

Myanmar Literature Project

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Hans-Bernd Zöllner (ed.)

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Contents

About the Contributors.....	4
I. INTRODUCTION (Hans-Bernd Zöllner).....	5
Looking Back on the Way to a Second Level of Investigation	5
Looking at the Contributions of this Volume	Fehler! Textmarke nicht definiert.
Nationalism	Fehler! Textmarke nicht definiert.
Political Terms and Political Reality	Fehler! Textmarke nicht definiert.
Socialist Economics with a Question Mark	Fehler! Textmarke nicht definiert.
A Way Out	Fehler! Textmarke nicht definiert.
Looking Ahead - Sceptically, not Pessimistically	Fehler! Textmarke nicht definiert.
II. Hans-Bernd Zöllner: INTEGRATING OTHER PEOPLES' PAST.....	18
III. Mo Mo Thant: A STUDY OF PUBLICATION BY NAGANI BOOK CLUB UNDER THE NATIONALISTIC ASPECTS.....	25
1. Introduction.....	25
2. Political Biographies	26
3. Socialism.....	30
4. Anti-Fascism	32
5. Internal Affairs.....	33
6. Summary	33
7. Bibliography.....	35
IV. Tin Hlaing: TRANSLATION OF POLITICAL TERMS AND CONCEPTS INTO BURMESE WITH REFERENCE TO NAGANI PUBLICATIONS.....	37
Initial Conditions.....	37
Growth of Nationalism and Political Awakening	38
Political Terms and Concepts in Nagani Books.....	39
Reviving Old Terms.....	39
Parties and Organizations.....	42
Democracy and People Power, Communism and Socialism	43

Revolution.....	45
Constitution.....	47
Political Meetings	47
University.....	48
Other un-translated Terms	48
Conclusion	48
References.....	49
V. Khin Maung Nyo: EMERGENCE OF SOCIALIST ECONOMIC LITERATURE IN MYANMAR/BURMA. SOME PROVISIONAL REMARKS.	50
Introduction.....	50
Attractiveness of Socialism.....	51
Controversial Issues	51
Experiences of the Thakins	52
Anti-Imperialism and Anti-Capitalism	53
Nationalism and Buddhism.....	54
Japanese Period.....	54
Individual Responsibility	56
Socialism - a Solution or a Problem?.....	57
VI. Bo Bo: A CONTROVERSIAL FICTION OF A CONTROVERSIAL AUTHOR, THE WAY'S OUT.....	58
Photograph of Daw Khin Kyi Kyi.....	58
Introduction.....	59
Newspaper Advertisement of Their Pe <i>The Way Out</i>	61
Political Background of the Book.....	61
Literary Background	62
Synopsis of the Book	62
Foreword	62
The Plot.....	63
Book Reviews and Comments	64
My Opinion.....	65

Papers Presented at the Burma Studies Conference, Singapore 2006

References 66

VII. APPENDICES 67

About the Contributors

Hans-Bernd Zöllner, born 1942 in Lüneburg (Northern Germany), studied theology and worked as a Protestant pastor from 1970 to 2000. From 1983 to 1990 he served the German Speaking Protestant Congregation in Thailand and Burma. In 1998, he did his doctorate with a work on the international outlook of the Burmese independence movements. Since then, he teaches Southeast Asian history with a special focus on Burma at Hamburg University as a lecturer.

Mo Mo Thant studied history at Yangon University and received her M.A. and Ph.D. there. In 2005, she was appointed Professor at the University of Distance Learning.

Tin Hlaing, born 1941, studied Physics at Yangon University and from 1972 on in London and did his doctorate there. After retirement, he works as a translator and an adviser to the Buddhist University Yangon.

Khin Maung Nyo, born 1956, studied economics at Yangon University and served as an advisor to the Prime Minister's Office until 2005. He is now working with the World Economics Journal, Yangon.

Bo Bo, born 1980 in Mandalay, studied medicine there. He worked for various magazines in Yangon and is now continuing his studies abroad.

I. INTRODUCTION (Hans-Bernd Zöllner)

Looking Back on the Way to a Second Level of Investigation

This paper contains the first volume of contributions to the Myanmar Literature Project, which looks at the publications of the Nagani Book Club and their reception history from a “higher” perspective. The number “100” denotes the place of this publication within the whole series. This does not mean that it is the series’ 100th publication but the first in a second level of investigation into the main subject of this enterprise. This subject is the role of Burmese and Myanmar literature as a mediator between the world and Burmese/Myanmar society.

Volume 1 of this series introduces the reader to the Nagani Book Club by briefly documenting the history of the venture. In addition, it starts with the documentation of the results of its first level. It ends with an appraisal of the Burma Studies Conference in Singapore. On this occasion, some results of the project’s first stage, together with the first findings of the second stage, have been introduced to the international community of Burma Studies scholars. The following five topics have been mentioned in Vol. 1 as prospective themes of papers:¹

1. The Translation of Political Terms and Concepts into Burmese with reference to Nagani Publications.
2. The style of Nagani books compared to books from other periods of Burmese history.
3. Socialist economic literature and nation-building in Myanmar.
4. The World's and Burma's situation through the lenses of Nagani publications.
5. The role of Asian political models for Burma's politics.

As this booklet is based on the contributions which were actually presented at the conference, the development from the planned to the de facto delivered conference presentations will be summarised here together with some remarks on the editing of the contributions published in this volume. This shows how theoretical and practical factors have influenced the first steps towards the project’s second level. Since these working papers do not intend to produce polished results but document a research process, such a report is an integrated part of the whole undertaking.

The final announcement of the papers presented at the conference panel which introduced the project was made just one day before the panel took place on the last conference day, July 15. It read thus:

¹ Myanmar Literature Project, Working Paper 1, Introduction, p. 8.

1. H.-B. Zöllner: An Introduction into the Myanmar Literature Project starting with an investigation into the Nagani Book Club.
2. U Yazar (on behalf of Dr. Mo Mo Thant): A Study of Publications of Nagani under the Nationalistic Aspect.
3. Dr. Tin Hlaing: Translation of Political Terms and Concepts into Burmese with Reference to Nagani Publications.
4. U Khin Maung Nyo: Emergence of Socialist Economic Literature in Myanmar/Burma.
5. Dr. Bo Bo: A Controversial Fiction of a Controversial Author — The Ways Out.

Topic 1 was meant to inform the attendants of the panel about the basics of the project. What was said is partly written down in Vol. 1 of this series and partly in this introduction. Therefore, it will not be reproduced here in total. Instead, the text of a lecture delivered at the Alliance Française in Yangon some days before the start of the conference will be. Besides the general public, the participants of the project were invited. The French and the German ambassadors attended the lecture as guests of honour.

The other four presentations were contributions from scholars living in Myanmar. The airfares for three of them were paid by the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation which supports the project financially. The composition of the panel underlined one main aim of the whole project: Burma's intellectual and literary heritage and its present state shall be investigated through the joint research of Burmese and non-Burmese scholars as an alternative to studies on Burma either from the inside or the outside. As former events and the conference proved, this aim was - and is - not easy to achieve. The concrete nature of the difficulties will be illustrated with the introduction of the individual contributions.

Paper 2 of the scheduled panel program carries out the intention of entry number 4 in the list of proposals collected before the conference. Mo Mo Thant could not come to Singapore herself because as a government official she had to abide by special regulations regarding her passport. Yazar, a former lecturer at Yangon University's history department, was in Singapore at his own initiative, but was not registered as a conference participant. This caused an unfortunate misunderstanding when he tried to enter the conference area for a final meeting of the panelists in the room where the presentation was scheduled to take place. As a consequence, he decided not to present the paper as planned.

The paper, therefore, had to be presented by the panel's chairman. As the audience should not be inconvenienced by an overly long presentation, this particular paper was the last one to be read.

Shortage of time prevented it from being read in full. Hence, the paper is presented here in its original length for the first time - and in the originally designated place.

The circumstances which foiled the planned sequence of presentation point to many and multiple hindrances that not only trouble this particular project, but contribute to an often one-dimensional picture of Burma's/Myanmar's recent history.

The complexity inherent in the object of investigation is clearly demonstrated by the contribution of Dr. Tin Hlaing. His account of the translation and transformation of political terms into Burmese was the only contribution which had not undergone any changes in the period between the initial plans for the conference and its final program. This paper takes up one of the criteria of the information sheet handed out to the reviewers and evaluates the translation of political terms in various Nagai publications as well as in other periods of Burmese history. The presentation stimulated a very lively discussion which had to be cut short in order to prevent overruns in the timetable allotted to the panellists. The discussion underlined the prominence of the issue as well as the need for further detailed investigation.

Khin Maung Nyo's paper dealt with a part of the originally conceived idea (number 3 of the original list). As an economist who had served in the office of Myanmar's Prime Minister before the conference took place,¹ he was especially interested in the historical roots of Burma's/Myanmar's troubled economic performance throughout the various periods of the country's post war history. This interest arose after the promise to review one of the Nagani books, which is a translation of part one of John Strachey's "Theory and Practice of Socialism" which covered the economic system. To draw a bow from the ideas that guided Burmese thinkers, both economists and others, from pre-war times to the present day is a very valuable and demanding task.

Finally, there was Bo Bo's paper. It took up an issue which was not thought of before. This was related to the problem of finding a suitable candidate who could take the third ticket to Singapore available for a participant from Myanmar. The story of Mo Mo Thant's paper already demonstrated this difficulty. There are more stories like this. For example, the staff member of Yangon University's Language and Literature Department who had proposed the second topic in the original list was even not able to write

¹ Having just resigned from government service, Khin Maung Nyo had some difficulties in getting his passport and the visa.

the paper due to other commitments. And even if she had have written a paper, she could not have presented it because of her status as a civil servant.¹

Bo Bo, who finally joined the group as the youngest member, had not been involved in the project before and, therefore, had not much time to prepare a paper. But he chose one that fitted very well into the panel because he chose to talk about the postwar novel of Thein Pe, one of the authors who contributed strongly to the Nagani publications. Thus, his presentation contributes to the investigation of the change — or non-change — of how literary means and political aims are related in the works of eminent Burmese writers before and after the war.

Looking at the Contributions of this Volume

The following remarks will provide the first observations indicating some ideas that the editor has in mind for further discussions of the topics addressed at the conference.

Nationalism

At the beginning of Dr. Mo Mo Than's article, we find a short and striking thesis: "Literature is a subordinate to politics." It directs our attention to the political situation at the time of the foundation of the Book Club. Its publication coincided with the start of the "Year 1300 Uprising" and is closely related to the events of that year. According to this thesis, the books published by Nagani were a consequence of the political situation of that time. It was necessary to support the nationalist spirit. Therefore, books about nationalist movements in Ireland, the Philippines and Turkey were published. On the other hand, the strike by the workers created a demand for information about how to replace an unjust economic system. Thus, nationalism and socialism were brought together.

It is likely that the events of 1938 provide the main political context of the early publications of the book club. Most of the publications of 1938² can be directly connected to the two catchwords mentioned above.³ In addition to Mo Mo Than's examples, Thein Pe's books on the student strike of

¹ The restrictive passport policy of the present Myanmar government will remain a severe obstacle to further contributions in the second stage of the project because it diminishes one incentive for such contributions, namely the prospect to present a paper abroad.

² See the book list in Vol. 1 of this series, contribution No. 9.

³ The exceptions are Nu's books reproducing his early plays and the translation of Dale Carnegie's *How to Make Friends and Influence People*.

1936 can be listed in this context, too.¹ An evaluation of the “Nagani News” of 1938 could help to understand more precisely how the events were perceived and what expectations were linked up with them by the editor of the news, Tun Aye, and the contributors to his magazine.²

On the other hand, some things remain unclear. Mo Mo Thant refers to many books on the Irish freedom movement published by Nagani. They clearly helped to strengthen Burmese nationalism, but they are by no means related to socialism. Interestingly, the first two books on Ireland were published only in August 1939. At that time, Tun Aye had left Nagani and established his own publishing house. Here, he later published only one book on this topic, Hla Baw’s *Sinn Fein*. As this book has not been reviewed so far, we have to wait to answer the question of whether this book is different from the many Nagani publications on Ireland’s struggle for freedom.

This observation leads to the question of what kind of “politics” may have influenced the publications of Nagani literature after 1938, and in particular after Tun Aye’s retirement from Nagani. Obviously, the outbreak of the war in September 1939 changed the Burmese political climate substantially. That led to many more books on Germany, the war and spies. It cannot yet be said how the foundation of the Freedom Bloc on October 1, 1939, affected the book club’s activities.

Mo Mo Thant briefly mentions that Nagani books had an impact on postwar politics in Burma, too. She does not elaborate on the question of how this finding matches her initial thesis. In other words, there is a question about what role Nagani books played after Nu had become Prime Minister of independent Burma and the political climate had changed accordingly. The meaning of nationalism underwent some transformation after the attainment of sovereignty and the meaning of socialism also changed. A case in point is the expulsion of the communists from the AFPFL. After this split, there were at least two competing visions of how to implement socialism in Burma. A history of the different stages of Burmese nationalism in connection with or independent from the issue of implementing some kind of socialism in Burma is still to be written.

¹ See the introduction to Vol. 4 of this series.

² An incomplete set of the Nagani News published in 1938 is in the possession of the editor. (See Vol. 1 of this series, contribution No. 6.) Copies can be made and sent to people who are interested in evaluating the magazine.

Political Terms and Political Reality

Dr. Tin Hlaing's paper on the translation of political terms contributes to comparative studies of politics in Burma vis à vis the world in different periods of history. He does not include the Burmese terms for "nationalism" in his paper, but he mentions a lot of the socialist vocabulary which was coined at that time and retained, dropped or changed in later times for reasons not yet known in detail.

This study is absolutely important because it touches on the crucial issue of the transfer of meaning-laden terms from one political culture to another. Up to now, there has not been a lot of research on this topic¹ and Tin Hlaing's paper must, therefore, be praised as an inspiration for further questions and inquiries. The reason for this estimation shall be exemplified with three cases in point:

a) Tin Hlaing states that a cabinet minister was named *wun-gyi* even before Nagani tried to influence the political thinking of the Burmese people. The Myanmar-English Dictionary of 2001 published by Myanmar's Ministry of Education gives three meanings for *wun*: 1) burden; load. 2) responsibility. 3) high ranking officer. As *gyi* means "great", the word can be paraphrased as "A great high-ranking officer shouldering the burden of responsibility" or "A high-ranking officer shouldering the great burden of responsibility" or "A high-ranking officer shouldering the burden of great responsibility". For *wun-gyi*, the dictionary gives two translations, the history of which Tin Hlaing explains in detail: 1) minister of the *hluttaw*; 2) minister (cabinet). The term *hluttaw* designates the council of the four officials who were looking after different subjects and regions of administering the country individually, who were responsible to the king for taking care of the state affairs.²

The English word "minister" literally means "servant". The word derives from the Latin word *ministrare* (to serve) and - together with other words from the same stem - has in its long history served to denote a variety of subjects in different contexts. In earlier times, members of the Christian clergy were - and still are - called 'ministers'. One important connotation which influenced the meaning of this term as well as its secularised use in the sphere of politics was a Biblical saying:

But Jesus called them [to him], and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over

¹ For a detailed discussion of the Burmese terms for revolution see Robert H. Taylor, "Burmese Concepts of Revolution", in: Mark Hobart, Robert H. Taylor (Hrsg.), *Context, Meaning and Power in Southeast Asia*. Ithaca, New York: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1984, S. 79-92.

² The name *hluttaw* was later used to designate the Burmese parliament by adding *pyitthu* (people) to indicate the change of responsibility.

the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many¹

This saying contains a particular interpretation of the antonym of high-low. The same opposition is inherent in the term *wun-gyi*, but in a different way, because here the burden-taker “serves” the common good through the chief-ruler, the king, whereas in the Christian tradition, he does his service to all the people in imitation of Jesus and under God’s guidance who created all men as equals. Even if the practice of the ministers in the different cultural and religious traditions were quite similar and the *wun-gyis* as their masters were expected to follow the ten royal virtues and the many other moral rules rooted in the Buddhist religion, a different contextualisation remains. The worldly responsibility of the Buddhist minister is structured vertically, the Christian minister’s horizontally.

Observations like this cannot lead to simple conclusions. Hegel’s famous analysis of the master-servant relationship demonstrates that the low-high opposition has to be considered carefully in a dialectical way. But such a dialogue on the different semantic and cultural backgrounds of political terms can pave a way for a better understanding of the different political practices of ministers on both sides of the language-drawn lines.

b) The second example concerns one of the hottest issues of present day Burmese politics, the issue of democracy. Because this issue is very much contested it has to be dealt with in a level-headed manner.

We learn from Tin Hlaing’s paper about the difficulties in finding a fitting Burmese term to translate “democracy”. *Pyithu Ahnar* was suggested as the translation of Sun Yat Sen’s second of his “Three Principles”, but was dropped later, maybe due to the use of the word by the Burmese communist parties. “Democracy”, therefore, was translated as *democracy* (or *demawcracy*). Of course, that does not mean that the subject denoted by the term is alien to Burmese traditions. But without a sober and thorough investigation it is impossible to know the semantic meaning of the word in a present Burmese context.

A rather gross thought experiment may illustrate this impossibility. In 1988, 26 years after the installation of the “Burmese Way of Socialism”, the demonstrators demanding political change shouted

¹ Gospel according to Mark 10, 42-45 (King James Bible).

“de-mo-cra-cy”. The media broadcast this slogan around the world and thus helped to coin the phrase “democracy movement” as a designation for the opposition led by Aung San Suu Kyi against the military government.

What we do however know is how the American President and his colleagues in other “democratic” countries understood the meaning of the word shouted on the streets of Burma. We can imagine, too, how a participant in the “people’s power movement” in the Philippines which ousted President Marcos from office understood the word, because we have some information about the development of democratic thinking and institutions in the Philippines since the United States introduced both after they crushed the efforts of the Philippine freedom fighters at the beginning of the 20th century. But we cannot know how the students, workers and citizens of Burma in 1988 understood the meaning of the catchword they used in the demonstrations simply because of a lack of data in all fields of academic studies which may shed light on the issue.¹ Therefore, it can be said that talking about “democracy” in Burma today in any academic sense is like discussing the contents of an empty set.

The consequence of this sobering consideration is to try to gather at least some of the missing data and discuss them. “Democracy” in Myanmar has surely to be spelled out — almost from scratch, academically — and maybe politically as well.

c) The same applies to other terms and what they denote, as in the case of the third example, namely “constitution”. Tin Hlaing informs us that in pre-war times no suitable word could be coined. Further discussion of the impact of the Burmese name heading the 1947 constitution seems necessary. The dictionary consulted gives the impression that in later times a shorter and more technical term has been used.

Like “democracy”, the term “constitution” signifies a fundamental political term. But the latter has a much more concrete meaning. From 1937 to 1988, Burma was governed under four very different constitutions. The last, enacted in 1974 after 12 years of preparations, was abrogated in 1988. Five years later, the promulgation of a fifth one began. The National Convention convened by the ruling

¹ For a discussion of the historical dimensions of democracy in Burma see Mary P. Callahan (1998a) “Democracy in Burma: Lessons from History.” in *Political Legacies and Prospects for Democratic Development*, NBR Analysis 9:3 (May 1998): 5-26. (Internet: <http://www.nbr.org/publications/analysis/pdf/vol9no3.pdf>; [9.2.2007]) - Mary P. Callahan (1998b) “On Time Warps and Warped Time: Lessons from Burma’s “Democratic Era”, in: Robert Rotberg (ed.), *Prospects for Democracy in Burma*. Washington, D.C., Brookings: 49-83.

military was at that time suspended for many years, but seems to have come close to completing its task in 2006. What would be extremely interesting would be to write a history of the Burmese discussions on the topic “constitution” together with a history of the naming of this fundamental institution — from the de facto constitution of 1935 which was fought by the Burmese nationalists, to the emerging one of 2000 plus X years that will surely be attacked for its rules and regulations which guarantee the military’s-continued domination of the politics of the country.

Finally, it must be stressed that all these considerations on the transfer of political terms into Burma need to be examined in the light of the experience of other countries which underwent the same painful process to achieve a national identity. This is a process which has not only in Myanmar not yet come to a satisfying end for all parties concerned. The developments in Thailand in the second half of 2006 substantiate this assumption.

One of the parties involved in the course of nation and identity-building consists of the “multiple entity” of countries where the political concepts originated that were - and still are - used in Myanmar and elsewhere. The reaction to Burma’s adaptation or non-adaptation of Western - and other . political concepts must be reflected on and, to make things almost as complicated as reality, should include the role of the Eastern mediators which were regarded as models for the future of a “new Burma” in some respect.

Socialist Economics with a Question Mark

U Khin Maung Nyo’s remarks on the emergence of socialist writings in Burma are another kind of starter or appetizer for a gourmet menu of many dishes to come. It shares with all other contributions the quality of being a reflection on Burmese issues from the inside. There are a lot of books and articles that describe and analyse Burma’s/Myanmar’s poor economic performance after independence. Almost all highlight the contrast between Burma’s great resources and the poor use made of them.¹ But most neglect Furnivall’s assessment in his groundbreaking book on the Political Economy of Burma (1931) that the wealth of a country lies first and foremost in its people, not in material resources.

¹ See, for example, David I. Steinberg (2001): *Myanmar. The State of Burma*. Washington, Georgetown University Press. He states in his review of the economies in different periods of Burmese history at the beginning of the chapter on the colonial economy: “Burma had been a colonial success story” (p. 126). Later in the chapter, he enumerates several reasons why socialism provided the basic stimulus for Burma’s post-independence economy. According to him, it was the civil war after 1948 that prevented the “natural endowments of the country” from materializing economically.

Khin Maung Nyo has read and used Furnivall's book which in the third edition of 1957 contains another foreword describing and analysing what happened in Burma in the 25 years between the first and the third edition. Based on Furnivall's and other scholars' writings and his own deliberations, Khin Maung Nyo shows that the future leaders of Burma did not have-much choice in selecting their own economic principles. Furnivall himself was a Fabian socialist and so was Victor Gollancz, the founder of the Left Book Club, who published some books which were translated by Nagani authors, for example John Strachey's "Theory and Practice of Socialism"¹ which dealt with economics. Even in Britain it was socialism that was widely regarded as an antidote to fascism and other evils of the time.²

Therefore, it is not so debatable as to *why* socialism was chosen by the Thakins and some other politicians, like Ba Maw. The more interesting question is *how* it was understood and attempted to be implemented and why these attempts were not successful, as hindsight clearly shows. One point is related to time, as the paper states. Whereas in Europe the idea of socialism developed over a long period of time, in Burma it was taken over as a finished product. It was not personal experience but belief in external knowledge taken from text books that was distributed. Consequently, discourse on the issues was rather dogmatic, not pragmatic.

This may be regarded as one reason for the splits that plagued Burma. Khin Maung Nyo points out that it is doubtful how many people really understood correctly what "socialist economy" meant and he states that different interpretations could cause confusion. This confusion was one reason for the splits which occurred within the Thakin movement. Another was that disagreement was not solved by discussion but by the parting of ways. It can be recalled that one reason for Tun Aye's departure from Nagani was the issuing of shares to increase the company's capital base.³

In view of the political splits which happened after the war, influencing the country's development badly, one may ask how different lines of thinking within the broad spectrum of "socialist economics" may have contributed to the splits and what prevented the actors from finding a pragmatic way out of the conflicts. Khin Maung Nyo's reference to the influence of Buddhist thinking may be helpful to find a more detailed answer.

¹The original book was published in 1936 by Victor Gollancz' Left Book Club, the model for the Nagani Book Club.

² For Palme R. Dutt, the other socialist author mentioned by Khin Maung Nyo, see paper No. 3 of this series which deals with Ba Hein's book on capitalism which was based on one of Dutt's works.

³ See Vol. 1 of this series, contribution 2 (Entertaining Knowledge).

Another point is, as mentioned in Khi Maung Nyo's paper, the "ethnic factor". The Thakin movement started shortly after the Indian-Burmese riots of 1930. The first pamphlets published by Ba Thung incited his countrymen to "buy Burmese" and thus strengthened the spirit of entrepreneurship on the side of the Burmese population.¹ The dominant Indian and, to a lesser extent, Chinese influence on Burma's economy together with the dominant British activities in this field contributed to the accumulation of economic skills and enterprises in the hands of foreigners. That clearly strengthened an anti-capitalistic attitude and pro-socialist leanings.

Finally, one can ask what factors favoured the adoption of socialist economic ideas in post-war Burma and the different attempts to implement them under Nu and Ne Win. For the era of Nu, Furnivall's foreword to his book on the political economy of Burma is helpful. He is focusing on younger students - he was 79 in 1957 - to assess the achievements of the government and remarked that such an investigation "will have to begin from the beginning".²

This may still be true today. The contribution of Khin Maung Nyo ends with a question mark. He asks if socialism in Burma was a solution or a problem. Maybe it was both: a problematic solution which lacked economic pragmatism.

A Way Out

The last contribution of this volume responds to the demand of pursuing the issues which were **introduced** through Nagani publications shortly before the war in the post-war periods. Bo Bo introduces the first novel written by Thein Pe after the war. His paper should be compared to the material collected on Thein Pe's two books on the students' strike, published by the Nagani Book Club.³ Here and there, the novel's setting is the political conflict of the day and the main message of the book seems to be the same: an appeal - **rather unsuccessful up to the present** - to achieve Burmese unity in both private and public life.

The information collected by Bo Bo about the book's genesis and the controversy it aroused provides a

¹ For the beginning of the Thakin movement see Khin Yi (1988), *The Dobama movement in Burma (1930-1938)*. Ithaca, Cornell University: pp. 3-6. The Burmese text of the *Dobama Sadan* is reprinted in the Appendix of the book, pp. 1-9. For an English translation see Hans-Bernd Zöllner (2000), *Birma zwischen "Unabhängigkeit Zuerst — Unabhängigkeit Zuletzt"*. *Die birmanischen Unabhängigkeitsbewegungen und ihre Sicht der zeitgenössischen Welt am Beispiel der birmanisch-deutschen Beziehungen zwischen 1920 und 1948*. Hamburg, Lit: pp.508-510.

² Furnivall 1957: p. ax.

³ See Vol. 4 of this series.

very valuable insight into the complex interrelationship of personal relations, discussions about price-worthy literature and the country's politics. Particularly the issue of literary standards set for a "national literature" should attract further attention. Until now, there **has been** monograph in a Western language on Sarpay Beikman, the agency which awards literature prizes until today. Nu, who founded the House together with the Burma Translation Society, in a way "nationalized" literature and thus continued as Prime Minister what he had begun as a political and literary activist by founding and operating the Nagani Book Club.

Looking Ahead - Sceptically, not Pessimistically

The previous comments indicate that there is no shortage of issues that deserve more enquiries on the second level of investigation into Myanmar Literature as a medium between the world and Burmese society. Furthermore, the papers presented at the Singapore conference and edited here show that the second level of investigation into this broad topic is interesting for at least two reasons.

First, the basic approach of this project to concentrate on the interface between those 'inside' and 'outside' of Burma/Myanmar is helpful to identify topics which point to some crucial issues both academically and practically. The "transfer issue" is a central theme which is varied in manifold ways. Nationalism, political terms, economy and literature are only some of these variations. It is a nice idea to deal with the similarities and differences of the main motif in their various manifestations. Maybe the next Burma Studies Conference will provide an opportunity for such an undertaking.

Whereas there is no lack of issues, there is a shortage of people who can handle them. The first part of this introduction gave some information about the difficulties in getting persons living in Myanmar involved in the process of discussions on the "transfer theme". Such a participation of "insiders" is obligatory because otherwise there would be no chance to establish the exchange of views which is the best method of addressing the said theme and its variations.

This volume presents papers only from Myanmar scholars of different backgrounds. This is very good because such contributions are rare. On the other hand, it indicates the necessity of a next step, that is, the participation of members of the foreign research community (including people with a Burmese background who are living abroad). Without such participation, it is rather doubtful whether working paper 101 can be published.

There are some reasons that justify scepticism about the success of any Burma-related undertaking that requires the participation of more than one individual — not just this particular endeavour. The community of people who come together at a conference taking place every two years is nice. But it is unclear whether the community really does exist in the intervals between the meetings. Burma studies do very much reflect the isolated state of affairs of their object of interest. In most places, there are specialists who work on Burma on their own without a platform offering a continuing exchange of views and without the space, time and money necessary to organize exchanges.

This is a sceptical but by no means a pessimistic outlook. Too many too interesting and entertaining issues lie ahead. Sooner or later, they will receive the scholarly attention they deserve.

Hamburg, September 2006

II. Hans-Bernd Zöllner: INTEGRATING OTHER PEOPLES' PAST

Some remarks on the interpretation of Nagani books.¹

Mingalaba, cher Monsieur l'Ambassadeur - lieber Herr Botschafter - dear ladies and gentlemen and *jesudimbade* for coming here this morning to listen to my talk and – more important – being prepared to comment on it later. And a special thanks to all people from the Alliance and from the German Embassy that helped this morning lecture and the following function to materialize.

I apologize for talking to you in English instead of Burmese but, thanks to the endeavour of Dr. Tin Hlaing, we have prepared a Burmese translation of what I have to say on a meaningful and up-to-date interpretation of old books. But before I come to this, I have to mention that I am still ashamed that after coming to Burma and Myanmar for more than twenty years now, I speak so little Burmese. Why is that so, I ask myself, and you may ask yourself the same question.

I can give an answer with the assistance of an old Greek story. It tells about a man called Sisyphus who was punished by the Gods for some severe wrongdoing. He had to roll a very heavy stone uphill the slope of a very great mountain. And shortly before he reached the top, he could not prevent the stone from rolling down again. He had to start anew. The punishment was that he had to do so for eternity.

My stone is Burmese language. Before each time I come here, I try to learn a bit and practice during my short visits and acquire some taxi-driver-Burmese. And when I return to Germany, I forget what I have learned and practised. But, like Sisyphus, I do not give up and try again and again. By the way, this French cultural institution reminds me of an interpretation of the old myth by the famous French writer and philosopher Albert Camus which ended with the statement that Sisyphus could be regarded as a lucky man – and since I feel very happy to return to Myanmar many times despite my failure to master the language, my example may indicate that Camus' interpretation was not so far from the truth. But, other than Sisyphus, I am not alone. I found people – some of you here and others who could not come this morning for different reasons – to make up for my handicap and thus to start a joint venture by investigating into the publications of the Nagani Book Club. To be precise, without my Sisyphean

¹ Lecture given on July 8, 2006 at the Alliance Française, Yangon.

handicap the whole project would not have come into existence. That is another reason to be happy and to say *jesudimbade* to all of you who share my interest in books.

That brings me back to the theme of my lecture. I can say that its main idea occupies me longer than I started to investigate into Nagani books some ten years ago. Some of you know that I started my career as a Christian minister who tries to make the old texts of the Bible understandable and attractive for today. The reason for my decision to become involved in the Nagani business was my feeling that through the interpretation of the old books published before World War II we can learn a lot more about Burmese history and at the same time about the history of Germany, France and other parts of the world. I will come back to this idea later.

However, there is another point I have to mention that prevents me from coming directly to the point: As a German who lives in Hamburg, a stone's throw away from one of the World Cup stadiums and as somebody who was - like almost every German - embedded in a wave of soccer-mania for one month now, I have some difficulties to turn off all those thoughts. Therefore, some references to the big event, facts, metaphors and analogies, cannot be avoided in my speech for you. As an excuse, I can argue that football has become an acknowledged subject even for serious intellectuals and writers these days in Germany and elsewhere.

All of you know that tomorrow the World Cup final will take place in Berlin, the German capital. The venue of the big show will be a stadium that like many others was reconstructed to meet the requirements and standards of the great occasion. That was necessary because this stadium is one of Germany's oldest big arenas. It actually celebrates the 70th anniversary of its building for another big event, namely the IX. Olympic Summer Games of the modern era which started on August 1, 1936. That date takes us right away to the time when the Nagani Book Club was founded. The book club came into being one year after the games took place, at a time full of global tension that some years later should discharge into the Second World War. I found out that two weightlifters from Burma participated in the Games. One of them, Zaw Weik, acted as a kind of fitness adviser to young Aung San. In his memoirs he described how fascinating he and his trainer, Saya Shein, found the New Germany of that time under Hitler's leadership. Other Burmans considered this Germany – together

with Italy – a model for Burma, at least with regards to some features. The rise of Hitler for example, was – like Stalin’s – seen as a paradigm for the phenomenon that – as Alaungphaya and others in Burmese history – a nobody can become a leader of a modern nation and bring it back to glory through personal energy, discipline and proficiency. And what had happened in Germany, Italy and Russia could happen in Burma as well.

The football arena of tomorrow’s final is therefore a concrete example of the integration of other peoples’ past. Germany’s history was – in more than one way, one has to add – made a part of Burmese history. Nagani books contain many more illustrations on how the histories of Western and Eastern countries were used to imagine, phrase and create a vision of a future, free Burma. For me, the interesting question is how this adaptation of foreign ideas and concepts was and is executed in detail and how the integration performed - influenced the course of history up to the present day.

I want to give a second example on how the ongoing actuality of the past can be demonstrated on the Olympic Stadium that fascinated Zaw Weik in 1936. If you visited this stadium in Berlin today, at first sight you would only see a typical modern stadium fitting into the 21st century. In the course of time, the arena has undergone many alterations, adaptations and modernizations. But a second look will reveal the special features of the architecture of the 1930s that in today’s Germany is looked upon as a symbol of the megalomania and the fascist political ideas that had befallen Germany. And what applies to architecture is valid for society, too. A few weeks ago people of dark complexion were attacked by – alleged – Neo-Nazis in towns near Berlin. There are such young right wing racists, but they constitute a very small minority among the German population. Still, their activities might have a huge impact on the German image abroad. Imagine a *New Light of Myanmar* article quoting German politicians that it would be unsafe for coloured visitors of the World Cup to enter some regions in Germany because of the aggressive xenophobia over there.

As you can see, the past is still alive and influencing the present, if only indirectly through a certain interpretation of historical events. That is why historians are so important as the specialists and the masters of the past. In the older days, rulers employed court historians to make sure that the past did not get out of control. That happens today, too, but it is a little bit more difficult nowadays and so it can

easily happen that the dark shadows of history darken the bright picture of the present as in Germany's case – and in other cases it may be just the other way round. The dark present is illuminated by the bright memories of the past.

Anyway, because the past is so powerful, it has to be handled extremely carefully. Integrating the past into the present, needs a very thorough and sensible reading and interpretation of history and of the literature which is part of history and which deals with the past. This means that it is necessary to have one's own history in mind as well as that of other people because both are closely interrelated.

For example, many Nagani books informed the readers about revolutions in different countries, East and West, and in various periods of history. Some of them dealt with the glorious French revolution at the end of the 18th century. The general purpose of importing this piece of French history is clear. It was meant as a lesson to perform a successful revolution in Burma. That was a good idea, because if the great ideals of that revolution, *liberté, égalité, fraternité* (liberty, equality, fraternity) had been implanted here, that would have been great for Burma. But these ideals could have been only implanted successfully if the dark sides of the French revolution were taken into consideration, too – as demonstrated by the terror of the radical Jacobins that killed many of the revolutionaries. (I hope the people of the Alliance Française will not charge me for this remark.) Therefore, if these dark elements of the French revolution were not given proper attention, the liberation of the own country could be affected.

This consideration leads to a very simple conclusion that constitutes a fundamental principle of the Myanmar Literature Project: We have to gather as many information as possible about what has happened in the past and we have to look at it from as many perspectives as possible in order to prevent misinterpretations that damage the past, the present and the future in equal measure. This may sound a little bit emotive but it has to be stressed as the base of any methodically correct handling of the art of interpretation. That is why the project was and is designed as a joint venture between people from different cultures and occupations both inside and outside Myanmar who have access to various sources of information and views of assessing and composing these pieces of information. All this is necessary, if we want to find the right balance between different and sometimes antagonistic pieces of

information and views.

Today, I can show you the working papers containing the first results of the project. The word WORKING paper has to be stressed because these papers are intended to be an invitation for more contributions adding more information as well as criticism and other assessments of the Nagani books and how their impact can be assessed.

I would like to make a rather dry methodological remark here. What we need is to carefully contextualise our objects of interpretation, our present book under review, as well as our present position. One of the first foreign books that were thought being useful to teach the Nagani readers was the treatise of the Chinese revolutionary Sun Yat Sen, “The Three Principals”. It was translated and commented on in two Nagani books. The second one was entitled “Peoples’ Power” (Burmese: ငြိမ်းသူ့အာဏာ) as a translation of the word “Democracy” in the English version of Sun Yat Sen’s book. That illustrates that at least four different contexts come together here: First, the Burmese context of 1938, when the book was published here. Second, an international one that led to the publication of Sun Yat Sen’s lectures in English language. Third, there is the Chinese context of the politician’s intention of informing his compatriots about the French revolution and the context of the original events. And fourth, to make things even more complicated, it matters if the people of today look at this Nagani publication from a Myanmar, German, English, Chinese or French point of view many decades after the books were written. Finally, these different perspectives may result in complimentary rather than contrasting interpretations.

A third very important element has to be added and illustrated by what happens at the World Cup competition. A lot of emotion is involved and some anthropologists argue that such an event can be regarded as a peaceful substitute for wars because aggressions are canalised by means of the rules of the game. But it may happen, too, that victories in the sport stadium may lead to an extent of national pride which is unsound. Quantity may turn into a new and perhaps dangerous kind of quality. That is one reason, why I am not completely unhappy with Germanys failure to make it to the final. And, of course, I wish France to win the final, not in order to revenge the German defeat in the name of German-French friendship but just because I am very fond of Zinedine Zidane.

Anyway, the emotions of past days as well as those of today have to be carefully and soberly taken into consideration. One must only mention in these particular days that Nagani published three books on the students' strikes of 1936 and 1938 respectively, to underline this point. Working paper 4 is dealing with the two documentary novels written by Thein Pe about the events of 1936 and they are meant to further a rational discussion on the role of the emotional side of what happened then and later.

The year 1936 brings us back again to the Olympic Games in Berlin and tomorrow's World Cup Final. The broadest context for the endeavour of interpreting Burmese literature as a medium between the world and this country's society is the global world. And this pertains not just to our present time with its inflationary and often superficial use of the term "globalisation" but to the time of Nagani's activities as well.

What I want to say, from a global point of view, to win liberty, equality and fraternity a lot of competition is needed, but a competition constrained by rules, rules of how to interpret texts, how to contextualise them and how to deal with a diversity of interpretations. These regulations prevent those who lost a game to be defeated and humiliated. In fact, that is not so easily done, but there is hope. Philosophically, we may turn to Camus' interpretation of the Sisyphus story, practically we can have a look at the present World Cup. To me, it's most important aspect in that context was the remarkable atmosphere in Germany in the last four weeks: It was – and hopefully still is - a friendly, joyful intercourse with a plurality of people free from what has been described as the German *angst* (fear) in the face of something and someone foreign and strange.

Given all this in consideration, together we have to integrate a plurality of information, perspectives and emotions into our interpretation as the most successful football teams do today. The most successful strikers of the German team were born in Poland and two players of the team have a brown complexion and all of them play with players from many countries in their home clubs.

Of course, to practise this pluralistic approach is easier said than done, particularly under today's conditions in Myanmar. But the only feasible way to integrate pluralism is the exchange of views and experience. And that is what the project is trying – not just for the benefit of people in Myanmar but

also for those outside the country who need to integrate an at least roughly realistic picture of Myanmar, into the perception of their standpoint vis à vis this beautiful country.

I want to close my speech with a comment on something I would like you to do later. We have prepared a sheet of paper asking you for suggestions on what kind of exchange in what fields of knowledge with people or institutions from outside you would appreciate. I cannot promise anything about the outcome of this questionnaire, only that I will edit it and send it to people with a concern on Myanmar and inform you about the outcome.

I wish all of us nice conversations, thank you for your kind attention, hope to meet you again soon and I would like to encourage you to ask questions or give some comments on what I had to say today.

III. Mo Mo Thant: A STUDY OF PUBLICATION BY NAGANI BOOK CLUB UNDER THE NATIONALISTIC ASPECTS

1. Introduction

As Capitalism had come out in the period of Feudalism, anti-capitalist literature emerged despite oppression of the capitalist authorities in the period of capitalism. It was proletariat's literature which was used as a tool for revolt. In a society that has different social classes, literature represents a social class. It reflects its political system and the former is of benefit to the latter. There is no literature that is independent from politics. Literature is a subordinate to politics.

After the world war, Myanmar awakened in politics. In Myanmar, the first student's strike rose up in 1920, when patriotism sprang up due to the rise of political awareness. Myanmar developed again. In 1926 the Burma Book Club was formed by a group of people loving national literature. In January 1928, the Burma Education Extension Society was set up to create the translation revolt and the experimental literature revolt. Its contemporary was the *Gandalawka* (World of Books) magazine. Articles in the magazine mostly focused on literature and education of the people rather than on instigating nationalism.

Literature instigating more nationalism came out after the 1930s. The Nagani Book Club emerged as there was a need for a literature association to systemically spread anti-colonialism instead of the occasional instigation of them by magazines. The Book Club not only instigated strong desire to be free from slavish existence but also let farmers and workers know that they could enjoy their freedom and use their strength themselves after they had been free from exploitation by the minority. The Nagani Book Club was formed to be systematic in fighting against colonialism in the light of the right policy to produce the selected political leaders and to deliberate the step and strength of those who were fighting against colonialism on the other side.

The Nagani Book Club was formed in the year when Burma's Nationalist Movement reached a peak in 1938 (1300 Burmese Era). That movement was stronger than before because it led to the Year 1300

uprising in which workers, farmers and students were all involved. The Nagani Book Club sped up the strikes of workers, farmers and students.

The Nagani Book Club was repressed by British colonialists for spreading anti-colonialism, uplift of nationalism and socialism. In particular, the Nagani was the forerunner of propagandizing socialism, which later became popular in Burma. The main objective of the Nagani Book Society (NBS) was to arouse, through literary means, the spirits of anti-colonialism, national independence, and socialism. To realize its objective the Nagani published literary works regularly on a monthly basis immediately after it was founded.

Among the books published by the Nagani Book Club, the ones instigating nationalism included "*The Irish Revolution*" and "*My adventure*" by Myoma Saya Hein, and the ones propagandizing socialism included "*Karl Marxism*" by Thakin Bo and "*Socialism*" by Thakin Soe. In publishing these books to the people, there were monthly- issued books and special books in order to interest the reader. Occasionally, the Book Club distributed material on current affairs in Burma for the reader's assessment. Such books included "*Riot between the Indians and the Burmese*" and "*Our immediate Duty*" by Thein Pe.

The Nagani publications were sold to the public at Kyat 2 (32 annas) per volume, while member of the Nagani Association could get one for 10 annas, a simple way to enhance membership. Booklets and papers on the current Burmese affairs were distributed free of charge to members so as to enable the reader to assess for themselves.

2. Political Biographies

The Nagani published political biographies in order to disseminate national spirit and produce elite political leaders. "*The Biography of Saya Lun. (Thakhin Kodaw Hmaing)*", published in January 1938, and co-authored by U Thein Pe (Thein Pe Myint) and Deedok U Ba Cho, was one of the early political biographies. In the first chapter of the biography, Saya Lun's childhood was depicted. It showed how patriotic the boy Maung Lun was and his dislike for being made to serve under alien rule. The biography of Saya Lun was presented in such a way that the reader would emulate his unostentatious

mind, and his goodwill on the nation and his bravery. The Nagani published the biography with the aim of turning all Myanmar people into patriotic citizens with high morality, just like Saya Lun. Thus, the Nagani had incited the Myanmar people to take example of Saya Lun's patriotism, to love the country as he did, and to try to achieve independence.

The Nagani obviously expected morally sound and patriotic leaders like José Rizal from among Myanmar people. The book presented how the Filipinos suffered under the Spanish rule and hoped the Burmese recollected their life under the British rule. It described how the Filipinos organized themselves under the leadership of José Rizal to strive for national independence with the intention of providing some hints for the Myanmar national leaders to follow suit. Furthermore, it was demonstrated how they achieved independence through giving their lives in anti-colonial battles. The Myanmar national leaders were exhorted with some anticipation through the eventual success of the Filipinos' attempts to free themselves from the Spanish rule. In its preface, the Nagani mentioned that it was written for the emergence of ideal leaders who would strive to achieve freedom for the whole nation.

"The Irish Revolution" described Ireland's attempt to gain independence, and the breaking up of Ireland into two after independence. The aim for publishing it was to remind the Burmese people of their situation under the British rule, and to take lessons from the Irish experience and unite to work for independence. If they were quarrelling and fighting among themselves, they would all perish instead of getting independence.

The book entitled *"Michael Collins and I"* was about the Irish national leader Michael Collins. It was solely a biography, but the emphasis was more on the efforts of the Irish people to gain independence. The book aimed to inform the Burmese readers how Michael Collins and the Irish people co-operated in working to reach their goal, of achieving independence. The biography was translated by Myoma Saya Hein. Concerning the aim of publishing the book, Nagani mentioned that riots, revolts and strikes were taking place in Burma. On the other hand, the British colonialist government put down the national freedom movement of the Myanmar people. The imperialist government and the capitalist class joined hands and repressed the people against free speech, free writing and free travelling.

However, the book mentioned the fact that patriotic leaders were striving for national freedom despite being imprisoned, irrespective of the oppression. The book was aimed at making it known how the Irish national leader and his people were striving for freedom with a view to reaching the goal of independence for the entire people. The aim of publishing the book was to make Myanmar people emulate the selfless acts of Michael Collins for the sake of national freedom. It reminded Myanmar leaders of the fact that they must use violent means for gaining independence easily. It roused nationalism and anti-imperialism in the minds of the Myanmar people. It also guided the fact that it was important for the leaders to work united for independence by showing the downfall of Michael Collins.

"*De Valera*" by U Nyi Pu was said to be a biography but it focused on the national struggle of the Irish, *De Valera* was trying to develop the Irish language and such an attempt was a significant activity for politics. It suggested that the Burmese should emulate the Irish People's struggle for independence. "*De Valera*", the patriotic nationalist joined the political organizations and fought to free Ireland from the English rule. There was a disagreement between *De Valera* and *Michael Collins* after gaining independence. In 1927, the British had to give full autonomy to Ireland, and the book described how *De Valera* took up the administration himself. Since it was a revolt against British rule, the book aimed to sow the seeds of revolution in the Burmese people who were in the same boat with the Irish people of that time.

In 1939, Nagani published "*Turkish Dictator's Biography*" translated into Burmese by U Tun Kyaing. It presented the biography of Mustafa Kemal, the Turkish national leader. In this book Kemal's activities for the freedom of Turkey and the welfare of the country and the people served as an ideal sample for countries which were under control of a foreign country. At that time, Burma was under control of the British. Therefore, the Burmese were stimulated to strive for freedom from control by a foreign country. It also reminded the people that their country needed such good leaders as Kemal.

Myoma Saya Hein wrote "*My adventure*" depicting the national struggle of Dean Brown, the national leader, who took active part in the struggle for independence in Ireland. (Myoma Saya Hein, 1939. 20) It was translated into Burmese for generations to come. It presented the persistent struggle against the

invasion of the colonialists till triumph was enjoyed. The Nagani instigated nationalism, anti-colonialism, organizing spirit for the entire people of Burma. It placed its trust in the Burmese who had been fighting against the British. It seemed to make Burmese leaders emulate the efficient national leaders like Dean Brown. Besides it pointed out the importance of the unity among leaders in fighting against imperialists.

The Nagani Book Club encouraged the people with books on the Irish Revolution for independence in order not to weaken the revolution when political activities were being actively carried out, and there were many more people who died in action. As the Irish and the Burmese were common in their attitudes and their patriotism, the latter were called "The Eastern Irish" What was mentioned was that Burmese had better emulate any good activities of any peoples in the world when striving for independence.

"The Irish Martyr" by Thandwe Maung was about the biography of Sir Roger Casement.. This book described the Irish people's struggle for national freedom. It made Myanmar patriotic leaders emulate his courageous acceptance of the death sentence. For the time being, there was a strong national movement in Burma. The British put down the strong national movement in various ways. In that situation the Nagani seemed to give proper guidance to the people to fight with arms or weapons against the British for independence. The book thus expressed biographies of the Irish national leaders who were striving for national freedom by using weapons.

The Nagani published *"Our Shan state"* on the basis of unity of national races. (U Ohn Myint, 1940. 161) This book emphasized the unity of Shan and Myanmar people and guided national leaders by letting them realize the importance of solidarity among national races living together in Myanmar for national independence and anti-colonialism. It was the time Myanmar was witnessing a violent struggle for anti-colonialism and national independence when the Nagani was first founded. It was the time of students' strike, workers' strikes and riots. All these struggles indicated that the colonialist government was not wanted at all. At that time, the Nagani Book Club raised up Myanmar's national and anti-imperialist spirit through the use of literary writings, digging up the independence struggles of countries which were all striving out for freedom from being under control of the colonialists.

3. Socialism

The Nagani not only brought about anti-colonialist and national sentiments in the Burmese people, but also tried to sow the seeds of socialism. The objective of Nagani was anti-colonialism and nationalism in form, but in essence it was socialism. The Nagani, at its founding stage, had to publish nationalist literature to be in tune with the rising tide of nationalist spirits of that time. However, the embedded concept being socialism, the Nagani steadfastly tried to stick to it by translating English books on Socialism published by British leftist book clubs.

“My beloved husband” translated by Shap Ni was the book written by Krupskaya, Lenin’s wife, a biography of her husband. It described which difficulties had to be overcome in building up a socialist country and how important it was to be persistent. The aim of publishing the book was to broaden the political outlook of the Burmese. The book seemed to instigate the knowledge that it was time to demand rights for workers and peasants, for the proletariat in Burma. Besides, the Nagani urged the people for the need of socialist leaders to march towards freedom of social classes of the people not just to strive for independence from control of colonialists.

The book *“Socialism”* was a compilation of core material extracted from books and papers by the Russian revolutionary leader Lenin, and by Karl Marx and Engels. Burma was suffering a lot under the wretched administration of the British capitalist colonialism. To get rid of that dilemma, workers and peasants must co-operate to destroy the colonial capitalism and establish a proletarian society. Socialism is the shining star guiding the Burmese proletariat in their offensive on the colonial capitalists. That was the aim of publishing the book. Thus, the book *“Socialism”* published by the Nagani exposed the essence of socialism, and in addition, gave guidelines to the Burmese people not to be satisfied with national independence after wiping out the British colonial capitalism, but to see to it that no fledgling Burmese capitalists dominate Burma. A paradise on earth (the Welfare State) where there was no class discrimination had to be created by the people. In the fight for independence, communism must be taken as the guiding policy. Communism and the fight for independence were inseparable, said the guideline. Therefore, the Nagani was to accept socialism, the authentic policy in resisting the colonial capitalism, and as the Nagani believed that socialism was the only doctrine to create a bright future for the country and people, it was propagating socialism by means of literature.

The Nagani was spreading socialist doctrines by means of literature and at the same time it published books on *capitalism*, the arch enemy of socialism, so that the public would come to know what it was, and why it was the enemy of socialism and the masses of the proletariat. Thus, the Nagani published a book on *capitalism* so as to inform the Burmese people of the pros and cons of capitalism, and to steer them on the new path to socialism.

“The Theory and Practice of Socialism – Part 1 The Economic System” was brought out with the aim of clarifying the socialist doctrine that had become popular in the later part of the 20th Century ; assessing the rhetoric of the so-called politicians; choosing which of the means of reform for land, tax and peasants’ affairs conformed with true socialist doctrine; and of providing knowledge on economics. In this way, it was claimed that the socialist economic system was the best. And thus, the Burmese people had a glimpse of the essence of socialism.

“Marxism” by Thakin Bo, described the essence of Karl Marx’s doctrine, and at the same time depicted the situation in Burma under the British rule. It was meant to be a guideline for solving nationalistic problems faced by colonized countries by means of Marxist doctrine. The Nagani published books and documents on leftist policies with the aim of propagating the socialist doctrine. Moreover, by presenting successful socialist revolutions and implementations of the socialist ideals, it provided guidelines for the Burmese people to take up a socialist revolution where the workers and peasants hold the national power.

“Way of Escape for the Destitute Vol. I” was a Burmese translation of R. Page Arnot’s History of the Russian Socialist Revolution by Thakin Nu. It was a successful story of a scientific social upheaval based on Marxism and Leninism implemented in the USSR. It was to inform the Burmese people of the processes of a social revolution and at the same time to make the people aware of their own situation under colonialism. Thus, it sent a warning to the Burmese people that they needed to take up a revolution like the Russians to free themselves from the misery they were suffering from under colonial rule. The two volumes dwelt on the victories of the Russian Socialist revolution for the Burmese people to be emulated by it apart from gaining knowledge of the events of the world.

“*The Red Eagle*” published by Nagani was a supplementary to the history of the USSR. Soviet leaders and their accomplishments, their relentless efforts and sacrifices were presented so as to urge the Burmese people to be like them in their fight for independence. “*The Red Eagle*” awakened the Burmese peoples to carry out democratic as well as socialist revolutions within their own circumstances and situations.

The volume “*Soviet Experiences in Democracy*” published by Nagani Book Society gave an account of Soviet administration, economic and social situations as the nation marched along the path of socialism. The theme was that the Burmese people should follow the footsteps of the Soviet peoples and reach a destination just like them. The path to socialism would be a full democratic one.

4. Anti-Fascism

The Nagani Society was founded to stimulate anti-colonialism, and socialist objectives through literature. Therefore, it was automatically against fascism, the highest level in colonialism. At that time, Burma was working for her independence and was seeking assistance from abroad. Nagani seemed quite concerned about Burma accepting assistance from the fascist Japanese. Therefore, it produced anti-fascist literature in which Japan was pointed out as a country adopting fascism, the severest form of colonialism. “*The Japanese Spy*”, written by Vespa, was translated into Burmese by U Ba Tin. It depicted the dark side of fascism to encourage anti-fascist movement and to warn Burma not to associate with fascist nations.

“*What Hitler had done*” was about Hitler’s life and how he founded the Nazi Party and dominated Germany. There were 25 chapters in that volume which was brought out as an NBS book selection. The Nazi party under the influence of Hitler dissolved political organizations headed by workers and peasants in Germany. Moreover, there had been arrests and detentions, and galling murders abound. These were presented vividly. Germany became a powerful nation thanks to Hitler, but the book pointed out how the German people had been denied their rights as citizens. In this way, the evil effect of Hitler’s Nazi party was exposed, and anti-fascist sentiments were fuelled by means of literature.

5. Internal Affairs

Nagani published books on national movements and on socialism. Moreover, from time to time, it also touched on the national movement in Burma. “*Our immediate duties*” by Thakin Thein Pe described Burma’s current political affairs and urged the workers, peasants, and students to carry on with the socialist revolution after gaining total independence through united efforts.

“*The Political History of Burma*”, by U Ba Khaing stressed the need for dedicated leaders in the national movement for independence. Besides, the book candidly expressed the need for unity among political parties in the anti-colonial movement. Therefore, “*The Political History of Burma*” reminded the Burmese people to make an analytical study of the past in order to gain lessons from the mistakes which would be helpful to the future tasks of the anti-colonial movement.

A Nagani publication, entitled “*The General Strike of 1300*” described the historical events of the strike by oil field workers, peasants, and students from the nationalist point of view, and thus strengthened the national spirit of the Burmese people. The book emphasized the activities of the oil field workers and those of the students. The Nagani described the nationalist movement prevailing at that time and urged the workers, peasants and students to actively take part in the anti-colonial movement.

6. Summary

To sum up, the publications by the Nagani included books on anti-colonialism, nationalism and socialism. In the first and second categories, there were biographies of leaders of nationalist movements, and historical events of the nationalist movements of respective countries. The biography of the Burmese patriot, Saya Lun helped revive patriotism in Burma. The books on the Irish revolution in particular reinforced the Burmese national spirit. It was a time when workers, peasants and students were most active in politics. Various classes of the Burmese society were making their demands known to the coalition government. The British government, on its part, was trying to suppress the rising tide of national spirit in Burma. Leaders of the Burmese patriots were put under arrest, and suppression by force was employed resulting in the death of student leader Maung Aung Kyaw (Bo Aung Kyaw) in

Rangoon, and 17 martyrs who fell in Mandalay. Thus, at a time of mourning for the Burmese nationalist movement in which peoples from various social classes were taking part, the Nagani Book Society (NBS) worked for its nationalist movement revival by refuelling it with literature on the Irish independence movement. Ireland and Burma were similar in becoming British colonies. But Ireland gained independence in the First World War. The NBS, in publishing on independence movements, revealed the unjust exploitations of the colonialists and at the same time incited the revolutionary spirit among the suppressed people. Thus the literature on the Irish revolution such as "*Michael Collins and I*", "*De Valera*" and the "*Irish Martyrs*" published by the Nagani, wielded much influence on the Burmese people. Up to this day, these books are still effective in stimulating national spirit. Similarly, literature on the history of the Indian independence movement, and that of China had also promoted national spirits in Burma.

While the Nagani stimulated for national independence on one side, it also gave guidelines of running the country once it had gained independence. The Nagani firmly believed that only socialism could wipe out the poverty, unemployment and epidemics that had plagued the proletariat. Socialism alone could make decent human beings out of the masses. In accordance with that belief, the socialist propaganda literature for future independent Burma was prepared and produced by the NBS. It included books on successful countries adopting socialism. Therefore, in 1938-39, leftist doctrine had disseminated into the Burmese people, and the Do Bama Asiayone (We Burmese Organization) exploited the General Strike of the year 1300 (Burmese Era) as a pilot project for implementing socialism. Thus, the Nagani's attempts to propagate the socialist doctrine had considerable success.

The spread of Nagani literature coincided with World War II. The Nagani brought out war time independence movements of other countries for the purpose of giving guidelines for the Burmese activists to work for independence, should war break out. In particular, the attempts by Egypt and Abyssinia for independence during World War I were provided as hints for the Burmese. Anyhow, the Nagani was very much concerned with the Burmese getting assistance from fascist nations in their movement for independence. So, anti-fascist revolutionary literature was produced to dissuade the public from pro-fascist sentiments.

In this way, Nagani Book Club produced a lot of books for anti-colonialism and socialism through literary writings. It also issued books on international revolutions in order for the people to emulate them. As the unity was important in a country struggling under colonialism, books on national unity were also published. Books on Socialism and anti-fascism were also issued. The Nagani promulgated the right of getting rid of colonialism. It was the literary touch of the period. Due to it, good patriotic leaders came out. Even the founders of the Nagani became leaders when Burma regained its independence. For these reasons, Nagani played such a significant role. It is found that the work of Nagani was successful. In particular, it initiated socialism which later became popular in Burma. The Nagani was called the Book Club that would save Burma. As expected, the Nagani could show its process. Thus, the Nagani was a political book club which could achieve the aim of progress and development in the Burmese nationalist doctrine with modern political ideologies. In presenting the history of the Burmese nationalist movement, the Nagani's literary role could not be left out since it is the book club that contributed much to the Burmese national independence movement under the colonialist rule.

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IV. Tin Hlaing: TRANSLATION OF POLITICAL TERMS AND CONCEPTS INTO BURMESE¹ WITH REFERENCE TO NAGANI PUBLICATIONS

Initial Conditions

The life span of the Nagani Book Club, dedicated to promoting leftist political literature, following the example of Victor Gollancz's book club in London, from 1937 to 1941, a short period of four years, was an intensive period of introducing modern political terms and concepts in Burma.

In the time of Burmese kings, the country had been an absolute monarchy. "The people had no role in politics; it was accepted to be the exclusive business of the king and royal family. --- They had no right to express their opinions regarding the making of laws, matters of revenue and finance, and the administration. --- The people had no need to think about politics because it was none of their business", writes U Than Tun (Toe-tet-yay), one of the Nagani authors. The famous treatise, *Raja Dhamma Sengaha Kyan* by U Phoe Hlaing, the famous scholar-minister, written in 1878, dedicated to be a political text book for the new King Theebaw, contains only very few political terms and concepts that are useful today. In the early years of British rule there was not much need for political terms and concepts, because just as in the former days there was no politics. What were needed were new designations for government officers and official jargon in law and administration. While many were just adopted by transliteration, others found suitable transitions. The word 'inspector' for example was never translated until after the war; it became '*in-sa-peit-taw gyi*' (gyi for great). A remarkable feature was the survival and extensive use of the ancient suffix '*min*' (the king or officer of some rank and bearing high authority). The governor was *bayingan min* (subordinate-king); a divisional commissioner was *taing min gyi* (great ruler of division) etc. We find *min* still indispensable in Nagani books.

Half a century of British rule did not improve the situation much. In the years after annexation, known as 'the pacification period', an absolute dictatorship ruled the country. Then, a Lieutenant-Governor, representing the British Government in London, but subordinate to the Governor General in India,

¹ Burma is used for the benefit of those who are not accustomed to using the official name Myanmar.

administered Burma. For all practical purposes he was the 'King of Burma', although he had bosses in India and England. An unelected legislative council of nine members was appointed in 1917, but mainly laws made in India were applied in Burma. Following reforms in 1918, the legislative council was enlarged, but popular representation remained unallowed. In 1919 India was given the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms, but Burma was excluded from it. Burma had to send a delegation to London to plead for improved government. Four years later, a form of government known as 'dyarchy' was instituted. Burma became a full Governor's province. The system allowed Burmese nationals a small share in the government, including a legislative assembly constituted mostly of elected representatives and allocated seats, and a few Burmese Ministers to handle 'transferred subjects' - local government, education, health, agriculture, public works, excise and forests. But the crucial functions of government, law and order, finance and revenue, foreign relations etc remained 'reserved subjects' i.e. reserved for the discretion of the Governor. Two members of the Governor's Council, who sat in the legislature, but not responsible to it, were delegated authority to take charge of the reserved subjects. Despite the elected component in the legislature and Burmese Ministers, the government remained autocratic, except for the fact that the 'autocrat' reported to, and took instructions from a democratically elected government elsewhere, in London.

The Government of Burma Act, 1935 made in England, provided a constitution to establish a bi-cameral legislature of a House of Representatives (a Westminster like parliament), and a Senate. Of the 132 seats in the House of Representatives, only 92 were members elected by Burmans, the rest being taken up by the Karens, the Indians, the Anglo-Burmans, and the Europeans. Fifty percent of the Senate's 36 seats were filled by the Governor's nominees, and the rest by the nominees of the House of Representatives. But the real power of the government still remained with the Governor and senior British officers who took instructions from Westminster.

Growth of Nationalism and Political Awakening

For years Burmese nationalism lay smouldering after the flame was extinguished by ruthless pacification. Re-emergence of nationalism came at the turn of the century with the organization of Young Men's Buddhist Associations (YMBA) led by young educated Burmans. In 1920, it became the

nucleus of the General Council Burmese Associations (GCBA), the national political vanguard. The year 1920 also marks a nationalist epoch, the Rangoon University Student's Strike, which led to the establishment of a National University, which didn't last long, and National Schools across the country. These schools produced educated young men who founded the *Dobama Asi-ah-yone* (We Burmans (Bama) Organization).

Yet another students' strike in Rangoon University in 1936 enhanced the flame of nationalism. The students prompted the people to organize and in addition to nationalism, it generated political awareness.

Political Terms and Concepts in Nagani Books

Reviving Old Terms

The terms for political institutions that we encounter in Nagani books happen to be old terms revived or modified.

Hluttaw

Originally, the *hluttaw* was the King's Council in the days of monarchy. Its meetings were chaired by the King, or in his absence by the Crown Prince, and its members, few in number, were appointed by royal decree. This term was revived and applied to the Legislature and later to the House of Representatives or the Senate. Generally accepted by the media and the public, *hluttaw* retained its use in Nagani books.

In many cases, *hluttaw* had been used synonymously with parliament, although the corrupted '*par-le-man*' was also used; to avoid ambiguity the combination *par-le-man hluttaw* is also used (for example Hla Pe), *Senate khaw ah-htet Hluttaw* (upper house of parliament also known as Senate) (Thein Pe). Generally, there is consensus among all Nagani writers in using *hluttaw*, either singly or in combination with the English word. It is also found that Nagani writers use *hluttaw* and parliament interchangeably even when referring to similar institutions in other countries such as the Congress of United States and the German Reichstag (Shwe U Daung). But Shwe U Daung, in his biography of

Abraham Lincoln, seems to be muddled in using *hluttaw* or *par-le-man*; we find him unable to distinguish the American institutions, Congress, Senate, House of Representatives, State Legislative Assembly.

In the royal tradition, a member of *Hluttaw* was an *ah-mat*, highest rank court official. *Hluttaw ah-mat* or simply *ah-mat* is generally retained in Nagani writings, with alternatives *par-le-man ah-mat* or *min-taing-pin ah-mat* (king's consultant *hluttaw* member) (Thakin Nu, Ba Khine, Thein Pe, Than Tun etc.) In addition, Shwe U Daung also uses a version, an unofficial one, *par-le-man luyi* (parliament big man), as also by U Than Tun. It seems appropriate especially in verbal usage as *luyi* refers to an adult, a leading man or a man of high standing.

It should be remarked that the original *hluttaw* of Burmese kings carried the mark of sovereignty, whereas the *hluttaw* under the British regime was far from it. Indeed Nagani, along with the media of course, had done a good job of preserving *hluttaw* as the nation's highest elected assembly. It stays on.

Thamada

Thamada is an ancient word (from *Maha Thamada*, of Indian origin, for the very first elected leader of men in this world). Throughout the period of monarchy, *thamada* had no practical use; it was commonly encountered in Burmese Buddhist literature. The famous Kin-wun Mingyi U Kaung, the first Burmese Ambassador to Europe, in his diary of diplomatic travels written in 1873, refers to the French President as *thamada-min*.

With its intrinsic meaning, *thamada* is the equivalent of 'president'. In Nagani books we find *thamada* used to mean a foreign president. Shwe U Daung uses it for President Lincoln (he often uses *Thamada-min* (President-king), and so does Maung/Thakin Soe; Thakin Nu uses *thamada-naing-ngan* (nation under a president) for a republic.

Thamada has been adopted in independent Burma to mean the Head of State. (Interestingly, during the period of Japanese occupation, Dr Ba Maw, the Head of State, adopted the designation *Adipadi* (The Chief). There may be reason why he did not use *thamada*. One plausible reason we may infer from

reading Nagani books is that *thamada* had been used, perhaps misused, to mean something other than the Head of State.

Having lost their king, the Burmese people were in need of a Head of State they could call their own. They met this requirement by conferring the title '*Thamada*' to their most esteemed political leader. About the election of a *Thamada*, U Ba Khine writes, "U Chit Hlaing as President of GCBA was so popular with the *wunthanu* (patriotic citizen) followers and so highly regarded that the conferences at Thayet and Paung-de accorded him the title '*Thamada*'. Provided with all royal paraphernalia, he was consecrated '*Thamada*' in the manner of a royal coronation. U Chit Hlaing then was 'the uncrowned King of Burma'. Following the split in the GCBA, U Chit Hlaing was replaced as *Thamada* President by U Su. A proliferation of *Thamadas* took place, about which U Than Tun (Toe Tet Yay) makes a serious remark: "The struggle for the leadership of GCBA, with its accompanying title *Thamada*, became so vigorous that very soon a number of *Thamadas* appeared, so many as to not only weaken the Burmese people, but also to disgrace them".

This might possibly be the reason why Dr Ba Maw preferred *Adipadi* to *Thamada* when he became Head of State. The disastrous use of the term *Thamada* has been documented by U Than Tun (Toe Tet Yay) and U Ba Khine in their Nagani books. However, the revival of the term was not altogether wrong, for the previous two constitutions of independent Burma recognized *Naing-ngan-daw Thamada* as the designation of the Head of State.

Wungyi and wungyi-choke

Wun-gyi (Minister-big, or Senior Minister) and *wun* (Minister) were senior officers of the royal court, appropriately to be interpreted as Members of Cabinet. After a dormant period of about two decades, it was reintroduced under the foreign government, in modified form, *Wun-gyi-choke* (Minister-big-chief) rather than *wungyi*. Ministers in the diarchy government were *wun-gyi-chokes*, while the Prime Minister was *nan-yin-wun* (palace-at the foot of-minister), meaning the minister at the palace. These terms, which preceded their works, are accepted by all Nagani writers.

But, because of an absence of a governing palace, *nan-yin-wun* is not appropriate for many countries.

Since independence, it has been changed: a Prime Minister or Head of Government is termed *wun-gyi-choke*. With *choke* applied to the rank of Prime Minister, the former usage *wun-gyi-choke* for a Minister has to be modified accordingly - i.e. delete *choke*. The present usage is *wun-gyi* for Minister.

Parties and Organizations

The Burmese words *athin*, *ah-pwhe*, *athin ah-pwhe*, *asi-ahyone*, *ah-pwhe choke*, *gaing* (from *Pali*), *tha-magga* (also from *Pali*), which preceded the Nagani books, all mean more or less the same thing, an association or organization. *Gaing* meaning a religious sect and *tha-magga*, meaning union, have been used by the Order of Buddhist Sangha (monks) from earliest days. We find in the Nagani writings that all these terms have been applied to political parties or groups, often indiscriminately.

General Council of Burmese Associations, the first political association, organized in 1920, was known in Burmese as *Myanmar Athin Choke Gyi*, although it was more popularly called by its acronym GCBA. The next major political force came by the name *Dobama Asi-ahyone* formed by Thakin Ba Thaug, regarded as a master of translation and political writing. In pre-Nagani days there was a profusion of *athins* (associations), such as *Kommaryee athin* (Women's Union) (U Ba Khine), and *Labour khaw aloke-thamar athin* (in Lenin whose author is anonymous.)

Often, however, there is not much distinction in the use of these words. But two terms stand out; the Pali derivative *gaing* and the English word *party*. Almost all authors accepted these words and put them to liberal use. Thakin Aung San's short paper in 'Burma and World War' contains the word *gaing* repeatedly and in the same booklet Dr Ba Maw mentions the *Bama Htwet Yat Gaing* (Burma Revolutionary Party). Shwe Uu Daung for example uses *Nazi Gaing* and *communist gaing-thar* (communist party member); Thakin Nu uses *Labour khaw Ah-loke Thamar Gaing Myar*, (*khaw* = known as), as well as *Ah-loke Thamar Gaing Myar*, while in 'Lenin' we find *Labour khaw Ah-loke Thamar Athin*. They have been using *gaing* to mean union, or party. And Trades Unions are also called *gaing myar* as well as *athin myar* (*myar* meaning plural) by most writers, but they all agree on *Kyaungtha Tha-magga* (Student's Union). However, the Burmese Women's Unions are *Myanmar Konmar-yee Athins* (*Kommar-yee*, from Pali meaning woman)

It is noteworthy that the word *party* is making its debut. Shwe Uu Daung uses *party* in his book 'What Hitler Has Done'. Nu in his 'Way out of Poverty', adopts the transliterated party names *Labour Party*, *Socialist Revolutionary Party* as well as *Socialist Revolutionary Ah-see Ah-yone*, indicating that (*party* equals *Ah-see Ah-yone*). *Party* as a political term has taken root in Nagani books; and we find it extensively used today. It seems the Nagani authors are pioneers who introduce the term *party* in Burmese.

Originally, the word *gaing* (from Pali, *gana*) seems to have been applied only to the sects of Buddhist Sangha. In applying it to political associations, *gaing* is really appropriate to mean a group centred about a person or idea, or a faction, or a party within a party, rather than the party itself. Recently we came across *Lay yauk gaing* used in the media for the Chinese 'Gang of Four'. We note that, at the present time, there is only slight use of *gaing* as a political vocabulary, at least for the time being. *Asi-ah-yone* has survived the war, and has been used by the Burmese Socialist Programme Party (1962-88) for its subordinate organizations. *Athin* and *ah-phwe* are also used today, but apparently for smaller or non-political groups.

Choke conveys the meaning of consolidation or uniting. When a party has smaller parties in it, then *choke* is the appropriate term. *Ah-phwe choke* (a league) is today a popular political term.

Democracy and People Power, Communism and Socialism

The greatest challenge to the Nagani authors seems to have been the translation of new political concepts, socialism, communism and democracy. Thakin Than Tun discusses comprehensively about the problem of translating 'socialism' and 'communism' in his introduction to Maung Soe's (Thakin Soe's) Nagani book 'Socialism'. They were both founding members of Burma Communist Party (BCP).- Thakin Than Tun as Party Chairman (BCP) later led for many years the party in revolt against the government of independent Burma. Thakin Soe, after splitting from BCP, organized the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) and also led it to rebel against the government.

Thakin Than Tun takes note of the Burmese terms *Sin-ye-tha wada* (*Dr Ba Maw's party*), *Aloke thamar*

wada (*U Ba Hlaing's party*). He thinks *sin-ye-tha wada* (poor folk's policy) a suitable Burmese equivalent of socialism, but he also believes the party and people using it are doing exactly the opposite of socialist ideals; so he rules it out. He also argues that *aloke thamar wada* is limited in meaning, implying something like trades unionism only.

He urges others to find the word. For the time being, he thinks *socialism* should be adopted as the title of Thakin Soe's book, which he edits and writes the preface. In the same book, Thakin Soe repeatedly uses *bon wada* (the policy of common ownership), as well as *sin-yetha wada* interchangeably with socialism. Often, Soe tries to make himself clear by writing *bon wada (socialist wada)*. Many people agree that Thakin Soe contributed a lot to introduce socialist and communist terminologies. But, as remarked by Thakin Than Tun, Soe borrowed too much from Buddhist Pali literature.

Also, for many writers, the distinction between socialism and communism seems to be unclear; both have been referred to as *bon wada* or *sin-ye-tha wada* (Hla Pe, Thakin Bo and others). But Thakin Soe takes care to distinguish them later in his book; he uses *communit khit (wa) bon wada ah-yint sar khit* (age of communism (or) age of mature socialism), and to make the difference clearer he refers to socialism as *bon khitpa-ta-ma sint* (first stage of communism). Thereafter Soe falls back again and again on the word *communism*.

Thein Pe, who later rose to literary fame, and also became the General-Secretary of Burma Communist Party, thinks there is not much distinction between socialism and communism. He emphasizes this point in a foot-note in page 14 of his book 'People Power'.

Finally, politicians accepted their inability to translate socialism and communism and they both have been adopted.

The period of Nagani's existence almost exactly coincided with the first elected legislature under the Government of Burma Act, 1935. It was an introduction of a small dose of democracy. Nagani writers, interested in democracy, are promoting it. But no author has found the Burmese equivalent for it. U Ba Khine's *democracy khaw ahmyar sanit ahya oke choke yay* (System of government by majority rule

known as democracy) is an example of the difficulty in getting the Burmese word for democracy. This has led most of the writers to adopt *democracy* (Shwe Uu Daung, Nu, Soe, Ba Khine, and others). Slight variation is noticed in the Burmese pronunciation and spelling: *democracy* is used by everybody while Shwe Uu Daung and Nu use *democracy* as well as the alternatively spelt *demawcracy*.

Democracy, socialism and communism have become established in the Burmese political lexicon, but remarkably *democracy* is staying on, perhaps growing and getting stronger, while *socialism and communism* are declining, probably tending toward extinction.

Related to *democracy* is the interesting term, *Pyithu Ahnar*, which seems to have come ahead of time in Burma. It translates identically as People Power'. *Pyithu Ahnar* is the title of the book by Thein Pe which is a translation of Dr Sun Yet Sen's work. Quite remarkably, he uses *democracy khaw pyithu ahnar* (*pyithu ahnar* known as democracy). Thakin Nu is another writer who uses *pyithu ahnar* in his work 'Way out of Poverty'. We do not notice it in the works of other Nagani authors, nor does it seem to occur in other contemporary writings. After the war, the Burmese communists are known to have used *Pyithu Ahnar* during their failed revolution. One could wonder if *pyithu ahnar* (People Power) had come too early for acceptance. It has remained unused since the communist rebellion broke down. Even after 'people power' has become internationally popular in the media after the 1980's we find *Pyithu Ahnar* has not found its resurgence.

Revolution

The word revolution has been variously translated as *ayay-daw-bon*, *tha-bon gyi* or *taw hian mhu gyi* (Nu, Soe, Thein Pe, Thakin Bo, Hla Pc and others). *Ayay-dawbon* has a long history, being used for the great struggles of Burmese Kings. In the introduction in his book, Naing Pan Hla mentions that Banya Dala, a Mon minister who served Bayinnaung, first translated 'Yazadarit Ayay-daw-bon Kyan' (The Struggles of Rajadhiraj) from Mon to Burmese in 915 Burmese Era (1553 AD). There seems to be unanimity among all writers, as well as politicians, oft he time on *ayay-daw-bon* as is shown by *Ta-taung-thonyapyi ayay-daw-bon* (the revolution of the year 1300 Burmese era). All Nagani writers use *ayay-daw-bon*, but they also choose to experiment with alternatives. Actually, *tha-bon* carries the

meaning of a rebel or revolt and it may or may not have political significance; but the Nagani writers do use it to refer to political revolutions in France and Russia. U Ba Khine uses *revolution khaw ah-myan pyaung-le-chin* (fast change known as revolution). Obviously, the men have been trying to find the alternative word for revolution.

In spite of the historical origin of *Ayay-daw-bon* and its intrinsic meaning as a courageous struggle for state power, against strong adversaries, we find the word hardly used after the war.

It should be highlighted that Thakin Soe uses *khit pyaung taw-hlan yay* (time changing revolution). We find it used as chapter title four times (chapters 5,6,7 and 10) in his book 'Socialism'. It carries revolution's meaning as an act of changing the conditions prevailing at the time, *Taw-hlan-yay* is a great innovation. *Khit pyaung taw-hlan-yay* and *taw-hlan-yay* have been extensively used since independence, especially during the period of 'Burmese Way to Socialism' from 1962 to 1988. We also note that other Nagani writers, except Thakin Soe, have hardly used it. Probably it is Thakin Soe who hit on the word *taw-hlan-yay*. Although we are not yet certain about who originally used the word *taw-hlan-yay*, we have reason to think Thakin Soe deserves some credit for it, for he was also one of the foremost leaders in organizing the *Fascist taw-hlan-yay*, the war-time Burmese revolt against the Japanese.

There is one observation to add: U Ba Khine's use of *thabon sar-yay sa-yar gyi* (rebel writer great) to describe a revolutionary writer, which also indicates that *tawhlan-yay* has not yet been commonly used by Nagani authors.

Dana-shin, sin ye-tha

In the course of promoting socialism and communism, the contrast, capitalism, has to be explained and translated. The popularly accepted translation is *dana-shin* (wealth owner or rich person). But capital, as an investment, is closer to *ah-yin*, and the owner of capital *ah-yin shin*. Although at the time of Nagani, all writers, including the non-politician Shwe Uu Daung adopt *danashin*, it has failed to survive. *Ah-yin shin* (capital-owner) and *ah-yin shin sa-nit* (capital-owner system), which are not found in Nagani works, have taken over. We are not aware when the replacement has taken place. Thakin Nu

explains that a *danashin* is a bourgeoisie and *sin-ye-thar aloke thamar* (poor man worker) is proletariat.

Constitution

Burma never had a constitution before, and the term did not exist in the language. The following examples indicate the inadequacy in the works of Nagani authors. Thakin Bo, in the preface in his book *Karl Marxism*, refers to the clauses in the Soviet Russian constitution, calling it *Naing-ngan Ooke Choke Yay Act Uu-pa-day* (Act Law for administering the country). In *Thein Pe's People Power*, we find *American doe ei Oke-choke- yay see-myin* (Americans' Administration Rules) for the US constitution. U Tun Pe uses *Oke-choke-yay Uu-pa-day* for the constitution of the Chinese Republic. Shwe Uu Daung has yet another usage - *American pylone saingyar (constitution) see-kan Uu-pa-day gyi* (the great-rule-law of the whole of America). We note the 'constitution' in the brackets, with which the author makes clear what he is saying. Thakin Nu solves the problem another way: he writes '*the Stalin constitution*', whereas U Tun Pe does the task using *Oke-choke-yay Uu-paday* for the Soviet constitution of 1918.

All these only reflect how alien the word constitution is for the Burmese people. In these translations, the basic nature of constitutional law is absent. Since independence, the constitution of 1947 and succeeding one has been called appropriately *Pwe-see Oke-choke-pon Achay-gan Uu-paday* (construct-unite administrative fundamental law). How and when the word appeared is an interesting piece of information.

Political Meetings

Many political meetings had been held before and during the period of Nagani's existence and they used to be reported in newspapers. A meeting, big or small, is in Burmese *ah-see-ahway*. However, meetings at national level, unusual in pre-colonial days, used to be *conference ah-see-way gyi* (conference meeting big), or *congress ah-see-way gyi*, or simply *conference*, and we find them used in Nagani books. For unknown reasons, we do not encounter the Burmese word *nyl-lar-gan* which originally refers to a meeting under the King's patronage. After the independence we find *nyi-lar-gan* extensively used for party national conferences, or state sponsored meetings.

University

Because of the importance of university students in national politics during the independence struggle, we have occasion here to discuss how the term has been translated in Nagani books. Rangoon University was only seventeen years old when the Nagani was launched, so people were not familiar with the Burmese word for it.

Shwe Uu Daung goes with the word *universily kyaung gyi* (university big school), and *Berlin universitas*. U Ba Khine is found to have used *university* and *takkatho* in one sentence, both to mean the same thing. *Takkatho* (from ancient Taxila) has been well known from Buddhist and Indian literature. In Nagani books we find all writers not yet ready to stick to *takkatho*; they employ *university kyaung* or *universily kyaung-taik* (kyaung school or monastery, taik = brick building). But *takkatho* has made headway, and today it is the accepted word.

Other un-translated Terms

There are many terms which remain to be translated. Being not easy at the time, Nagani authors have avoided translating them, probably hoping them to be adopted. Some examples are: *conservative*, *liberal*, *dominion*, *aristocrat*, *moderate* (Ba Khine and Hla Pe); *theocracy*, *autocracy*, *cabinet* (Thein Pe), *bourgeoisie*, *proletariat* (Nu) etc.

Conclusion

Nagani writers formed an important intellectual group in colonial Burma. Shwe Uu Daung and Thakin Ba Thaung were already established writers of renown as translators. Thakins Nu, Than Tun, Soe, Aung San, Thein Pe, Hla Pe all rose to national prominence as political leaders. Their impact is great. The political terms and concepts they have promoted through their writings in Nagani books have been useful in educating the people. Some words they have used do not last, but many do survive.

However, we do not mean to give them total credit for the creation of these words. But they certainly have done a good job of promoting or introducing new concepts and terminologies.

Acknowledgement

The author wishes to thank Hans-Bernd Zöllner for his interest and encouragement in this work. The assistance of Ma Ah Win and her enterprise *Nandawun* is recognized for making available copies of Nagani books.

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V. Khin Maung Nyo: EMERGENCE OF SOCIALIST ECONOMIC LITERATURE IN MYANMAR/BURMA. SOME PROVISIONAL REMARKS.

Introduction

As an observer who experienced the last days of Socialism in Myanmar I wonder how our forefathers treated, introduced and imported Socialism to Myanmar. Although I am a beginner in the field of history in which I find more and more questions instead of answers, I will try to find solution to my problem even though it may not be a problem to learned scholars.

Here is a general working definition: Socialist economic literature includes Marxism, Socialism, Marxism-Leninism in their adapted and adopted versions.

Thakin leaders of the radical Burmese rationalist movement of the 1930s, the Dobama Asī-ayon, learned their Marx and Lenin, not through decades of debate but through the texts of British writers like John Strachey, a socialist, and the theoretician of the British Communist Party, R. Palme Dutt.

English-language Marxist books first became easily available to Burmese nationalists only after Dr. Thein Maung returned in 1932 from the London Burma Round Table Conference. At about the same time, U Tun Pe, a journalist, also purchased and distributed the books recommended by Pandit Nehru in his *Impressions of Soviet Russia*.

Other English language leftist books found their way into the hands of young nationalists via J.S. Furnivall's Burma Book Club.

However, Marxist writings in the Burmese language became readily available only after 1937, when the Nagani Book Club was founded by Thakin Nu and others as a publishing house and the writings of radical young writers such as Thakin Thein Pe, Thakin Soe, and Nu himself.¹

Nagani book club published 71 books on various subjects from politics, biography to sexology. Tun Aye's Burma Publishing House also published 30 books². Other publishers might have produced other

¹ Robert H. Taylor (1984): *Marxism and Resistance in Wartime Burma (1942-1945)*, Athens/Ohio, Ohio University Press: p. 70

² See vol. 1 of this series, section 2 and 9.

books on Socialism.

Attractiveness of Socialism

When Marxism first entered Burma through India and the United Kingdom, it was vaguely understood but widely acclaimed by the younger nationalists as a panacea for all ills. At that moment, the Thakins seemed to be searching for an idea which would encourage and motivate their movement.

The Thakins used the terminology of evolutionary and revolutionary Marxism although, as U Nu pointed out two decades later, the young people who were in the movement had very little knowledge of Marxism and religion.

Even U Nu was first appreciated for his good reasoning and writing concerning with Marxism and later condemned for his political activities by famous writer Shwe U Daung.³

During the 1930s, articles in newspapers were discussing the merits of synthesizing Marxism and Buddhism. Some writers condemned Marxism as anti-Buddhist. The attacks against communism were never successful during the last ten years of the nationalist struggle for independence when all Marxists cooperated in the fight against the Japanese and British.

The Marxists made efforts to make use of the Buddhist religion to propagate their own ideology. Communist leaders studied Buddhism in an attempt to find Buddhist terms for Marxist phrases in order to capture public opinion. They achieved a remarkable degree of success, and some terms which they took from Pali were in use for a long period of time.⁴

Controversial Issues

In his introduction to the translation of John Strachey's work *Theory and Practice of Socialism* the translator U Ba Tin expressed the objectives of translations.⁵ As socialism was so popular at that time, different interpretations emerged. Some of the political teachers (neither politicians nor political scientists) claimed that they were not followers of capitalism and socialism. As there was no alternative, they had to favour one against the other. Translated work was intended to

³ Shwe U Daung (2006): *Autobiography*. Seitkuchocho Publishing, Yangon.

⁴ Fred R. von der Mehden (1963) *Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*. Madison, The University of Wisconsin Press.

⁵ U Ba Tin (1939): *Theory and Practice of Socialism Part I. The Economic System*. (translation) Yangon, Nagani Book Club.

those who should take the right path.

As politicians have to take the initiative for the well-being of the people, some argued that one should not differentiate between the “-isms” of the poor and the rich. The translation was also intended for those people.

At the election, political parties would compete with each other. Although these parties had different titles, people should be aware whether they were in the same group or not.

Although there was no socialist doctrine, some preached their “-isms” and pseudo-socialism as socialism. To take caution against those, the translator tried to introduce the theory and practice of socialism written by John Strachey.

There were different interpretations of socialism. The translator categorized them into two, namely scientific socialism and non-scientific socialism. Here, he used two terms in Pali-language which were familiar with Buddhist Burmans.

According to the translator, Marxism was scientific socialism. Furthermore he equated capitalism and parliamentary democracy and claimed that by establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat, Burma could become a socialist country.

Some observers remarked that some sort of socialism was ‘mild’ and some was ‘hard’ and extreme. According to U Ba Tin, to become objectively knowledgeable, one should analyze on the basis of ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. It implied that his work of translation would help to differentiate ‘right’ socialism against a ‘wrong’ type of socialism.

That introduction already proves that at the time of publication complexities occurred around Socialism and Marxism.

Experiences of the Thakins

The left-wing Thakins accepted the validity of Marxist revolutionary and international political analysis not merely because of its powerful rhetoric and apparent logic. The Thakins’ experiences as leaders and observers of the peasant, student, and worker strikes and demonstrations of 1938-39, which they called the 1300 (Burmese Era) Revolution, underscored the strengths of Marxist analysis. Their experiences

also pointed out the limitation of mass action alone to overthrow the colonial order.⁶

One of the consequences of Japanese rule was the growth and spread of communism. Shortly before the war some Burmans had begun to study communism as a means of liberation from capitalist imperialism, and a few called themselves communists. When the war reached Burma, they took the side of Russia and headed the resistance against the Japanese. Their influence increased as the resistance movement gathered strength.⁷

Anti-Imperialism and Anti-Capitalism

Most newly independent countries are inclined toward some form of socialism and that this represents a radical departure from their old practices both before and in the time of colonialism. They needed the state's direction of the economy to force the pace of development. The new leaders distrusted private business because they associated capitalism with the period of colonial exploitation.⁸

The Thakins were attracted to and influenced by Marxism chiefly because it provided an ideological weapon in the struggle against British imperialism. Here was an ideology which demonstrated scientifically that imperialism was the last stage of capitalism about to disintegrate under the pressure of inner contradictions. In the fight against western imperialism, the victory of Burmese nationalism was thus inevitable and imminent.⁹

In Burma, where by the First World War the best part of Lower Burma was in the hands of absentee alien landlords, lawlessness and violence were endemic. Significantly, in South-East Asia indications of a more co-ordinated protest first appeared in Java and the Philippines, the areas that were enduring the most disturbing western presence. The dissatisfaction was not at first directed exclusively against the colonial powers. The peasants' concern was land, and their anger was directed against the immediate agents of their disinheritance, the Indian and Chinese money-lenders and middlemen as well as the indigenous landlords (the Saya San rebellion in Burma in 1930 affords an example). But here, the germ of nationalism is to be sought. Awareness of their social dislocation gave the peoples of South

⁶ John S. Furnivall: *An Introduction to Political Economy of Burma*. p 3.

⁷ Furnivall, p ?

⁸ Lucian W. Pye (1963): *Politics, Personality, and Nation Building :Burma's search for identity*. New Haven, Yale University Press: p. 63.

⁹ Donald E. Smith (1965): *Religion and Politics in Burma*. Princeton University Press: p. 119.

East Asia a consciousness of common destiny.

Nationalism and Buddhism

Buddhism was more immediately available as a rallying factor than imported ideas of nationhood and anti-imperialism. For various reasons, however, religious teachers failed to consolidate their hold, and the organizations they had helped to bring into existence, for example the Young Men's Buddhist Association in Burma, fell most often into the hands of leaders who, though nominally of the appropriate religion, were far more secular in their political outlook and aims. In the aftermath of the First World War, nationalism and anti-colonialism developed rapidly.

Two things strengthened the association of nationalist and socialist thinking: the Russian revolution and the impact of the interwar depression. The obvious direct attraction of the first was quickly followed up by the forging of links between the nationalist movements and Russian leaders. The depression had catastrophic consequences for South East Asia, since the bottom completely fell out of the market for most of the commodities produced in the region

Japanese Period

The Japanese period was important for a variety of reasons. First of all, the speed and decisiveness with which the Japanese forces defeated and humiliated the European armies made an indelible impression on the peoples of the region. The myth of white supremacy had been dealt a deathly blow, and it would never again be possible for a handful of white troops and administrators to hold down millions of Asian subjects. Second, the Japanese presence gave the nationalists training and experience in the use of arms.

A third important result of Japanese occupation was the precipitous promotion of layers of South East Asian administrators, who had, under the colonialists, been restricted to the lower echelons of the service. This was an important training for the tasks that lay ahead, because all the European powers had been guilty to some extent of culpable neglect of education and of discrimination in employment.

A fourth factor was the encouragement, direct and indirect again, given to the development of local nationalism. Of course it was the Japanese intention to pass themselves off as "liberators", but their

concessions were extremely limited until defeat began to loom. In Burma and the Philippines, where ready collaborators were found among the politicians, "independence" was declared by the Japanese in 1943. In Indonesia, where the nationalist leadership was divided between those who took to the hills and those who tried to wrest every advantage from co-operation with the invaders, the Japanese allowed the collaborators, who included Sukarno and Hatta, to propagate the national language (Bahasa Indonesia) and to travel widely throughout the country stirring up anti-colonialist feeling. Burma had had a uniquely unfortunate colonial experience in terms of the demoralization and disintegration of traditional social structure and way of life, and it was natural that all sections of society should be anti-western, to the extent of eventually virtually closing the Burmese borders to visitors from the West.

The distinction between what has come to be known as the "neo-colonial" and the "non-aligned" powers in South East Asia is a significant one, and must be seen in connection with class relationships in the respective societies, in particular the relationship between the traditional ruling classes and landlords on the one hand, and the western-educated middle classes on the other. In pre-war Burma, big landlordism itself was largely a product of colonial rule, and aliens were the main beneficiaries. In addition, the educated Burmese was subject to restrictions concerning the kind of employment he might have expected, since Indians filled large sections of such employments in the public services and the higher professions. Nor was it easy for the local capitalists to take advantage of what business opportunities were available, since Indian capital had a stranglehold on petty trading and small business. It can be appreciated, then, that the educated middle classes in Burma and Indonesia naturally wanted not just a political revolution leading to independence, but also a social revolution to blow the resented groups - alien traders, privileged landowners - out of their entrenched positions which were identified with colonial power.

Not surprisingly, all the nationalist movements in Burma and Indonesia were "socialist", at least in vocabulary. Colonialism was identified with the Western capitalist countries; to be anti-colonialist was to be anti-capitalist. For Indonesians the adjective "capitalistic" had the indelible connotation of "selfish, predatory, forsaking of human and social interests in the search for profits, and thus inconsistent with the spirit of democracy", and the same could be said for the Burmese. Even those nationalist leaders with rather moderate views had learned to apply Marxist vocabulary, as the most apt and appropriate available, to the situation in which they found themselves as colonial subjects. Moreover, unlike their counterparts in Malaya and the Philippines, the educated middle classes of

Burma and Indonesia could, in a dichotomous class situation see themselves as on the side of the workers and the peasants as not only against the colonialists and their alien Asian agents but also as against those indigenous elements of society (big landowners, top feudal administrators) committed to, and supported by, the colonialists. They could therefore decidedly formulate revolutionary aims. Moreover, all the nationalist groups paid at least lip service to the need for planning of some kind after the attainment of independence in order to promote development; "planning" was held up against the social chaos created by unregulated capitalism-colonialism. Socialism, then, was a broadly accepted, if rather undefined aim of most of the nationalist groups.¹⁰

The traditional Myanmar concept was in favor of government intervention in the economy and other affairs. The western concept of laissez-faire seemed to have no appeal to the traditional Myanmar thinking. Myanmar perceives the government intervention as necessary to check and remedy the undesirable consequences caused by greed and selfishness. Because of the apparent weaknesses of people, the intervention of the government is required to protect the weak from the wicked.¹¹

Individual Responsibility

The teachings of Buddha as accepted in Myanmar placed full responsibility upon the individual for his future. But the idea of individual responsibility did not carry over into the political realm. Government was one of the five evils which all men must endure. Man therefore lived in a political order he could not change, and his responsibilities did not extend to politics. The idea of individual responsibilities did not transcend the religious realm and become a basis of popular government. In modern as in ancient times, authority from above was accepted by the majority of the people, and the leader who held the place or seat of government and controlled the symbols of authority had the right to rule.¹²

¹⁰ Malcolm Caldwell (1966): *Problems of Socialism in Southeast Asia*. in: Robert I. Rhodes: Imperialism and Underdevelopment. A Reader. New York, Monthly Review Press: pp. 376-403.

¹¹ Tin Soe (2005): *Some traditional Myanmar Concepts*. in: Traditions of Knowledge in Southeast Asia. Part 3, Myanmar Historical commission, Yangon: p. 132

¹² Khin Khin Ma (2005): *Sources of Myanmar political culture*. in: Selected writings of Daw Khin Khin Ma: Myanmar Historical Commission, Yangon 2005, p. 7.

Socialism - a Solution or a Problem?

In his diary, Journalkyaw U Chit Maung made some comments on Socialist literature published by Nagani Book Club.

In his opinion, learners may get confused and have difficulties to absorb the contents of the published translated books, especially those on political literature, if there is no system and sequencing. Thus he urged the Nagani group to arrange different levels of texts to serve the different needs of beginners to advanced learners. But nobody listened to him. As a result, there was just a limited number of persons who really grasped the subject. Because of the political leaders' lack of good comprehension of basic concepts and foundation in those literatures, their trial and error approach became an obstacle to new nation building.¹³

With regards to the relation between socialism and Buddhism, different interpretations and manipulations emerged. It seems to be that both “-isms” were victims of different groups at different times.

Whatever the intentions of the founders of Myanmar were, in practice, socialism did not help Myanmar to become a developed nation like her neighboring countries. Many questions remain unanswered still nowadays.

It will not do much justice and fairness if we review those works in today's context. Socialist literature became rooted in Myanmar as a result of the international and national political climate, the Myanmar cultural background and the country's value system.

¹³ Journalkyaw Ma Ma Lay Biography of Journalkyaw U Chit Maung.

VI. Bo Bo: A CONTROVERSIAL FICTION OF A CONTROVERSIAL AUTHOR, THE WAY'S OUT

Acknowledgement

Firstly, I would like to express my gratitude to our doyen writer and poet Dagon Taya and Daw Khin Kyi Kyi (Mrs. Thein Pe Myint) for sharing their precious experiences. I should not forget to mention Maung Zayar (U Than Ohn, National Library) and others who helped me so much to write this paper.



Daw Khin Kyi Kyi, Thein Pe Myint's wife (April 2006)
holding the book reviewed in Bo Bo's paper.

The title page of the book shows Dasie Myint (Htar Htar Myint) donating her diamond ring to General Aung San for the Anti Fascists Peoples' Freedom League fund at the AFPFL's conference in 1945.

Introduction

I would like to submit a paper on a political fiction by a politician-cum-writer. Although it is not as qualified as a novel, it still emphasizes the importance of having a sound political program for reconciliation in a country with political upheavals. It was published while the author was in prison and was refused to give literary award for political reasons. It shows how an ex-member of the Nagani Book Club deeply focused on Burmese political situation at a critical time after the war.

Thein Pe Myint (1914-1978)

Bio-data of an outstanding novelist, journalist and also a politician

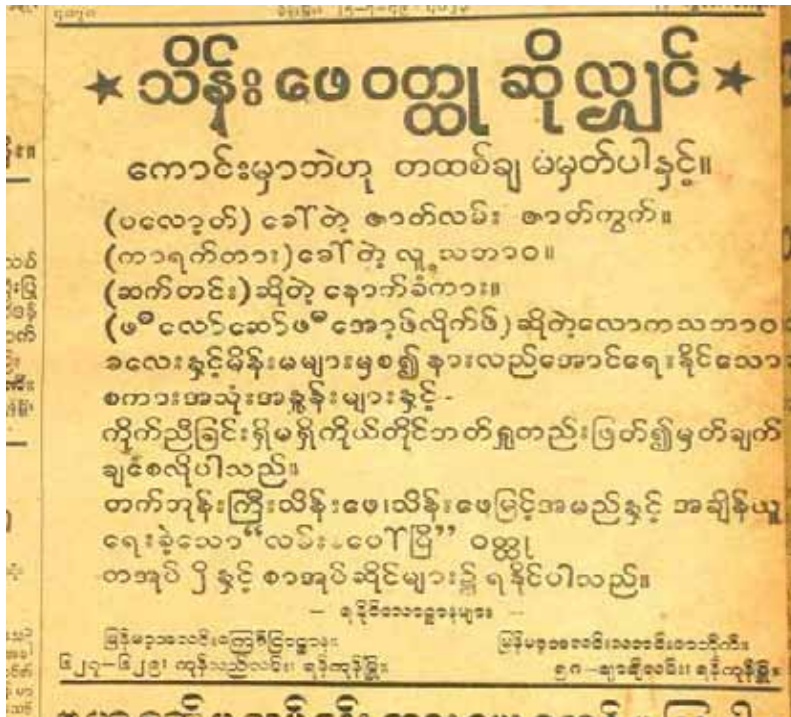
- 1936 and 1938: Took active part in student strikes.
- 1937-1939: Dominant member of Our Burman Association (Thakin Party)
- 1941-1945: Fled to India and China after Fascist invasion and served as a liaison officer of Burmese anti-fascist resistance.
- 1945-1946: Acted as General Secretary of Burma Communist Party, Associate General Secretary of Anti-fascist People Freedom League and first Communist minister in the British Empire (in General Aung San's Cabinet).
- 1947-1949: Failed to reconcile Burma Communist Party (BCP) and AFPFL, expelled from BCP. When the civil war broke out, he was detained for one year for attempting a coup as he was involved in defection of 3rd battalion.
- 1952-1962: Presidium member of National United Front (major opposition league), Member of Chamber of Deputies from Budalin (his native town and also the same constituency where his eldest son, Han Tha Myint, was elected in 1990)
- 1958-1964: Founded Bo-ta-haung daily and served as chief editor, columnist

up to 1975.

1964-1976; Member of Burmese Socialist Programme Party, vice-chairman of Advisory Committee for Revolutionary Council Government (1970), member of election commission (1974).

Distinguished Works

- Modern Monk (1936)
- U Lun, Rebel Poet (1937)
- Evil of Modern Time (1938)
- University Boycotters (1938,1939)
- The Way's Out (1949)
- Wartime Traveler (1953, 1962)
- Political Experiences in Revolutionary Time (1956)
- As The Sun Rises from The East (1958 BTS award for fiction)
- Kyaw Nyein (1961)
- In Search of Truth Among People (1964)
- Collected Short Stories (1966)
- A Silver Jubilee (1973)
- Portraits of Famous Figures (1999)



Newspaper-Advertisement

Political Background of the Book

The Fiction covered the immediate post war era from the end of the Anti-Fascist Revolution (March 1945) to the time before the assassination of General Aung San (July 1947). Although Communists and Socialists coordinated in revolution as AFPFL, unity started to crack because of factionalism and suspicion among them. They became rivals and tried to organize followers. There was also the People Volunteer Organization, the former resistance soldiers who were recruited as auxiliary forces. When General Aung San and the Governor reached an agreement to form a coalition government, BCP accused General Aung San as a traitor and that’s why the BCP was purged out of AFPFL. Actually, AFPFL preferred to gain the independence through peaceful means and BCP through revolution. But General Aung San, Nu, Kyaw Nyein (socialist), Thein Pe and Than Tun (communists) tried to seek reconciliation which was aborted after independence.

Literary Background

In spite of tight scrutiny and scarcity of printing paper under fascists' oppression, literature flourished again in the post war period. New writers from different strata blossomed like Bahmo Tin Aung, Kyi Aye, Tint Tae, Than Swe, Thawda Swe, Htin Lin, Ye Gaung, Min Shin, Mya Than Tint, Lin-yone Ni and Aung Lin, Most of them reflected their experience during World War II and preferred Socialist Realism. New magazines which are still influential up to now were published [Thwe-thauk, Taya, Shu-ma-wa and Pa-day-tha]. In 1948, as successor of Nagani, the Burma Translation Society (Sar-pay-beik-man) was established and it awarded annual literary prizes for fiction. Some famous fictions of the period are:

- (1) Zawana - Golden Rice (1945)
- (2) Maung Htin - Nga-ba (1947)
- (3) Bahmo Tin Aung – I'm just a Lonely Guy (1947)
- (4) Min Aung- Under the sky (1948 BTS award)
- (5) Dagon Taya- Myaing (1949)
- (6) Kyi Aye-Mie (1949)

Synopsis of the Book

Foreword

On the front page, Thein Pe (Modern Monk) announced his new name, Thein Pe Myint, adding Myint in remembrance of his late mother Daw Myint.

In the forward, he mentioned that at first he wrote a script named "New Life" for U Nyi Pu of A1 Film but it could not be produced. So he decided to change it into a fiction. However, he could write the fiction only when in prison. The difficulties he met in writing are

- (1) He had not written in Burmese for 8 years.
- (2) He had to describe according to the script.
- (3) He had to set a background on an unfamiliar area. (Because he was not allowed by the BCP to go back to Monywa, his native district, for the background)

In the second edition, he just changed some words in accordance with local terms and some dramatic events. He also admitted that his writing is not so superb but he wanted the readers to consider the facts mainly.

The Plot

Bo Tin Oo (a Socialist) and Ma Hta May (a communist) met and fell in love with each other during the Anti-Fascist Revolution. Farmers named Tha Gaung and Maung Kala also participated in the revolution and they became communist sympathizers. Ko Mya, secretary of Pyapon District Communist Party, was a man who devoted himself to the party. Bo Bala, a PVO, also was their comrade in revolution. But there was also a young, westernized and patriotic girl called Than Than Myint (Daisy) who became a Socialist. U Myint, her father was a witty land owner who had good connection in the government circles to make himself rich.

It was days after the purge of the BCP from the AFPFL, Ma Hta May was attached at a public meeting. So her party urged her to stop the relationship with her boyfriend. In an attempt to arrest communists, Maung Kala was shot to death and Tha Gaung was sent to prison where he met Tin Oo and Bo Bala who were also arrested for agitating to revolt. They all discussed and understood each other. Finally, they agreed to cooperate again in activities like preventing villagers from the buffalo dacoits and mass ploughing of fields, without asking permission from land owners. Tin Oo and Htar May believed there was a way's out for both leftist unity and their love affair.

Thein Pe's Works in Prison

- The Way's Out (1949)
- Teachings of Mao-tse-tung (1950)
- Chit-yaut-khaw-ya Movie Script (later fiction)
- Evergreen Unity and Peace Drama (written and performed in prison)

Sketches on A Cellmate

- All's well, Sir (Thwe-thauk, October, 1949)
- Unexpected Visit of A Character in My Story

(Ngwe-ta-yi, November, 1967)

Book Reviews and Comments

The foremost criticism of this fiction was 'Crepe de Shine Fashion' by Kyi Aye, a young talented female poet and novelist. (August, 1949, Taya). She did not like putting numerous English words and sentences in the fiction. She also thought the author promoted himself politically and blamed Thakin Soe and Thakin Than Tun for the split of unity. Dagon Taya, a veteran poet, novelist and peace activist, told me that Thein Pe Myint suspected this criticism was written by Taya on behalf of Kyi Aye.

Dagon Taya expressed his review in '1949 Burmese Fictions, Why Haven't Sar-pay-beik-man (s-p-b-m) Prize given' (April, 1950, Taya). Sar-pay-beik-man declared that although fiction was valid with their standard, it was against their aim to avoid controversy because it was biased by affiliation to BCP. But Taya thought s-p-b-m did not say clearly which was more important, standard or aim. If s-p-b-m had a policy in which they could not accept political fiction, he would disagree with them. But the fiction was like Thein Pe's political poster. He also told me that Zaw Gyi and Min-thu-wun, scholars, poets and master brain of s-p-b-m could not exert influence on Thakin Nu, premier and founder of s-p-b-m.

Thein Pe Myint also explained the theme of his fiction after 20 years. He pointed out that disunity could delay independence and rehabilitation. Even in romance, politics were still influential. Any hero could occur among farmers and local politicians (ordinary people).

Thein Pe had to resign from s-p-b-m prize committee when *The Way's Out* was considered for the prize.

In s-p-b-m seminars, Tet-ka-tho (University) Win Mon and Lin-yone Ni wrote papers covering with Burmese fiction and post war Burmese prose in which they mentioned that 'The Way's Out' was included in early political and social fictions together with *Nandar-pearl* by Tet-Ka-tho Nanda-mate (1950), *Thit-sa-man-dai* by Tin Soe (1951) and *It's Nearly Down* by Ko Ko (1952).

On account of Khin Kyi Kyi (Mrs. Thein Pe Myint), Zaw Gyi told her that they could not give prize to this fiction as they did not want to quarrel with ruling socialists. U Thant, former UN Secretary General, talked in a speech that this fiction was head above the rest in that year. She assumed Ko Mya's character in the fiction is close to Parachute Ohn Maung, the late veteran politician whose

underground name is Ko Mya and also from Pyapon.

Narrative of Than Nyun (New Light of Burma), Veteran Reporter- Thein Pe Myint and NLM manger U Tin (later Finance Minister and Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies in AFPFL era) were friendly since prewar and Thein Pe served as foreign correspondent for India while he was studying an M.A course in Calcutta. His famous report was abdication of King Edward VIII. In the chaotic situation at the start of civil war, as cinema owners in rural area did not dare to show a left propaganda movie by Min Shin Naung, A1 film also hesitated to shoot Thein Pe's script. So it appeared as a fiction from NLM.

My Opinion

I think it is a stereo type of socialist fiction from U.S.S.R. There is no definite road map or strategy to achieve the reconciliation vividly mentioned. It is just a dim way out.

The plot is the script type, a typical triangular love story snuffed with politics. Shortage of clothes after war, dacoits, British soldiers' ransack in the rural area, formation of red villages, Robbing rice storehouses and famine, AFPFL conference, general strike, split between AFPFL and BCP - all historic events are inserted appropriately. The chapter in which Maung Kala went to Pyapon and bought the goods with Japanese notes is similar to that Maung Htin, the most outstanding Burmese satirist, had written in his masterpiece 'Nga-ba'.

The two main characters, Tin Oo and Htar May, are just hero and heroine. Tha Gaung and Maung Kala were also imitation of clowns, Tha Guang and Sai-ta-maw from A1 pictures. U Myint and Ko Mya are merely flat characters. Than Than Myint was portrayed as an immature, political-minded and westernized lady.

The background setting of Pyapon and delta area was well illustrated although the author was from Upper Burma.

It did not get so much political influence. Both Communists and Socialists treated the author with distrust and they did not have enough time to consider his plan. Deviated from his hope, civil war reached to the climax.

As the conclusion, I would like to read new Burmese novels which can enlighten the real way's out of present political stagnation.

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VII. APPENDICES

MYANMAR LITERATURE PROJECT



Starting with an investigation into the NAGANI BOOK CLUB

The project's
Working Papers
are published by
the **Department of Southeast Asian Studies of Passau University**

Already Published:

- No. 10:1, An Introduction into the Nagani Book Club
- No. 10:2, Thein Pe, *Saya Lun* and *Member of Parliament*
- No. 10:3, Ba Hein, *The World of Capitalists*
- No 10:4, Thein Pe, *Student Boycotters* (Two Volumes)
- No 10:5, Ba Khaing, *Political History of Burma*
- No. 10:6, Nu, *Gandalarit*

Some Nagani Books
were scanned and are available on CD.

For details contact
habezett@t-online.de

All Working Papers published until now are available
at

<http://www.zoellner-online.org/mlp.htm>
and at the Online Burma Library
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/show.php?cat=2083>

INVITATION

Readers are invited to participate in the project by

- writing **comments and criticisms** on the contents of this and other volumes of this series;
- contributing **essays** on Burmese/Myanmar literature as a medium between the international world and Burmese society;
- providing **material** that sheds more light on the Nagani Book Club, its context and impact on Burmese intellectual and literary life;
- offering **assistance** as translators and commentators of book reports.

For contributions and questions, please contact:

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