

# Traditional Karen Culture

- Clothing
  - Tunics and sarongs of homespun cotton (dyed red, blue and black) are traditionally worn
  - Both men and married women wear a loose tunic over a wrapped sarong
    - Women's embroidered with coloured thread and beads
  - Unmarried girls wear a simple long white dress
- Pale yellow paste called 'thanaka' may be painted on cheeks, forehead and arms

Photographs by Tom Riddle

Source: [www.tbbc.org](http://www.tbbc.org)



# Traditional Burmese Culture

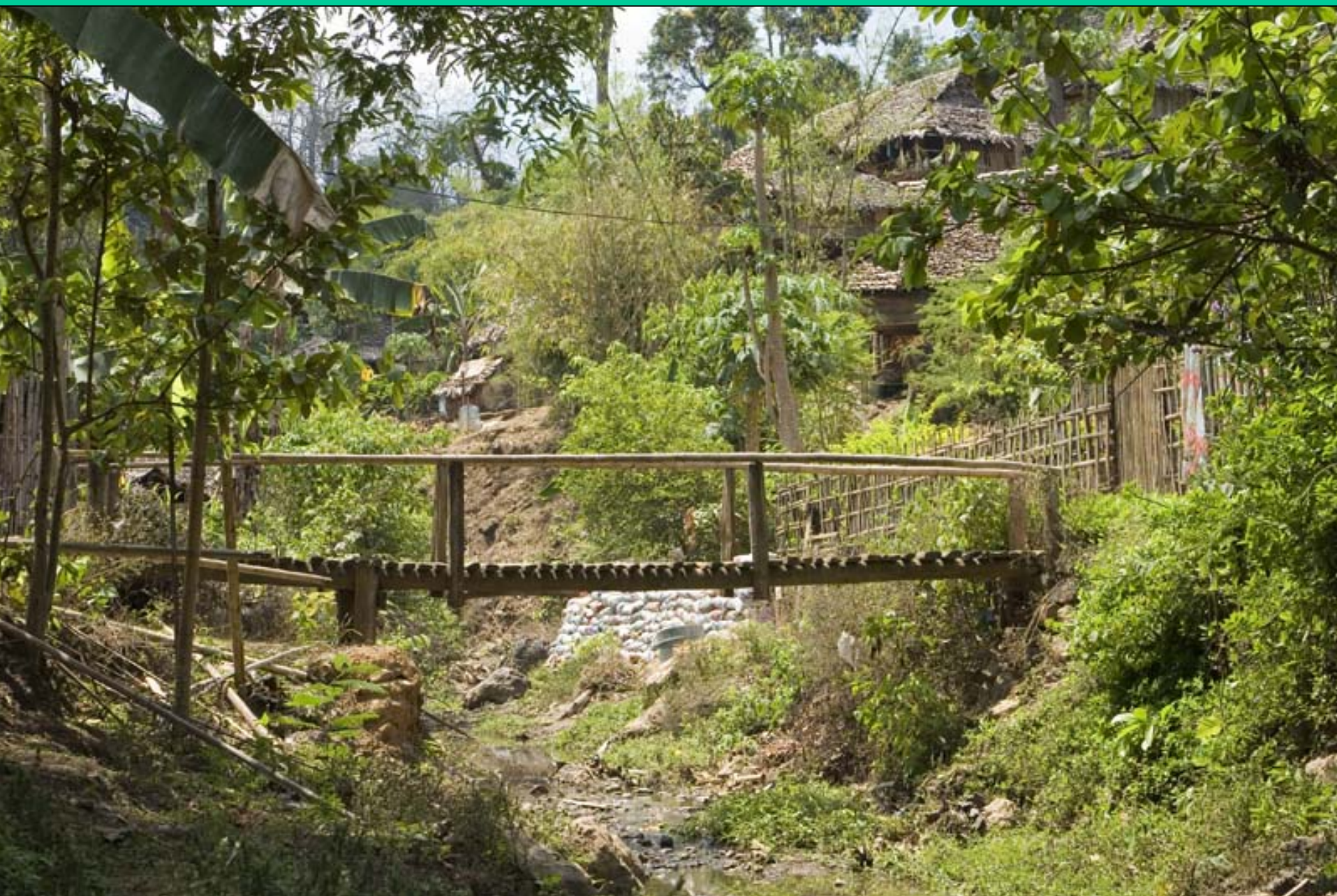
- Similar to culture of Karens, some differences:
  - 90% Theravada Buddhist
  - Families are usually extended
  - Arranged marriage
  - Community structures – social class lines

# Traditional Karen Cuisine

## Large variety of foods

- Rice is a staple and eaten at meals and for snacks
- Jungle products – snake, bat, monkey, grubs, bee larvae, ants, palm sugar, white honey, forest herbs, frog, lizard, birds and fish
- Raise chickens, ducks, pigs, cattle
- Grow corn and pumpkin, and gather forest 'greens' and vegetables
- Monosodium glutamate (MSG) powder as flavouring
- A favourite dish is *takataw* – boiled rice and dried meat (made into a porridge) with added vegetables







# Conflict in Myanmar

- State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) identified Karen and other ethnic minorities as specific threats to their rule
- Karen subjected to systematic, widespread, ethnic-based persecution and persecution for real or imputed political opinion (individual and group basis)
- Since the mid-nineties SPDC army has:
  - Relocated and demolished Karen villages
  - Actively limited access to food, housing, education and health care
  - Created forced labour camps
  - Arrested and violated villagers

# Conflict in Myanmar

- Consistent human rights violations against ethnic minority civilians continues to this day
  - Murder
  - Military abuse of Karen women, particularly rape
  - Torture
  - Forced labour – human minesweepers, human shields, road and railway builders
- Estimated 350,000 Karens have fled to Thailand to seek asylum or refugee protection

# A refugee is...?

- a person who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country..."

*United Nations Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Status of Refugees and Stateless Persons; adopted in 1951*



# Camps on Thai-Myanmar Border

- Tham Hin
- Ban Don Yang
- Nu Po
- Umpium
- Mae La
- Mae La Oon
- Mae Ra Ma Luang
- Ban Mae Surin
- Ban Mae Nai Sol

107,212 Karens  
accommodated in  
these camps

April 2006



**Mae La Camp**

**Source:** [www.tbbsc.org](http://www.tbbsc.org)

# Refugees on Thai-Myanmar Border

- ~44% adults (18 – 59 years)
- ~37% children (5 – 17 years)
- ~16% children under 4 years
  
- Many refugees have spent extended periods in camps (up to 20 years)
- Camp clinics have basic facilities and conduct health and education programs
- Some can speak and write Burmese
- Many have some exposure to English and primary education



*NuPo Camp*

Source: [www.TBBC.org](http://www.TBBC.org)