

Quiet flows

*“This is Burma,
and it will be
quite unlike any
land you know
about...”*

Rudyard Kipling
Letters from the East
1898

Photographs and Text by
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*Sunset looms over the Irrawaddy
Where seagulls sing and fleet
Quiet flows the river to the east
Streaming to the far-away sea...*

Once upon a time, this idyllic folk song brought a child's imagination to a dream-like wonderland. At the time, I only knew Irrawaddy as a river in a distant country named Burma. But the sunset, the seagulls,

and the serene water has haunted in my reveries ever since.

Sandwiched between the Indian subcontinent and Indochina, Burma has long been the backwater of the region. The country emerges from a complete oblivion in people's memories thanks to its much charming and charismatic Nobel Peace Laureate Aung San Su Kyi, and the notorious military regime she is fight-

the Ayeyarwady

ing against. International sanction in recent decades deepens the country's isolation, shielding it from the sight of the world. The legendary name of Mandalay is fallen into a name of a Las Vegas casino.

Even fewer are familiar with the country's official name of Myanmar. The name adopted in 1989 reflects the complete severing from the country's colonial past. In the native lan-

guage, Myanmar has always been the official name for the nation. The British colonists imposed the name of Burma in the 19th century, when they annexed the kingdom into part of British East India. Burma was due to the Burman, one of the largest of the some 130 ethnic groups in the country. The United Nations have officially recognised the new name, even though it is still resisted by some countries like the United States.

