures might jeopardize the rice industry. For instance, in Burma, British-owned rice mills sought to keep rice prices low to maximize profit. • Many colonial administrations in Southeast Asia were also reluctant to diversify the economy away from primary products, for example towards manufacturing, since this would create competition for Western manufacturers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handout 4: Role play 2 - role cards (for students acting in role play 2) 	
<p>Closure [15 minutes]</p>	<p>8. Reflection</p> <p>8.1 Students refer to the iceberg diagram on Handout 6.</p> <p>8.2 Explain that typically there are numerous underlying causes that give rise to a phenomenon. What one sees above the water is only the tip of the iceberg. Often larger causes that rest 'beneath the surface' can be difficult to detect at first.</p> <p>8.3 Students complete their iceberg diagrams and decide if the Indian Chettiars were to blame for land alienation in Burma based on the sources presented and the information acquired from the role play activities. Elicit responses from the students.</p> <p>8.4 Consolidate what the students have learned and ask them to complete the Handout 7.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handout 6: Consolidation of information using the iceberg diagram • Handout 7: Reflection 	<p>The use of the iceberg diagram helps students gain awareness of the multiple factors that give rise to issue of land alienation. The visual image of the iceberg helps students remember the importance of looking deeper than what is on the surface in order to better understand events in the past (or present).</p> <p>The reflection handout enables the teacher to gauge students' understanding of how the development of rice export industry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a double-edged sword. It also helps the teacher assess if students recognize multiple perspectives when dealing with contentious issues.</p>

Sources and handouts

Glossary

Chettiars:	a group of Tamil migrants from Chettinad, India, most commonly associated with moneylending, who provided credit to rice farmers in the Irrawaddy Delta. It is also a title used by various mercantile, agricultural and landowning castes in South India, especially in the states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala.
Cinchona bark:	the cinchona is a tree. The bark is used for medicine.
Constitutional monarchy:	a monarchy that is subject to a constitution (the laws of a nation).
Copra:	dried kernel of the coconut used to extract coconut oil.
Coup d'état:	the seizure of power in a state by a small group of people, usually elites.
Great Depression:	a global economic crisis in the 1930s, with severely reduced business activity and demand for goods.
Kapok:	a tree is that is cultivated for the seed fibre. Also known as the 'Java cotton', it is used as an alternative to down as filling in mattresses, pillows, upholstery, etc.
Rangoon:	the former name of the city of Yangon, Myanmar.
Sisal:	a plant; its fiber is used for rope, twine, paper, cloth, etc.
Subsistence agriculture:	small-scale farming to feed the family, rather than to sell the surplus for profit.
Wall Street Crash (1929):	a major crash on the New York Stock Exchange and the trigger for the Great Depression.

Source 1: The rise of export industries in Southeast Asia

By 1940, Southeast Asia supplied almost of all the world's rubber, hemp, pepper, cinchona bark and teak, three-quarters of its tapioca and copra, more than half of its palm oil, more than one-third of its sisal, large amounts of sugar, tin, tea, tobacco, spices, natural resins, gums and fats, petroleum, iron, manganese and chromium.

Source:

Pluvier, Jan. 1974. *Southeast Asia: From Colonialism to Independence*. Kuala Lumpur; New York: Oxford University Press.

Source 2: Development of the rice industry in Burma

Owing to the existence of a strong and steadily rising demand for Burma's rice in Europe and other areas, the Irrawaddy Delta's economy expanded rapidly in the last half of the nineteenth century. Between the mid-1850s and 1900, five million additional acres of rice land were brought into production in Lower Burma, the amount of rice exported annually from Burma rose from less than two hundred thousand to over two million tons. This growth was supported by a steady rise in the price of paddy from Rs. 45 to Rs. 95 per hundred (46 lb.) baskets in Rangoon.

Source:

Adas, Michael. 1974. 'Immigrant Asians and the Economic Impact of European Imperialism: The Role of the South Indian Chettiars in British Burma'. *The Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 33, No. 3 May, pp. 385-401.

Vocabulary

Steadily: regularly.

Source 3: A historian's observation about how the expansion of rice cultivation was a mixed blessing for Burma

The country became increasingly prosperous as an addendum to the economy of the West, utilizing Western markets and enterprise, while the people remained relatively poor and quite incapable of controlling the vast economic forces playing on them.

Source:

Cady, John Frank. 1958. *A History of Modern Burma*. Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press

Vocabulary

Addendum: something added.
Prosperous: rich.

Source 4: A historian's explanation about why indebtedness occurred

The most important cause by far for the loss of land was that cultivators incurred debts which were beyond their capacity to repay. Indebtedness, in turn, could be traced to a number of causes such as the inexperience and ignorance of borrowers caught in the rapid change from a subsistence to a cash economy; circumstances befalling the borrowers like drought, flood, pests, illnesses and cattle disease; the use of loans for purposes such as elaborate traditional ceremonies; the use of loans for speculative ventures which failed; and the unfavourable conditions under which loans were made such as excessively high interest rates charged, the practice of moneylenders to allow and even encourage borrowers to borrow to the limit of the value of their land, which they were offering as security for the loans.

Source:

Cady, John F. 1946. 'Economic Development in Burma'. *Far Eastern Survey*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Jan. 16, 1946), pp. 1-4.

Vocabulary

Befall: to happen to.
Cash economy: an economic system in which financial transactions are carried out with cash / money.
Drought: a long period with low or no rain, leading to a shortage of water.
Indebtedness: being in debt.
Speculative ventures: risky investments.
Subsistence economy: a non-monetary economy that relies on natural resources to provide for basic needs, through hunting, gathering and subsistence agriculture.

Source 5: A historian's explanation about why cultivators borrowed money from Chettiars

The cultivators sometimes borrowed money unwisely because he needed cash, had no practical alternative to accepting the Chettiars' terms. They had to buy seed rice and hire labour for planting and harvesting, for the repair of the paddy dikes.

Source:

Cady, John Frank. 1958. *A History of Modern Burma*. Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press.

Vocabulary

Cash: money, in coins or notes.

Chettiars: title used by various trading, agricultural and landowning castes in South India, especially in the states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

Paddy dike: ridges made out of dirt to divide rice field into plots and to retain water.

Unwisely: in a way that shows poor judgement.

Source 6: A table illustrating the trend of landownership in the thirteen rice-producing districts of Burma

The thirteen principal rice growing districts were Pegu, Tharrawaddy, Hanthawaddy, Insein, Prome, Bassein, Henzada, Myaungmya, Maubin, Pyapon, Thaton, Amherst and Toungoo.

In 1930, the Chettiars owned about six per cent of the total occupied area, but by 1937 their share rose to 25 per cent. This was caused largely by the fall in the value of land following the collapse of world cereal (this includes rice, rice was a major export product for Burma) during the depression of the early 1930s.

**Report of the Land and Agriculture Committee (1938, Part II, p. 39):
Distribution of agricultural land by type of owners in
the thirteen principal rice-growing districts of Lower Burma, 1930 to 1937**

Year	Total agricultural land	Area owned by non-agriculturists	Area owned by Chettiars	Percentage of area owned by	
				non-agriculturists to total agricultural land	Chettiars to total agricultural land
<i>In thousands of acres</i>				<i>Per cent</i>	
1930	9,249	2,943	570	32	6
1931	9,305	3,212	806	34	9
1932	9,246	3,770	1,367	41	15
1933	9,266	4,139	1,782	45	19
1934	9,335	4,460	2,100	48	22
1935	9,408	4,689	2,229	50	24
1936	9,499	4,873	2,393	51	25
1937	9,650	4,929	2,446	51	25

Source:

Cheng, Siok Hwa. 1965. 'Land Tenure Problems in Burma, 1852 to 1940'. *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 38 (1) (207), July, pp. 106-134.

Vocabulary

Chettiars: title used by various trading, agricultural and landowning castes in South India, especially in the states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

Collapse: downfall, disruption.

Source 7: A historian's explanation about the locals' hatred of Chettiar moneylenders

The primary grievance of the harried Burman paddy farmer in Lower Burma was the Chettiar money-lenders. Practically all the annual increment of the new rice land was subject from the outset to mortgage to the Indian moneylender. Loans were advanced by the Chettiars at rates ranging from 15-36 per cent per annum. Once having become involved in debt, few farmers were ever able to extricate themselves. After the Chettiars, the landlord, the tax collector and the Chinese merchant took their due from the crop, the cultivator usually had less than enough to feed their families until the next harvest.

Popular hatred of the Chettiars was greatly intensified as a result of foreclosures of land mortgages during the depression years of the early thirties when the price of rice fell below the cost of production. When Chettiars called in their loans and the cultivators could not pay their debts and had to give up their land, the Chettiar community acquired full titles, eventually possessing 2.5 million acres of paddy land, equalling to one-quarter of the cultivated land in all Lower Burma.

Source:

Cady, John F. 1946. 'Economic Development in Burma'. *Far Eastern Survey*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Jan. 16, 1946), pp. 1-4.

Vocabulary

Chettiars:	title used by various trading, agricultural and landowning castes in South India, especially in the states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala.
Due:	what is owed to them to repay the loan.
Extricate:	to get out of a situation.
Foreclosure:	taking possession of a property when the loan cannot be repaid.
Grievance:	complaint.
Harried:	worried, stressed.
Increment:	augmentation.
Mortgage:	loan agreement.
Outset:	from the start (from the outset).

Source 8: A description of the 'absentee' landlord

As a rule, the absentee landlord did very little to improve his land or to encourage tenants to improve methods of cultivation. This was especially the case with the alien landowners who did not intend to keep the land for a long period and had no interest in their land except to extract as much rent out of it as possible while it remained in their possession.

Source:

Cheng, Siok Hwa. 1965. 'Land Tenure Problems in Burma, 1852 to 1940'. *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 38 (1) (207), July, pp. 106-134.

Vocabulary

Absentee landlord:	absent owner, people owning a land but not living on it, not working on it, rarely visiting it.
Alien:	foreign.
Tenants:	people who rent a land from the land owner.

Source 9: Chettiar involvement prior to the 1880s

The Chettiars confined their banking and moneylending operations largely to Rangoon city and its immediate environs. Although they financed agricultural production indirectly through loans to indigenous moneylenders who in turn lent to cultivators at higher rates of interest, the Chettiars provided few loans directly to agriculturists in this period. This low level of Chettiar involvement in the early expansion of agricultural production contradicts a number of major assumptions regarding their role in Burma's development.

Source:

Furnivall, John. 1938. *Political Economy of Burma*. Burma Book Club, Rangoon.

Source 10: How the British colonial regime promoted economic development from the 1880s

The British introduced legal and political institutions geared to a capitalistic economy, expended large sums on transportation improvements, embankments and other public works. Private British investors built processing plants for rice, which was to become Burma's predominant export, European merchants furnished links with market outlets overseas.

Source:

Parrot, B.A. 1881. *Report on the Settlement Operations in the Syriam Township, Hanthawaddy District, 1880–1881* (Rangoon 1881), p. 7. by Rangoon, p. 7.

Vocabulary

Embankment: a wall of earth or stone to prevent flooding.

Predominant: main.

Handout 1

Task: Add these words that are missing from the text below. Can you work out from the text what the phrase 'land alienation' might mean?

commodity

depression

migration

landlords

export

riots

foreclose

Introduction

Limited access to land, dependence on rainfall and the potential for the destruction of crops by pests and natural disasters were sources of poverty before the arrival of European colonialists. However, colonialism and the introduction of a cash economy and the shift to growing crops for _____ significantly worsened the problem. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the development of the rice industry highlighted how Southeast Asia's economy changed from previous centuries.

On the one hand, the region remained well connected to the rest of the world and witnessed tremendous economic and social development. Rice was cultivated on a large scale for export to expanding populations in Southeast Asia and beyond. Throughout the region, but particularly on the mainland, such as in Burma, Thailand and French Indochina, large numbers of peasants became rice farmers. They formed big waves of _____ within the country to grow rice in newly opened areas, for example, Burmese moving to the Irrawaddy River Delta and Thais and Vietnamese to the Mekong and Red River Deltas.

On the other hand, the transformation of rice as an export _____ in colonial Southeast Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had negative consequences such as the widespread land alienation in Burma (present-day Myanmar), Cochin China (the southern part of present-day Viet Nam), Philippines, Indonesia and Malaya.

In Burma, the Indian moneylenders (Chettiars) were particularly hated when the price of rice plummeted during the economic _____ of the 1930s and they began to _____ on the land held by native Burmese who could not pay their debts. As a result, the Chettiars came to own nearly one-quarter of the cultivated land in Lower Burma.

In these cases, the Burmese farmers now owned no land of their own and were reduced to tenants who rented the land from others to cultivate their crops. The moneylenders became absentee landlords, since unlike traditional _____, they did not reside in the countryside but merely drew income from the rent of the lands. By 1939, 59% of the cultivated land in Lower Burma was rented out to tenants, highlighting the seriousness of land alienation in Burma.

The issue of land alienation generated social problems in Burmese society which reached a climax during the Great Depression, when anti-Indian _____ broke out in Lower Burma.

However, were the Indian Chettiars to blame, or were there other factors that led to economic dislocations such as debt and loss of land?

Find out more from the sources presented and the role-play activities in this lesson.

Handout 2: Exit pass

Rice, capital, debt and rural hardship in Southeast Asia
from the nineteenth to twentieth centuries

Exit pass

3

New facts I learned today

2

Things I found interesting

1

Big question I still have in my mind

Handout 3: Role play activity 1 – Role cards

Role 1: A rice cultivator in Burma

- You are thinking of cultivating rice on a larger scale because the price of rice has been rising.
- You need more money to buy more paddy land. Other rice cultivators are also expanding their holdings [properties] so the price for paddy land is rising.
- You also need for seeds, fertilizers, basic equipment and labour.
- You also have family expenses you need to pay for (e.g. weddings, funerals).
- You are going to borrow money from a local Chettiar and you will have to use your land as mortgage. If you are unable to repay your loan, you will have to hand over the title of your land to the Chettiar.
- You know it is a risk but think that the returns from the sale of rice will be worth it.

Role 2: A Chettiar moneylender in Burma

- You used to confine your banking and moneylending operations largely to Rangoon city and the areas nearby.
- You financed agricultural production indirectly through loans to indigenous moneylenders who in turn lent to cultivators at higher rates of interest. You actually provide very few loans directly to cultivators.
- The British colonial regime has introduced a new system of land tenure (laws about land ownership).
- These new laws mean it is now possible for cultivators to mortgage their land as security for loans obtained from moneylenders.
- Coupled with strong and rising demand for Burma's rice, there have been more local cultivators seeking loans from you to expand their holdings [properties] and you have expanded your operations from Rangoon city and its surrounding areas into the rural areas.

Handout 4: Role play activity 2 – Role cards

Role A: A British colonial government official in Burma

- You are concerned about the steady [regular] loss of land by cultivators to non-cultivators.
- You believe that there should be laws in place to restrict land alienation.
- This is because some non-cultivators are not natives of Burma – a substantial portion of the profits of the land is 'remitted' (sent back to their home countries) year by year.

Role B: A British government official

- You are opposed to having laws in place to restrict land alienation.
- You believe legislation would place a very heavy burden on the British administration. You are worried government officials in Burma will not be able to manage the huge amount of work generated by many individual cases.

Role C: A European merchant in Burma

- You deal in rice milling, rice export trade and fabric imports.
- There are attempts at establishing laws to restrict land alienation.
- You are concerned that if the cultivators are unable to borrow as much money as they could, they may not be able to buy equipment and hire labour, therefore might leave much of the land they own uncultivated.
- This would affect your rice business. Your fabric trade would also be affected since the purchasing power of the cultivators would be diminished – they wouldn't have the money to buy your fabric!

Role D: A Burmese landowner

- You were a moneylender and became a landowner through moneylending activities.
- You oppose laws to restrict land alienation.
- You are concerned that if such a law were passed, land could no longer be used as security for loans. As it is now, if borrowers can't pay you back, you can foreclose (take their land).
- If the law comes in effect and you cannot foreclose, money lending would have to be conducted on a much smaller scale with greater risks. If borrowers don't pay you back you get nothing!

Handout 5: Land alienation in Burma: Were the Indian Chettiars to blame?

Role Play 1:

You have the opportunity to interview a Burmese rice cultivator and a Chettiar moneylender. What questions would you like to ask them to help you learn more about the issue of land alienation in Burma? Write down your questions and their response in the space below.

Role Play 2:

The British colonial government is considering having laws in place to restrict land alienation.

You will be one of four characters in this role-play exercise; two British colonial government officials, a European merchant and a Burmese landowner.

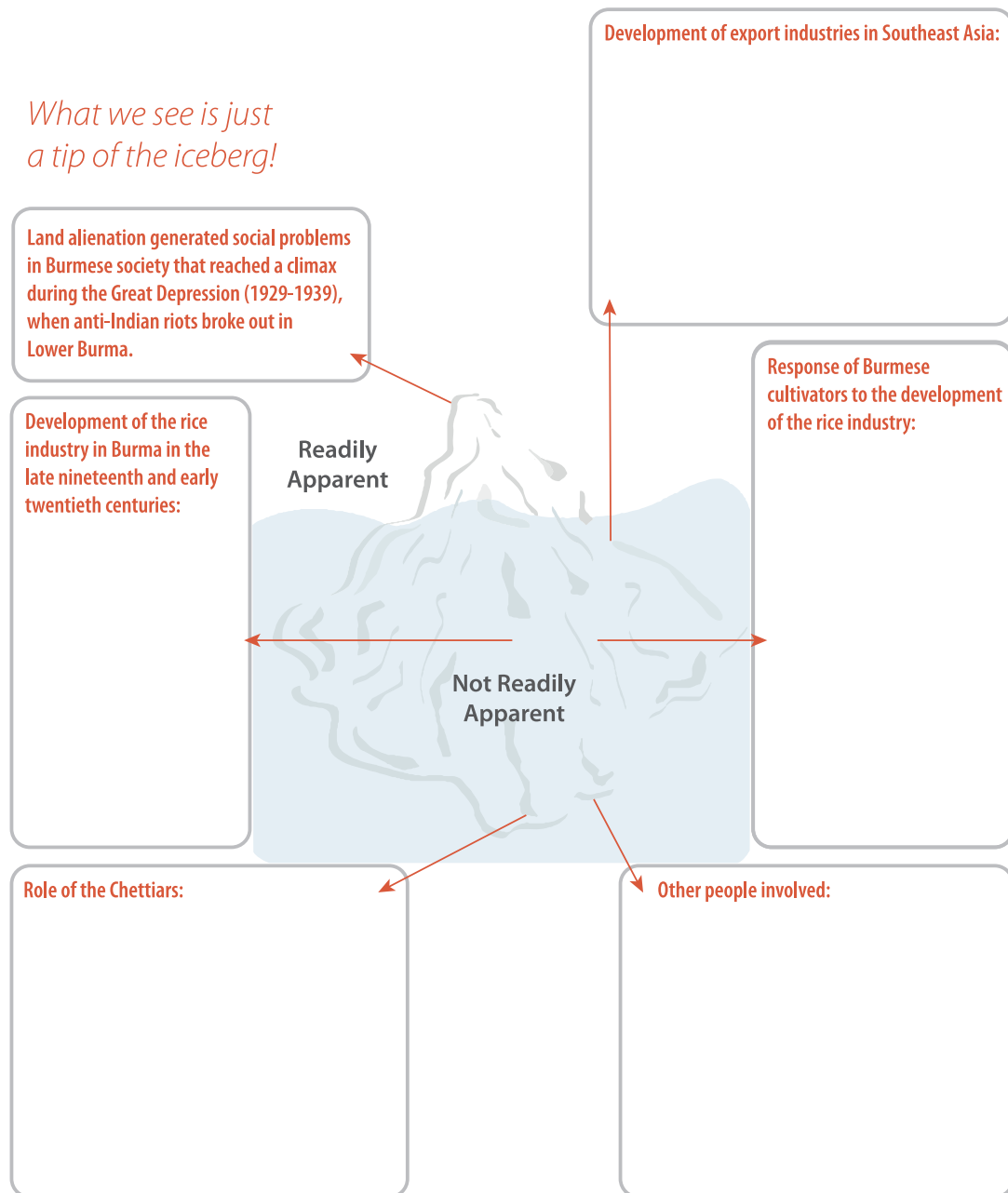
Explain your views about the idea of legislation on land alienation to the other three characters in your group.

Do they agree or disagree with you? Why? How is their perspective different from yours? Make a quick note of who agrees/disagrees with whom and why.

Handout 6: Consolidation of information using the iceberg diagram

Typically there are numerous underlying causes that give rise to a phenomenon (an event we want to explain). What you see above the water is only the tip of the iceberg. Often larger causes that rest beneath the surface can be difficult to detect at first. Based on the sources presented and the information acquired from the role play activities, complete your iceberg diagram and decide if the Indian Chettiars were to blame for land alienation in Burma.

What we see is just a tip of the iceberg!



Vocabulary

Tip of the iceberg: only a hint or suggestion of a much larger or more complex issue or problem.

Handout 7: Reflection

Write a report about what you have learned about land alienation in Burma. Use the following questions to guide you:

- *What did you learn from completing your iceberg?*
- *Of the causes listed in the not readily apparent part of the iceberg, which one or two do you think were most significant? Why?*
- *How does the information in this iceberg help you better understand the world we live in today?*