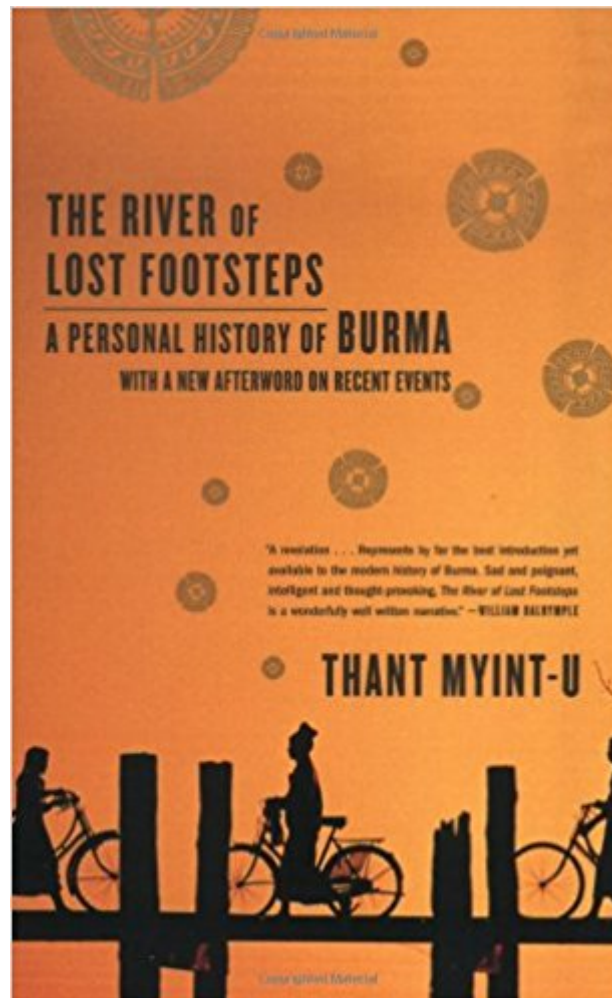




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# The River Of Lost Footsteps: A Personal History Of Burma



## Synopsis

What do we really know about Burma and its history? And what can Burma's past tell us about its present and even its future? For nearly two decades Western governments and a growing activist community have been frustrated in their attempts to bring about a freer and more democratic Burma—through sanctions and tourist boycotts—only to see an apparent slide toward even harsher dictatorship. Now Thant Myint-U tells the story of modern Burma, and the story of his own family, in an interwoven narrative that is by turns lyrical, dramatic, and deeply affecting. Through his prominent family's stories and those of others, he portrays Burma's rise and decline in the modern world, from the time of Portuguese pirates and renegade Mughal princes through a sixty-year civil war that continues today—the longest-running war anywhere in the world. *The River of Lost Footsteps* is a work at once personal and global, a "brisk, vivid history" (Philip Delves Broughton, *The Wall Street Journal*) that makes Burma accessible and enthralling.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Analysis of Burma has been "singularly ahistorical," Thant Myint-U (*The Making of Modern Burma*), a senior officer at the U.N., observes. With an eye to what the past might say about Burma's present status as a country in crisis, Thant Myint-U examines the legacy of imperialism, war and invasion. Recounting in a well-crafted narrative the colorful histories of Burmese dynastic empires from ancient times to the 18th century, Thant Myint-U then focuses on how, during the 19th century, the Burmese kingdom of Ava fought and lost a series of border wars with the British East India Company, culminating in a treaty that marked the beginning of Burma's loss of independence.

Considering the country's longstanding global isolation in the context of its geographic and cultural singularity, Thant Myint-U interweaves his own family's history, writing extensively about his maternal grandfather, U Thant, who rose from humble origins to become secretary-general of the U.N. in the 1960s. Profiling 20th-century Burmese leaders such as Aung San, U Nu and Nobel Peace Prize-winning activist Aung San Suu Kyi, Thant Myint-U beautifully captures the complex identity of a little-understood country, concluding with a trenchant analysis of Burma's current predicament under an oppressive regime. (Dec.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

An international pariah for the past four decades, Burma has seen its profile, though not its military government's reputation, rise higher in recent years because of the saga of Aung San Suu Kyi, 1991 Nobel Peace Prize recipient. Thant contributes welcome context to her plight under house arrest, as well as to Burma's, writ large with this history. It reaches into ancient mists, establishing the origins of Burmese national traditions (in terms of revered places, admired kings, and Buddhism), and commences concretely with three wars that culminated in Britain's colonization of the country in 1885. Administratively part of British India, Burma regained some autonomy in the 1930s, but its nationalists, according to Thant, were inclined toward ideological extremism, with baleful effects: the founder of the military regime, Ne Win, sided with the Japanese invaders in World War II and in 1962 imposed a form of nationalistic socialism that suffocated the economy and isolated the country from the world community. This readable, reflective history will support revived interest in Burma. Gilbert Taylor Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This personal history was an opportunity to go over Burma's centuries-long history of warfare. Who knew? The author belongs to Burma's elite class. Thus, no surprise that he focused on royals & military history. Very detailed, informative.

This is one of the best historical books I have ever read in my life. As a matter of fact. I purchased two books. Before completing the first one I gave it to my friend who like me was also born in Rangoon. During 1942 when I was five my parents had left me to study in India with my grandfather but three times I had visited my parents in Rangoon during my vacations before I came to America for further studies. While I was still in Iowa, during 1964 my parents, my brothers, and my sisters

had come back to India but no one knew the real reason why general Ne Win deported so many of them from Burma. My initial reason was to determine what was his real motive. Searching through various pages I landed on 296 which has the the real reason. Briefly, his coal business in Rangoon had turned sour when he could not compete with some coal merchants from India. Thus, for him revenge was the only answer and he accomplished it after coming to power. I strongly recommend this book to those who are born in Burma or those who have roots in Burma. Thant Myint-U has done extensive search to write this book for those who are curious about Burma and those who are there seeking democracy. My hats off to those students who had given up their lives seeking freedom for their country, those around the world who are supporting that cause for Burma, and Aung San Suu Kyi who is optimistic about getting democracy in her country. Rashmi

I read it as precursor to a trip to Myanmar. The history is revealing, and depressing. The writing is on the turgid side, but for one who knew nothing of the country other than contemporary reporting, the book offers a traveler perspective that helps understand a complex country and society.

It seems like a real cliché to say that this book is fascinating, yet that is the word that best sums up my experience reading it. Before I picked up this book I knew virtually nothing about the history of Burma. I have traveled a fair bit in SE Asia and have spent a lot of time reading the history of Thailand in particular. The overview short history of SE Asia that I read some time back completely ignored Burma which seemed totally inexplicable to me. This book goes to great lengths to explain the history of Burma from the beginning. Much of the book deals with the 19th century and the eventual British take over, ousting of the monarchy, and subsequent events. While there is definitely a good bit of personal history and familial anecdotes are included I didn't think they took away from the history of the country as it is laid out. And the book has changed my personal opinion about sanctions and Burma policy as it has evolved over the last few decades. As much as those of us in the West would like the countries of SE Asia to be functional Western style democracies I am not sure it is fair to expect such systems to develop and evolve overnight given the starting points these places have to work with. While democratic ideals are certainly a goal to which we would want all countries and people to aspire I think we forget that Western countries' democracies have taken hundreds of years to reach the point they have achieved. To expect SE Asian countries, with little to no democratic historical contexts or institutions, to become democrats in a short period of time is not realistic. The author lays out in the final chapter how it will take some time for Burma to become a real democracy. And it rang true with me when I read it. And let's also not forget that current

Western democracies aren't all they are cracked up to be either as they more and more exist for the enrichment of the already rich at the expense of the rest of us. This neighborhood is full of countries where corruption is rife, economic and human rights are regularly abused, and the vast majority of people are barely eking out a life with little prospect of economic mobility. How do we help these people move themselves forward? Does sanctions on the Burmese government, which has itself sought isolation anyway, do anything to advance the cause of Burmese freedom? Or do they stand a better chance of a better life if we engage with them, visit them, trade with them, and try to bring them into the "family of nations"? We are always quick to punish, but is there much evidence that this punishment brings about the sorts of changes we are hoping for?

This book traces the history of Burma from the earliest days up until the start of the 21st century (2005). Unfortunately, some major changes in the political scene have occurred since then. However, it provides a solid background to understand the country and its ethnic components. The author is the grandson of U Thant, a former UN Secretary General and lived a large part of his life in the US, so the book is very readable and understandable. It is indispensable to an understanding of Burma (Myanmar) today.

An excellent account of the history up to recent times of this important country, from an insider whose family members have been important players in its ongoing history. Highly recommended, with its very moving and eye-opening accounts of events and persons not generally known in other parts of the world.

Not a bad primer for a country I don't know anything about

Read this as preparation for a trip to Burma. Found it interesting and worthwhile. Very much written in a textbook style and very readable. I think this provides good background for the trip. I would recommend this book, but give yourself plenty of time to read slowly and thoughtfully. The map in the beginning is a great reference to help the reader understand who the various peoples are throughout the country and throughout history. The edition I have does have a more recent afterword to help bring things up to date.

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