

Chapter 1

Life Without Freedom

Power kills and impoverishes life.
----This web site [Appendix](#)

Billions of people live without freedom, as shown in Table 1.1, below. In the worst of these countries, they live in fear and insecurity. They are literally slaves, bought and sold, or the effective slaves of their governments. They are hungry, starving, or diseased. They live in primitive refugee camps; are suffering under torture or the immediate threat of death; are diseased and soon to die without treatment. They are prisoners, concentration camp inmates, or in death camps. They are soldiers subject to the most barbarous treatment or involved in lethal combat. They are children performing dangerous forced labor. They are civilians cowering under bombing and shelling. They are women who are second-class citizens and cannot leave their home without completely covering themselves, the permission of their husband, and the presence of a male relative. They are the aged and infirm that barely subsist under dangerous environmental conditions. Even those who escape all this and manage to feel happy and safe for the moment still live under the realistic threat that war, revolution, disease, famine, extreme poverty and deprivation, or a dictator may destroy their lives, or those of their loved ones. So they live in fear of arrest and prison, of disappearance forever, of forced labor, genocide, mass murder, and an unnatural death.

Even in countries that are partially free, they may still be arbitrarily arrested, subject to torture, executed without a fair trial, spied upon, and denied even basic rights because of their race,

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religion, or nationality. Criticize the government and especially, its dictator or leader, and death may follow.

Table 1.1
How Many people were Free in 1999?

Rating*	World's Population		
	Nations	Total (Bil.)	%
Free	85	2.34	39
Partially Free	59	1.50	25
Unfree	48	2.10	36

* From Freedom House (www.freedomhouse.org)



All this is abstract--simple words. Yet such abstractions are ultimately personal. Sudan, a nation larger than the United States (see [map and statistics](#) for Sudan and [world map](#)), is a case in point. Witness what happened to Acol Bak, a member of the Dinka tribe who lived in the southern village of Panlang . Arabs attacked her village, killing her father, and though her mother escaped, they seized her and her brother. Carrying on their heads the goods stolen by their captors, without food and only able to drink from filthy ponds along the way, they were forced to walk north for three days to the village of Goos. Their captors then separated her and her brother and sold them separately to different Arabs--yes, sold them, as people were sold in the sixteenth century slave trade She would never see her brother again. Her Arab master had a wife and daughter who forced her to work from morning to evening: in Acol's words, "I was the only slave in that house. If I said I was tired, I was beaten by all of them." She bore the scars of those beatings, and had her arm broken. Her accommodations were simple--outside and without bedding. Though she was only eight years old her Arab master had her circumcised, in accord with Muslim tradition, and with no anesthetic.

But unlike so many slaves, Acol was in luck. A foreign Christian group, who secretly entered the Sudan for this purpose, bought Acol with 248 other slaves and set them free. Although this policy of buying the freedom of slaves is controversial and may encourage more slavery, she did not care. She was free. She could return to her village where her mother was waiting.¹ This happened in our modern age--not in the seventeenth or eighteenth Century, but in the 1990s.



Sudan	
Area	2,505,810 sq km--slightly more than 1/4th of the U.S.
Population	35,079,814 (July 2000 est.)
Ethnic groups	black 52%, Arab 39%, Beja 6%, foreigners 2%, other 1%
Religions	Sunni Muslim 70% (in north), indigenous beliefs 25%, Christian 5% (mostly in south and Khartoum)
Languages	Arabic (official), Nubian, Ta Bedawie, diverse dialects
Life expectation	56.55 years
Literacy	46.10%
Purchasing power parity	\$940 (1999 est.)
Government	transitional - previously ruling military junta; presidential and National Assembly elections held in March 1996; new constitution drafted by Presidential Committee, went into effect on 30 June 1998 after being approved in nationwide referendum
Freedom rating	among most unfree (1998)

Not all these poor people forced into slavery were children. Soldiers raped one forty-year-old woman, Akec Kwol, and took her north to a slave market, where they sold her like an animal. Her slave owner also tried to circumcise her, but she resisted and got herself slashed with a knife and scarred. Had she not submitted finally, she later explained, "They would have killed me. Because I was a slave, they had the right to do whatever they wanted to me."²



Akuac Malong, 13, left, is hugged by her mother Abuong Malong for the first time in 7 years in Madhol, southwest of Khartoum, Sudan, December 1997. Akuac, taken from her village and enslaved by an Arab in northern Sudan, was freed when an Arab trader sold her for about \$100 to a Swiss-based charity which buys freedom for slaves (AP photo/Jean-Marc Bouju)



When slave raiders attacked, these boys hid—500 other boys and girls were taken, and 36 were drowned in a nearby river

And then among the thousands of other slaves, there was Victoria Ajang, a Sudanese now living in the United States. She testified before Congress regarding her escape from slavery: "On a summer night, the government militia forces suddenly swooped in on our village. We were at home relaxing, in the evening, when men on horses with machine guns stormed through, shooting everyone. I saw friends fall dead in front of me. While my husband carried out our little daughter Eva, I ran with the few possessions I could grab. All around us, we saw children being shot in the stomach, in the leg, between the eyes. Against the dark sky, we saw flames from the houses the soldiers had set on fire. The cries of the people forced inside filled our ears as they burned to death. Our people were being turned to ash."³ She and her family escaped by jumping into a nearby river.

Buying and selling slaves in the Sudan is, ironically, a free market. There is no monopoly or government control over prices, which vary according to supply. In 1989, for example, a slave cost \$90, but within a year, the increase in slave raids caused the price to plummet to \$15. This is about equal to the cost of pruning shears at my local hardware store.

How can such slavery exist in this age of the internet, and space exploration? It is part of a civil war between the Arab Islamic North, ruled by a fundamentalist Muslim dictator, and a majority black South. This war began in 1989 when Lt. General Omar Hassan Bashir and the Arab-led

Sudanese People's Armed Forces overthrew the democratic government in power at that time and imposed strict Muslim law and faith on the whole country. Sudan's population is about 34 million people, of which Muslims are about 70 percent, mainly in the North. Some 5 percent of the population, mostly southern Blacks, is Christian. The rest of the six million living in the South are animist who attribute conscious life to nature and natural objects. The South had a protected and special constitutional status under the democratic government, but with its overthrow and especially with the effort of the new regime to impose Muslim law throughout the country, the South revolted and a bloody civil war resulted.



Sudanese slaves await redemption in Madhol, Sudan, in December 1997. An Arab trader sold 132 former slaves, women and children, for \$13,200 (in Sudanese money) to a member of Christian Solidarity International. (AP photo)



This man lost his wife and children to government raiders who attacked his village. Malnourished and distraught by his loss, he may have died after this photo was taken.

possessions.

To defeat the South and motivate its Arab tribal militia to fight, the North made slaves part of their compensation, along with whatever they could loot, and gave Arab soldiers carte blanc to commit rape. Of course, old people did not fit into this scheme, since they are good neither as slaves nor for rape, so they were beaten up, if not killed. Young men, however, were usually marched off to slavery, unless for some reason they were unworthy of this: then they also were killed. According to the Muslim faith, all non-Muslim southerners, whether man or woman, old or young, are infidels. They have no rights, even to life. They may be killed as a matter of course, enslaved, raped, and all deprived of their

In this civil war, bombing from the air killed many of those who lived in heavily populated areas of the South; even schools were bombed and children killed. Hospitals did not escape. There were many bombing attacks on the Samaritan's Purse, the largest hospital in southern Sudan. Bombers often attacked other medical facilities as well, sometimes with cluster bombs. Even more monstrous, the North bombed the wells that provided southerner's water, as well as sites with foreign relief supplies, including food for the starving southerners. All this, in addition to the regime's socialist economic policies, has contributed to a massive famine.



A victim of famine in southern Sudan

But because they live under a fundamentalist Muslim regime, even northern Sudanese far from the civil war enjoy few human rights. For example, the government harasses and monitors women for correct dress, forbidding even slacks. Women who dare to defy the law risk arrest, conviction by an Islamic court of immoral dressing, and flogging, as recently happened to nine women



Famine in Sudan, which has the richest soil in Africa

students. Women also cannot hold any public office that would give them authority over Muslim men, nor can they marry a non-Muslim.

Both men and women have no freedom of speech or religion--all must accept the Muslim faith. Also, police can arrest any commoner and imprison them for up to six months without trial. And while detained suspects can expect as a matter of course that officials will torture them. To further this religious rule, the government appoints only Muslims to the judiciary. Worst of all, a Muslim dare not convert to another religion, for the punishment for doing so is death.

In addition to 20,000 to 40,000 people enslaved, the Sudanese population includes nearly 4,000,000 displaced from their homes and villages--the largest number for any country. Many more Sudanese simply gave up on the country. By the beginning of 1999, 352,000 had fled, escaping the fate of some 1,500,000 to 2,000,000, who died from the war, famine, or disease, or were murdered in cold blood by Muslim forces or rebels.



Children are a large part of the southern armed forces

But Sudan was a country at war with itself, and inflicted with government-created famine and disease. What about a country at peace like Saudi Arabia (see [map and statistics](#), and [world map](#))? Would not life be better for you than in Sudan? It is, in that there is no war, rebellion, or famine killing hundreds of thousands of people. But as in Sudan, Saudis still suffer

MIDDLE EAST



Saudi Arabia

Area	1,960,582 sq km -- slightly more than one-fifth the size of the US
Population	22,023,506
Ethnic groups	Arab 90%, Afro-Asian 10%
Religions	Muslim 100%
Languages	Arabic
Life expectation	67.77 years
Literacy	62.80%
Purchasing power parity	\$9,000 (1999 est.)
Government	Absolute monarchy
Freedom rating	among most unfree (1998)

one kind of repression or another. There is no freedom of speech in Saudi Arabia. Police may arrest Saudis for the most minor criticism of the monarchy that rules the country, the Saudi King or any royal personage, or the Muslim religion. People live in fear of saying or doing something innocent that would land them in prison, get them tortured, and have them flogged. Through no fault of their own, the authorities might even cut off their head.

Even trying to be honest can be dangerous. One poor fellow, Abdul-Karim al-Naqshabandi, apparently refused to help his employer by giving false testimony. In retaliation, his well-connected employer had him framed and arrested for a crime he did not commit. To get a confession the police tied him up like an animal, and beat and tortured him. He finally signed a confession to end the misery and get someone outside to hear his case. Even then, the police allowed no one to visit him in prison. And although he could present considerable evidence proving his innocence and provide the names of defense witnesses, the court would not give him the right to defend himself. He was sentenced to death and executed in 1996.

King Fahd Bin Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud's power is absolute. There are no elections, no legislature, and no political parties. All are illegal. The country's constitution, by the King's decree, is the Koran, Islam's holy book. Its precepts are law. What this means for the average Saudi is that they had better be Muslim and of a particular type, called Sunni (minority Shiite Muslims are always at risk of arrest and detention), and they must obey religious law. They dare not change their Muslim religion or, by law, the courts can have them executed. They must keep their mouth shut about any questions they may have about the Muslim religion or the monarchy.

Just consider the two Sunni Moslems, Sheikh Salman bin Fahd al-'Awda or Sheikh Safr 'Abd al-Rahman al-Hawali. Simply for their "extremist ideas" and to make them repent, the police arrested them in September 1994. Security forces worked them over year after year, until a court tried them in June of 1999, virtually five years later.

But life is easier for Muslim man. This near totalitarian, religious rule especially enslaves women, roughly half the population. The Committee to Prevent Vice and Promote Virtue, the Mutawaa'in, or religious police, watches over every women's behavior for violations of religious law, which they strictly enforce. This has created a harsh and rigid apartheid system against women. In public, they must wear an abaya, a garment that fully covers their body and can be of any color, as long as it is black. They must also cover their head and face, on which the religious police keep a close watch.

The unfortunate case of Nieves, a Filipino maid, provides one example of how these religious police work. She accepted a married couple's invitation to a restaurant to celebrate a birthday. By chance, a male friend of the couple also joined the celebration. Then, happening by and spying on the group, the religious police arrested Nieves on suspicion of being there to meet the male. A clear immoral act. While under arrest she denied this, but since she could not read Arabic, authorities tricked her into signing a confession she thought was a release order. This gave the court enough excuse to convict her of an offense against public morals and to sentence her to sixty lashes and twenty-five days in prison.

Then there was the Filipino Donato Lama. The police arrested her in 1995 for possibly committing the unpardonable crime of preaching Christianity. In a revealing letter about her later beating and confession, she wrote, "I was at my most vulnerable state when the police again pressured me to admit or else I would continue receiving the beating. 'We will let you go if you sign this paper. If not, you may as well die here.' Badly bruised and no longer able to stand another beating, I agreed to put my thumb mark on the paper not knowing what it was I was signing."⁴ The court sentenced her to 70 lashes plus 18 months in prison.

Women cannot travel abroad or even on public transportation without the permission of a male relative. Even then, they must enter buses by a separate rear entrance and sit in the women's section. The government forbids them to drive a car, or even walk outside by themselves. Their husband or male relative must accompany them, or for so "offending public morals the religious police will be arrested." Nor can women play any role in the King's government. Most important, the police ignore the frequent violence against women, especially by their husbands. Even harder to believe, severely injured women must still have the permission of a male relative to enter a hospital. The testimony of one man in court is worth that of two women. Men can divorce women without cause while women must give legal reasons. In school, women may not study many subjects restricted to men, such as engineering and journalism. In the words of the feminist Andrea Dworkin writing in 1978 and still applicable today,

women are locked in and kept out, exiled to invisibility and abject powerlessness within their own country. It is women who are degraded systematically from birth to early death, utterly and totally and without exception deprived of freedom. It is women who are sold into marriage or concubinage, often before puberty; killed if their hymens are not intact on the wedding night; kept confined, ignorant, pregnant, and poor, without choice or recourse. It is women who are raped and beaten with full sanction of the law. It is women who cannot own property or work for a living or determine in any way the circumstances of their own lives. It is women who are subject to a despotism that knows no restraint.⁵

In their treatment of women and non-Muslims, as well as the enforcement of religious rule over male Muslims, Saudi Arabia is the norm among the Sheikdoms of the Middle East. We also saw this religious absolutism in fundamentalist Sudan. And Algeria and Iran share it to a certain extent. Even in the non-fundamentalist Muslim countries like Egypt and Pakistan, governments deny human rights and women are second-class citizens. The Taliban regime of Afghanistan,



Farzana Kauzar with her three children. They were reportedly arrested on 8 October 1997 at their home in Dhahran by members of al-Mabahith al-'Anuma and held as hostages in order to force the father to return to Saudi Arabia from abroad.

however, has even exceeded Saudi Arabia in its harsh and barbaric application of the Koran, denial of human rights, and savage suppression of women. The courts can sentence them to death for even adultery, as was the woman simply identified as Suriya by Taliban-run Radio (the Taliban are a fundamentalist Muslim force that now controls most of Afghanistan). Convicted of adultery in April 2000, officials took her to a sports stadium and stoned her to death in front of thousands of spectators. There are few other ways the Taliban could have picked to execute a person that is more cruel, inhumane, and prolonged. There was no word on what happened to the man involved in the affair, if anything.

The best label for the lives of all women in these Muslim countries is pseudo-slavery. The only difference from real slavery is that the government does not allow men to buy and sell them. Otherwise, women are under the complete control of the government, their fathers, and their husbands.

While the fear, insecurity, and risk of daily life that common people experience in the Sudan and Saudi Arabia exists in many other Muslim countries, life can be even worse in some non-Muslim ones, such as Burma (Myanmar). This country in South Asia (see [map and statistics](#), and [world map](#)) is 89 percent Buddhist, and is ruled by a socialist military regime. Life here is hellish, due to the military's savage repression of dissent, and its barbaric response to the rebellion of nearly a dozen ethnic minorities.

In the nine villages of Dweh Loh Township, northwest of Rangoon and near the Thai border, the Karen ethnic group has long been fighting for independence. During harvest time in March 2000, military forces attacked the villages, burned down homes, and destroyed or looted possessions. By sheer luck, some of the villagers managed to flee into the forest, leaving behind their rice and possessions and risking starvation--starvation made almost inevitable by the military's burning crops and rice storage barns. Soldiers even torched the cut scrub, needed to prepare the soil for planting. And they killed those who remained in the village, or seized them for forced labor or portering, or pressing them into the military. That done, they mined all approaches to the village to prevent villagers from returning.

Soldiers kill any male suspected of being a rebel. These are not all easy deaths. Sometimes soldiers gruesomely torture the victim and prolong their death to cause as much agony as possible. Women or young girls are only marginally better off: the soldiers "only" rape them. Then they marched them, along with the children and whatever village men left alive, to work sites to build barracks, defensive works, roads, railroads, or fences, or carry bamboo and firewood. Alternatively, the soldiers force them to porter ammunition and military supplies like mules. This is the most dangerous form of forced labor and many die from it.

Even the children do not escape this. Soldiers routinely make them do such arduous labor, or even soldier. Worse, the military sell the girls into prostitution in Burma or into the Thai sex market across the border, which already exploits the bodies of 40,000 Burmese girls. Worse still, the military has forced children to walk ahead of soldiers to trigger mines. No military have used



Burma

Area	678,500 sq km -- slightly smaller than Texas
Population	41,734,853
Ethnic groups	Burman 68%, Shan 9%, Karen 7%, Rakhine 4%, Chinese 3%, Mon 2%, Indian 2%, other 5%
Religions	Buddhist 89%, Christian 4% (Baptist 3%, Roman Catholic 1%), Muslim 4%, animist 1%, other 2%
Languages	Burmese, minority ethnic groups have their own languages
Life expectation	54.91 years
Literacy	62.80%
Purchasing power parity	\$1,200 (1999 est.)
Government	military dictatorship
Freedom rating	among most unfree (1998)

human bodies to clear mines like this since World War II, when the Soviets often compelled prisoners to sweep minefields with their feet.

Aside from those made to do forced labor and portering, the general condition of Burmese children is disastrous for their future and that of the country. Even children living outside the civil war zones are unlikely to go to school. No more than one out of five get even as much as four years of primary school. They are more likely to be working at some job to help their family survive, as are, according to UN estimates, about one-third of all children 6-15 years of age. Anyway, a child is simply unlikely to survive to adulthood, since half of all those that die each year are children.



Refugees attempting to rebuild their village after it was burnt down by the regime

In the civil war zones, for children and adults alike, people routinely live on the edge of death. For example, anyone living in the township of Dweh Loh that contained the nine villages I mentioned, had an equal chance of doing forced labor, being looted, or suffering extortion by soldiers on the one hand; or of fleeing into the forests on the other. Those living in other townships throughout this area probably escaped to the forests and were barely surviving there on whatever food they could grow. Were soldiers to find these refugees, they might shoot them or make them porter under threat of death.

Life was no better for those living in the Nyaunglebin District to the west. They had to beware of hand picked execution squads of soldiers searching for rebels or their supporters, and operating off and on in the area. If these soldiers even suspected a villager of most minor contact with the rebel forces, even seen talking to someone suspected of being a rebel, they usually would cut his throat. Sometimes they also would decapitate the victim, and mount their head on a pole as a warning to others. This would have been an easy death, however, compared to what soldiers did to three men they captured in Plaw Toh Kee, as reported by a villager there.⁶ No matter that these were simple farmers and cattle breeders, thought good men by the villagers and the village head. The soldiers suspected them of working for the rebels and that was enough. They forced them to stand against trees for days without food or water, beat and punched them in the face because they could not answer any questions about the rebels, and then systematically made one inch slices all over their bodies. Then the soldiers cut out their intestines, pushed the mess back into their stomachs, and kept these poor souls this way until the soldiers finally killed them.

This is only one atrocity story that I could multiply many times as this civil war takes its toll on unarmed and peaceful villagers living in one civil war zone or another. There are around sixty-seven different ethnic groups in Burma, each with their own language and culture, many of which have rebelled and are fighting the military government.



Burmese refugees on the run

With more or less ferocity, these rebellions have been going on since 1948, with a death toll of 200,000, or even possibly 400,000, Burmese. Both sides have also murdered outright an additional 100,000 to 200,000 Burmese. Moreover, rebellion, fighting, and brutal military pressure on the Burmese people have caused 500,000 to 1,000,000 of them to be displaced within the country, many of whom the military has commanded to live in inhospitable forced location zones. Others have escaped relocation for bare subsistence in the forests without a home or village. Still 215,000 others have fled abroad and are formally listed as refugees by international refugee organizations. An added 350,000 Burmese are without refugee status and subsist in refugee-like conditions in neighboring Thailand.

The vast majority of Burmese, however, live far away from the civil war zones and are not members of the rebelling minority ethnic groups. But they have other things to fear. Burma is a military dictatorship, and this regime is willing to use its weapons on unarmed people who protest or demonstrate. When students demonstrated against the regime on July 7, 1962, soldiers shot 100 of them to death. On August 13, 1967, soldiers similarly shot over 100 demonstrating men and women, and even the children that accompanied them. And so on and on, from demonstration to demonstration, until the worst of them all.



**On left: students marching in 1988
On right: soldiers preparing for crackdown**

On August 8, 1988, doctors, students, teachers, farmers, musicians, artists, monks, and workers took part in peaceful, pro-democracy demonstrations in all major cities. The military demanded that the demonstrators disperse, and when they would not, soldiers fired round after round into the crowds. They massacred an incredible 5,000 to 10,000 unarmed people simply trying to express their desire for democracy. Soldiers and police then arrested hundreds of those escaping this bloodbath, and tortured them in prison. Many thousands escaped to border areas, leaving their loved ones, homes, and possessions behind.



On Left: Officer directing soldiers to shoot
On right: A body riddled with bullets



One of thousands of
students killed in 1998

Burmese who stayed home, avoided demonstrations, and aroused no suspicion, might still be conscripted by the military for forced labor or porter duty. Socialists in mind and spirit, the military has been ambitious to build railways, roads, airports, and so on. And to do so, they simply draft civilians. For example, those who lived near the route of the 110 mile e-Tavoy railway, built by the military in southern Burma, were among the 200,000 people that soldiers forced to work on the project for fifteen days a month without pay. Then there were the 30,000 the military conscripted for the Bassein Airport extension. Those who missed this, might have been among the over 920,000 the military compelled to labor on the Chaung Oo-Pakokku Railroad.

Then the soldiers came to my house and poked my wife in the side with a rifle butt. They kicked her hard in the stomach, and she vomited blood. Then they kicked my baby son down into the fire, and all the hair on his head was burnt. They slapped my 7-year old son in the face and he cried out. They beat them because I had escaped.⁷

For those living close to the soil,

wholly dependent on what they can grow and eat, time is food. The days the military forcibly take without pay often makes even bare survival difficult. The only choices for many are to flee or shirk work. But then, the military's punishment for not doing the work can be even worse. As reported by one refugee:



Those who do the forced labor have to sleep at the work site, guarded, and without much shelter--sometimes none. The ground is their only bed. To go to the toilet they have to get permission from a guard. Their only food is what the workers themselves can bring. And they have to be sure not to be injured, because there is seldom any medical care. They also can die, as many do, from sickness or exhaustion. If they try to escape from the work site and soldiers catch them, and if they are lucky, the soldiers will only severely beat them. Just resting without permission can get them beaten and killed by guards. This happened to Pa Za Kung, a man from Vomkua village in

Chin State's Thantlang Township, doing forced labor on a road from Thantlang to Vuangtu village.

But portering is even worse. We have already seen that the military makes those living in war zones porter for them. Since they need as many as two porters for each soldier to move much of their supplies and equipment, they conscript people living outside the war zones. And portering is worse than forced labor. Porters suffer from hunger, malnutrition, disease, and exhaustion. Rebel fire kills them, they step on mines, or soldiers shoot them because they cannot force their bodies to work any longer. Or soldiers simply abandon them with no medical care, no food, no help, no way home. All told, this is another form of slavery suffered by millions of pitiful Burmese.



**Chained
Photo by Damien Lewis**



Aung San Suu Kyi, standing in front of portrait of her father, Aung San

Burmese generally have no rights other than to serve the military. This might have changed in 1990, when the military caved in to considerable international pressure resulting from their 1989 massacre of pro-democracy demonstrators, and held real democratic elections. And were shocked when the democratic opposition, under the leadership of 1991 Nobel Peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, won 82 percent of the seats in the new Parliament. The military then refused to yield power, and have held Aung San Suu Kyi under virtual house arrest ever since. They also arrested and

tortured thousands of her supporters and members of other political parties, and have killed or disappeared thousands more. They even arrested hundreds of those elected to parliament, with harsh prison conditions causing some of their deaths. Member-elect Kyaw Min, for example, died of hepatitis caused by his imprisonment.

Having learned its lesson about the power of the democratic idea, the military no longer allows political activity or criticism. There is no freedom of speech or association. Even in this Buddhist country, the military keeps a watch on Buddhist monks and prevents them from being involved in political activity. It also restricts the leaders of other religions. There can be no unions. Just

having a computer modem can cause arrest, torture, and a fifteen-year prison sentence. Having a fax machine may even mean death, as it did for the Anglo-Burmese San Suu Kyi, who was honorary Consul for the European Union. No independent courts exist, and the law is what the military command. The military monitors the movements of common citizens, searches their homes at any time, and takes them forcibly from their home to be relocated, without compensation or explanation.

Nor are Burmese free to start a business or invest. Since 1962, when the military overthrew the democratic government, the military has pursued a "Burmese Way to Socialism." This has left little room for private businesses and a free market, and companies run by the military dominate many areas of the economy, leaving as the most vigorous sector of the economy the heroin trade. This alone may account for over 50 percent of the economy.

The economic result is what one would expect. Among all countries, Burma has plummeted to near the bottom in economic freedom, possibly only better than communist North Korea. And the country is nearly bankrupt. However, maybe having learned from this economic disaster, the military is now trying to liberalize their economic control and have invited foreign investment. Still, the average Burmese earns only about \$300 per year.

Burma is a small country, tucked beneath the mass of China to the north. With more than 1.26 billion people, China has about 20 percent of the world's population (see [map and statistics](#), and [world map](#)). You therefore were more likely to be born in China than in any other country. And would life have been better than in Burma, Saudi Arabia, or Sudan? This depends on when in the twentieth century you were born there. If a decade or so ago, yes. But anytime before then, no. Chinese were then at great risk of dying from disease, or starvation, or of soldiers killing them in one of the hundreds of battles war lords fought back and forth over the country. And with the communist takeover of the whole country in 1948, Chinese were murdered by the millions in the Communist Party's national campaigns, such as Land Reform, "Suppression of Counterrevolutionaries," Three and Five Antis, Collectivization, and the Cultural Revolution. The Party eventually murdered tens of millions in cold blood. And those who survived this monstrous bloodbath could well have starved to death in the famine caused by the Party's "Great Leap Forward" industrialization campaign, and collectivization of all peasants into communes and factory-like farming. This famine happened in the late 1950s through the early 1960s and was the world's worst ever. As many as 40,000,000 Chinese might have starved to death or died from related diseases. This alone is over twice the 16,000,000 killed in combat during World War II for all combatants, including Germany, Soviet Union, Japan, China, United States, and Great Britain. All this I have detailed in my book on [China's Bloody Century](#)

Life is better now for the average Chinese. Relatively. They are especially freer to pursue a business or invest. The Party now largely leaves peasants alone to farm as they see fit and sell their food. The Party is trying to liberalize the economy and give greater reign to private ambition and foreign investment. What was a deeply impoverished country in the 1960s, possibly even worse than Burma, is now rapidly developing its economy. Moreover, Chinese are freer from Party controls, rules, intervention, and especially Party attempts to remake their lives and



China

Area	9,596,960 sq km -- slightly smaller than the U.S.
Population	1,261,832,482 (July 2000 est.)
Ethnic groups	Han Chinese 91.9%, other nationalities 8.1%
Religions	Daoist (Taoist), Buddhist, Muslim 2%-3%, Christian 1% (est.); Daoist (Taoist), Buddhist, Muslim 2%-3%, Christian 1% (est.) Note: officially atheist
Languages	Standard Chinese or Mandarin (Putonghua, based on the Beijing dialect), Yue (Cantonese), Wu (Shanghaiese), Minbei (Fuzhou), Minnan (Hokkien-Taiwanese), Xiang, Gan, Hakka dialects, minority languages
Life expectation	69.6 years
Literacy	89.90%
Purchasing power parity	\$3,800 (1999 est.); U.S. is \$33,900 (1999 est.)
Government	communist dictatorship
Freedom rating	among most unfree (1998)



China

Area	9,596,960 sq km -- slightly smaller than the U.S.
Population	1,261,832,482 (July 2000 est.)
Ethnic groups	Han Chinese 91.9%, other nationalities 8.1%
Religions	Daoist (Taoist), Buddhist, Muslim 2%-3%, Christian 1% (est.); Daoist (Taoist), Buddhist, Muslim 2%-3%, Christian 1% (est.) Note: officially atheist
Languages	Standard Chinese or Mandarin (Putonghua, based on the Beijing dialect), Yue (Cantonese), Wu (Shanghaiese), Minbei (Fuzhou), Minnan (Hokkien-Taiwanese), Xiang, Gan, Hakka dialects, minority languages
Life expectation	69.6 years
Literacy	89.90%
Purchasing power parity	\$3,800 (1999 est.); U.S. is \$33,900 (1999 est.)
Government	communist dictatorship
Freedom rating	among most unfree (1998)

culture.

Though with a milder and more tolerant hand, the Communist Party still controls all aspects of government--it *is* the government. It is supreme and shares power with no legislature, courts, military, or any other group. No one elects high Party leaders, which arise from a struggle for power within the Party. And except for those parts of the economy, culture, and family over which its policy is being liberalized, there still is little that Chinese can do without Party permission. It allows virtually no freedom of speech or association. Nor does it permit the Chinese to protest or demonstrate. And whatever their religious faith, the Party tightly controls it or makes it illegal.

Look at what happened to practicing members of the Jesus Family, a Protestant sect of which the Party does not approve. In 1992, a mass of police surrounded and arrested sixty-one members attending a monthly commune service in Duoyigou, Shandong Province. The police destroyed their village, and confiscated all Church belongings. A court eventually sentenced some of the members between one and twelve years in prison for, among other things, taking part in an "illegal" religious meeting. The court gave the sect's leader and his sons the heaviest sentence of all for "swindling" because they were so bold as to collect contributions for the Church's annual Christmas celebration. Even if church members had avoided prison, the police might harass them years later. After these people rebuilt their village, police sealed it off and those entering or leaving had to pay five yuan. Yuan Hongbing and Wang Jiaqi, two legal scholars, believed this was unjust and tried to help the sect take legal recourse, which only resulted in the police arresting them as well.

One religious story these days is the Party prosecution of the Falun Gong sect. This sect (to members it is not a religion) combines Taoism and Buddhism, along with mediation and martial arts techniques, into a spiritual melding of mind, spirit, and body. There are as many as 100,000,000 adherents in China, while the Party claims that no more than 2,100,000 belong. Clearly, however, leaders can bring together many members quickly. On April 25, 1999, for example, a mass of 10,000 followers stood quietly in front of the compound housing the top Party leadership in Beijing.

Even Catholics have suffered repression and many can only practice their religion underground. The party considers Catholicism a "foreign, imperialist" import and has tried to keep it under tight control. Bishops and priests have been arrested and their churches burned, and in some places churches are disguised as factories so that Catholics can pray at secret services.

Police are likely to arrest any Chinese that practice Falun Gong, as they have already done to over a hundred of its leaders and thousands of its adherents, for what until recently the Party labeled a "counterrevolutionary crime," and has renamed in less political terms, a "Crime Disturbing Social Order." The Party now holds over 35,000 Falun Gong members under detention or in prison and has tortured many. And it has sent an additional some 5,000 to labor camps without trial. From all this mistreatment by the Party, at least 89 Falun Gong have died.

Though this number is small and seems irrelevant in such a huge country, for each of the 89 and those who loved them it was terribly real. Sixty-year old Chen Zixiu is a case in point. She

traveled to Beijing to request that the Party lift its restrictions on the Falun Gong. The police arrested her, then beat and tortured her. Her aging body could not take it, and she was dead in four days. When her family collected her corpse, they found it bruised all over, teeth broken, and dried blood in her ears. Another woman, Zhao Xin, a professor at Beijing's Industry and Commerce University, died from a beating she received after her arrest for practicing Falun Gong breathing exercises in Beijing park.

The Party even cannot leave alone even that which most people regard as superstitions or simply good health exercises. There has been a crackdown on one such group of Qi Gong practitioners, for example, of who over 21,000 have been arrested for nothing more than fostering breathing and meditation exercises.

Action against unapproved sects or religious groups is simply an example of the Party's continuous campaign to suppress any association, speech, unions, movements, and the like, of which it does not approve. In China, there can be no association without permission of the Party, no nonprofit organization without registration. The Party must license all newspapers, magazines, and other publications. Censorship is common, and no book can be published without Party approval. There are even Party guidelines for publications, such as requiring that newspaper stories be 80 percent positive, 20 percent negative. Disseminating or selling unapproved literature can get one a long prison sentence. In the case of two Beijing bookstore owners, sisters Li Xiaobing and Li Xiaomei, for example, the police arrested them for selling Falun Gong publications, and a court sentenced them to six or seven years. The police even arrested the environmental journalist Dai Qing, who justifiably criticized a mammoth dam building project on the Yangtze river, which will create the world's largest hydroelectric dam and displace one to two million people. A court sentenced him to ten months in prison and forbade him to publish in the future. Even for simply making a list of those convicted of protest-connected offenses--just a list--a court sentenced one fellow, Li Hai, to nine months in prison. After all, convictions are a "high-level state secret."

Arrest, prison, labor camp, psychiatric hospital, forced drugging, brainwashing, psychological torture, physical torment, execution, and a simple beating, are all Party tools. Their purpose is to control the Chinese population, advance Party policies, and maintain Party power. There is no humanity in any of this. Note how the prison authorities treated the 42-year-old woman Cheng Fengrong. They beat her while handcuffed to a tree, made her stand in the snow barefoot while they kicked her, and finally they poured cold water over her head, which ran down her body and turned to ice at her naked feet.

Aside from the Party's great concern over what Chinese say and whom they associate with, there is still more reason why you would not want to be born in China. The Party also deems restricting population growth to be vital. It therefore forcibly intrudes into the core of a family's soul--the desire to have children. Since 1979 the Party has dictated who will have no more than one child, a policy largely applied to Han Chinese (comprising 92 percent of the population) living in urban areas. To prevent women from having a second child, the Party might sterilize them, or if pregnant, force them to undergo an abortion. If in some area there are many pregnant women, or just to ensure that there are no second children, Party officials might enforce a local "Clean Out the Stomach Campaign" involving house-to-house examinations and forced abortions. If a woman still somehow manages to have a second child, officials would likely fine the couple, and

the child would be discriminated against and not allowed to attend better schools.

What happened to the owner of a small clothing store is an example of the trouble a second pregnancy might cause. I will name her Women x, since she is now a refugee and fears harm if the Party knows her name. After she had her first child, officials ordered her to use an intrauterine device to prevent another pregnancy. She did so for a while, but because of connected health problems, secretly removed it--and got pregnant. When they found out about this, Party officials fined her, and forced her to undergo an abortion. The fine was too much for her meager resources to cover, and she could not pay it. Officials then seized her store. Penniless and distraught, she borrowed what money she could from relatives and fled alone, deserting her husband, child, and mother.

The result of the Party's one-child policy was predictable in an Asian, male-oriented society. If a Chinese woman believed her first fetus to be female, she might well abort it. The second try might yield a male. If a female were born, the mother or her husband might murder or abandon it. Infanticide is naturally prevalent, and sometimes even encouraged by Party authorities. The result is that there are about 119 males born for every 100 females. It has led to playgrounds with a mass of boys, few girls, and no siblings.

For traditional Chinese families, there is an even worse result. Who will take care of the old parents? The result of all this has been a Party reconsideration of the policy. One resulting reform is to permit families to have two children, if both parents are from single child families.



One of freedom's heroes.



Goddess of Democracy erected by demonstrators in Tiananmen Square, 1989

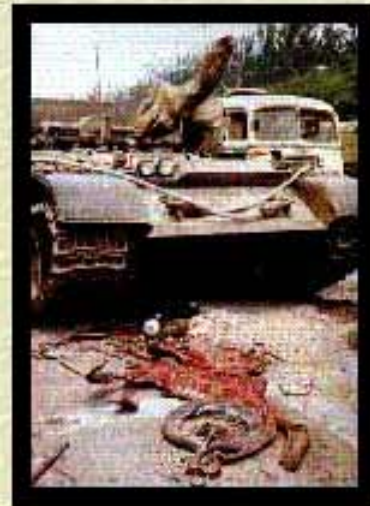
With the liberalization of some controls, a much freer market, and less emphasis on remaking the society and culture, the Party now executes far fewer people that it did decades ago. Still, the numbers are very high by international standards. As expected, how many people the Party executes or otherwise kills without a fair trial and for political or religious "crimes" is unknown and difficult

to estimate. Going by what the outside world knows, however, in just the one year of 1996 the Party executed at least 4,367 people. With a little more than 20 percent of the world's population, and going only by documented executions, the Party performs about 75 to 80 percent of all known judicial executions in the world.

Executions are the result of official court sentences, but Chinese also die "off the record" from beatings, torture, or other mistreatment by authorities in prisons or labor camps. Even the Chinese press sometimes reports these deaths, as it did of a worker who suspected of embezzlement, died after being beaten and tortured for 29 hours. Chinese who simply demonstrate for democracy can be killed. Of those involved in the, nonviolent, pro-democracy demonstrations in Tiananmen Square, Beijing, in 1976, soldiers, armored vehicles, and tanks slaughtered possible 10,000 demonstrators.



Student murdered in Tiananmen Square massacre 1989



Run over by a tank--Tiananmen Square massacre 1989

Nor can Chinese expect a decent burial if

executed. As they lie on the ground dead after being shot behind the head, doctors brought there for this purpose will likely cut the organs out of their still-warm bodies and rush these to a hospital. This, without the prior consent of the executed or their families. At the hospital, doctors will transplant the organs into well-paying foreigners or the elite. Or doctors will prepare organs for shipment, and the Party will sell them in the international transplant

market for much-needed hard currency. An American Chinese-language newspaper even advertised such organs for sale--one negotiated price was \$30,000.⁸

There is more to what life would be like were you a Chinese living in China. Those who escape execution or prison might still be sentenced to a forced labor or re-education camp. Life in either case can be worse than prison, however, and even death might seem preferable. It did for human rights leader Chen Longde. Beaten by guards with clubs and electric batons; tortured by other inmates who were promised reduced sentences if they got him to confess; suffering from associated kidney damage, he finally jumped from a window. He survived, perhaps unfortunately, with two hips and a leg broken.

The Party forces inmates to fulfill a work quota or meet certain "reform" standards. Failure to meet a quota or spout communist dogma can be lethal. Camp officials may simply deny them

benefits, but more deadly, they may beat these poor souls, starve them, or put them in painfully tightened leg irons or handcuffs for long periods. The quotas are not easy for inmates to fill, and could require them to work overtime with little sleep, sometimes for no more than three or four hours. Moreover, camp authorities might combine work with required communist study, making it even harder to meet quotas. In some camps, guards routinely beat and harass inmates to force them to do more work. Of course, guards beat prisoners in other countries as well. But in China these beatings are not the idiosyncratic behavior of sadistic camp guards. They are the Party's method to ensure work output and proper brainwashing. Overall, the Party admits keeping 1,200,000 prisoners, including detainees. This total is probably far under the actual number.

China is not the worst abuser of human rights in Asia, however. You have already seen what life is like in Burma. And east of Burma and to the south of China is Laos, in which the treatment of its people by the Laotian Communist Party that controls the country can be best described as Stalinist. Then to the east of Beijing, China, is communist North Korea, now the very worst place in the world to live. I can only describe this country as a border-to-border, horrid slave labor camp, as I detailed in [Death By Government](#). The North Korean Communist Party owns and dictates everything. There is no life, even in the innermost recesses of one's family, independent of the Party. Its rule is absolute, uncontested, and above all, the dictates of one psychotic man, Kim Jong-il. This is the only past or present communist country in which the dictator has *inherited* supreme power. He is the son of Kim Il-sung, who Stalin put in charge of the country when it became formally independent in 1948, and who ruled with no less an iron and bloody fist than his Soviet mentor.

Party command over all, even over what farmers' plant and harvest in the fields and when, has involved mass incarcerations, mass deaths, and mass starvation. The country has been bankrupted while Kim Jong-il continues to squander most of its resources on the military. Any North Korean might well be executed or die in one of the many forced labor camps (really, sub-camps, since the whole country is one prison); or they might die from starvation or disease, as have millions.

There are many other countries with their own awful tales and practices of the day. In Rwanda in 1994, Hutu soldiers and armed civilians killed hundreds of thousands of Tutsi, and armed Tutsi retaliated by murdering Hutu. By the end of this genocidal slaughter, Hutu and Tutsi had massacred as many as 1,000,000 Rwandans within a few months, as [Chapter 6](#) will report in full detail. Iraq's dictator Saddam Hussein gassed Kurdish women and children in the North and the destroyed over 3,000 of their villages., and massacred Shiite men, women, and children in the South. And in 1971, as I also detailed in my [Death By Government](#), the West Pakistan military murdered by the hundreds of thousands its East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) Bengalis and Hindus. And there are tens of millions more whose murder I will discuss in [Chapter 6](#).

Here I mention this only to make the point clear. In such countries, and given what we know about life in Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Burma, and China, the lives of the people have been filled with disease, starvation, forced labor, slavery, beatings, torture, and death. Their rulers have absolute or near-absolute power. And for those with absolute power, their whim is law, their fantasy a

command, their wish a campaign. They do not see people as living human beings, each a self-conscious person with a human soul. Citizens are rather their ruler's bricks and mortar for building a paradise on earth, expendable pawns with which to fight a war, or robots to be programmed with a religious text.

Still, by what right can one criticize the lack of freedom in these countries? Why should one be free? Is one's personal enjoyment or desire for freedom sufficient to justify it for others? Really, what do we mean by freedom? And what are its consequences of such freedom for people or society as a whole?

NOTES

* Written for this web site. I am indebted to Judson Knight for his careful editing and helpful comments on a draft of this chapter.

1. Linda Slobodian, [*The Slave Trail*](#), 1947.
 2. Karin Davies, "[Slave Trade Thrives in Sudan](#)".
 3. Nat Hentoff, "[Our People Were Turned to Ash: A Sudanese Women Tells Her Story](#)".
 4. [Amnesty International](#).
 5. Andrea Dworkin, "[Take Back The Day](#)," 1978.
 6. An Independent Report by the [Karen Human Rights Group](#), March 31, 2000.
 7. "[A Comprehensive Response To Burmese Refugee and Displaced People Problem](#)," *The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia Joint Standing Committee of Foreign Affairs, Defense and Trade*, October 5, 1994.
 8. [The Laogai Research Foundation](#).
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