

## **When Ravana Is a Hero: Anti-Colonialism in the Contemporary Myanmar Novel *Lin-gar Di Pa Chit Thu* by Chit Oo Nyo\***

Wathanyoo Faktong

Ph.D student, Department of Comparative Literature, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand

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### **Abstract**

*Ramayana* or *Yama* in the Myanmar language, is one of Myanmar's canonical literary works that has been prevalent since ancient times and appeared in the forms of poetry and dramatic performance. Recently, the story has been modified and reinterpreted into a contemporary novel entitled *Lin-gar Di Pa Chit Thu* by Chit Oo Nyo. Through a postcolonial perspective, the novel critiques the British-Myanmar colonial power relations by characterizing Ravana as the protagonist who represents Myanmar natives' struggles against colonialism while appointing the role of the colonial powers to the Rama character. This anti-colonialist rewriting of *Ramayana* is achieved by turning upside down the traditional writing approach of the story, through which Ravana is the antagonist whereas Rama and his followers are the protagonists.

**Keywords:** *Ravana, Ramayana, Anti-Colonialism, Myanmar Post-Colonial Literature, Rewriting, Chit Oo Nyo*

### **Introduction: Anti-Colonialism in the Post-Colonial Literature**

The concept of "anti-colonialism" in the post-colonial literature appears in various forms, for example, reviews of history and culture before the emergence of colonialism, or creation of unique cultural identity which is rejected and hindered by colonialism. Trying to understand or critique the Western ideology which serves as an important power base for occupation and colonization is an important post-colonial movement.

Post-colonial critics pointed out that the main strategy for expressing "post-coloniality" is through language and literature. The book entitled *The Empire Writes Back* by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (1991) discusses the distinguished features of anti-colonial literature which include writers' use of abrogation and appropriation. For example, in the British colony context, the idea that

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English of the colonizer is the only correct form of English is abrogated, and such English is appropriated by mixing it with local grammar or untranslated local words to create a unique form of English and acceptance of English varieties. This appropriation strategy also appears in other elements of anti-colonial writings, such as dominant colonial discourse, literary genres, theories on knowledge and thinking systems or literary theories. This technique is for abrogating the dominant colonial language and culture, and is an attempt of the colony to create a new discourse to show their independent culture and ideology, as well as to serve as anti-colonial discourse (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 1991: 37-76).

On one hand, the creation of post-colonial literature is aimed at decolonization. Decolonization, which comes in various forms, is the process of exposing and destroying power of the colonizers, as well as destroying the ideology hidden in the colonial system and the cultural influence that nurtures the colonial power until political independence is achieved (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 2000: 63). Helen Tiffin, a post-colonial scholar, proposed “counter-discourse” in the post-colonial literature in her article “*Post-colonial Literatures and Counter-discourse*.” Tiffin pointed out that total decolonization is hard to achieve as the colony’s culture has become hybrid, as well as the colony’s literature. That is, the colonizer’s culture is integrated with the local culture. Although some groups of scholars viewed that such literature is not an “authentic” native literature, it can represent a certain form of native identity and experience. In addition, Tiffin pointed out the importance of canonical counter-discourse, saying canonical literature often consist of “otherness,” particularly European writings like those of Britain and France which were powerful colonizers during the Colonial era (Tiffin, 1987: 97-98). Tiffin cited the counter-literature *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys who wrote counter-discourse to the novel *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte. The characters in this novel were created based on the Imperialist ideology, and the counter-discourse was constructed through re-characterizing native people. This novel unmasked the Imperialist ideology presented in Bronte’s well-known writing. Tiffin showed that counter-discourse is not only written to counter the content of the original literary work, but also to counter discourse in the original, whose impacts were still prevalent during the post-colonial era. Tiffin tried to show that “otherness” discourse in canonical literary works is embedded in the colonizers’ ideas, and it is the same thinking system adopted during the colonial era. The use of counter-discourse exposes not only the hidden Imperialist ideology, but also colonial discourse hidden in different texts unrealized by the readers.

In the context of Myanmar literature, Chit Oo Nyo is one of the outstanding Myanmar post-colonial writers whose novels were mostly written during Myanmar’s post-colonial era (Myanmar’s post-colonial era began after the 1950s as Myanmar gained independence from Britain on 4 January 1948). His novels depict colonies’ experience like the post-colonial works of other writers, such as Maha Hswe, Gyarnal Gyaw Ma Ma Lay, Thein Pe Myint, and Dagon Tar Yar, etc. However, among Chit Oo Nyo’s works, *Lin-gar Di Pa Chit Thu* is his masterpiece written in 1977 (Khin Aye, 2003). One goal of this literary work is for decolonization through the use of unique anti-colonial strategy. That is, the writer didn’t rewrite an important canonical work of the West or colonizer nor write a literary work using the colonizer’s language. Instead, the writer rewrote *Yama Zat*, Myanmar’s classic literary work, to critique colonial power relations in the form of contemporary novel entitled *Lin-gar Di Pa Chit Thu*.

From the survey of Chit Oo Nyo's post-colonial literature, it was found that the writer used the post-colonial writing strategy by reviewing the history and classic literature, such as retelling *Ramayana* and *Yazadirit* or reviewing the history when Myanmar was colonized by Portugal, etc. Thus, Chit Oo Nyo's writing is a good example of post-colonial works using Myanmar's own history and classic literature as a tool for critiquing colonial power relations.

The novel *Lin-gar Di Pa Chit Thu* is a rewrite of *Ramayana* by turning upside down the traditional writing approach and reinterpreting *Ramayana* through the use of post-colonial writing. The writer selected this classic literary work for a rewrite as the story line is about the war between Rama and Ravana, which can symbolically interpreted as a form of Western colonization. The interesting feature of rewriting *Ramayana* into *Lin-gar Di Pa Chit Thu* is the use of counter-discourse by retelling the classic literary work for the anti-colonial purpose. Through this technique, the writer counters the West by turning upside down the traditional work, both in terms of character construction and perception through original interpretation.

This article aims to study the contemporary novel *Lin-gar Di Pa Chit Thu* to analyze the strategies used for writing a literary work relating to colonial power relations.

### **Significance of *Ramayana* in the Global and Myanmar Contexts**

*Ramayana* is one of the most precious and classic literary works of humankind. The story took place in the mountainous forests of India in the pre-historic age (Ramesh Menon, 2008). It is known as a masterpiece across time praised by Indian people of all religions as a great literary work and a law of desirable acts.

The traditional interpretation of *Ramayana* is that it is a story about the war between goodness and evil, in which Rama represents goodness while Ravana and his followers represent evil. The protagonist is Rama, the prince of Ayothaya and an avatar of Vishnu. Although the story line of *Ramayana* is simple, it is difficult for the protagonist to achieve his mission. The theme of this story is that Ravana's evil troop invaded the Earth and bullied humans who had inferior power. However, Ravana failed to ask for Brahma's blessing to save him from being killed by humans as he was arrogant and believed humans were inferior to him. Vishnu, one of the three Indian gods, was reincarnated as Rama, human prince, to defeat evils on the Earth. As an avatar, Rama possessed all the human qualifications while still having the god power. Rama killed giants, the symbol of dark power, and brought back Dhamma to the world at last. Dhamma in the Indian sense is the thing that covers all the elements of human life. The theme of *Ramayana* is universal without limitation of time or period. Goodness and love are clearly depicted in the story, including love of father for his son, love of son for his father, love between brothers, love of husband for his wife, and love between friends, which is no less important than other forms of love. Moreover, greediness, evil, deception, betrayal, benevolence, loyalty and devotion are all depicted in the story. As a result, *Ramayana* involves all kinds of experience and all levels of human spiritual value, making it an intriguing story (Ramesh Menon, 2008: 10-11). The interpretation in this perspective reflects division of people based on the dichotomy between goodness and evil.

India's *Ramayana* has been rewritten into other native languages in India, South Asia and Southeast Asia, including Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Myanmar. In these countries, *Ramayana* has been read, retold, sung and performed in various styles and forms according to each culture, and it has become a classic or national literary work of those countries in unique ways. *Ramayana* has been used to assert the power of kings in various ancient states in Southeast Asia, such as the claim for legitimacy of government through the Rama character, which is the protagonist of *Ramayana*. Power of the king is identified with the Rama character to create legitimacy that the king is an avatar of a god who came to the Earth to defeat evils and rule the kingdom for the happiness people, such as the context of Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Indonesia and Myanmar, etc.

In the Myanmar context, it was found that *Ramayana* entered Myanmar during the Bagan Kingdom, which corresponds to the 11<sup>th</sup> century. In the Bagan era, evidence linking rulers' power with *Ramayana* was found, which was a stone inscription of King Kyansittha (1084-1113) who is described in two Mon stone inscriptions as a descendant of Vishnu, and a relative of Rama (Thein Han and Khin Zaw, 1976: 137-138). The role of traditional *Ramayana* is to support the king's power as evident in many versions of *Ramayana* in Myanmar, such as the prose *Rama Vatthu* (Yama Wutthu) in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the poem *Rama Thagyin* by U Aung Phyoo in 1775, the prose *Maha Rama* and the play *Thiri Rama* written by Nemyo Natakas Kyaw Guang in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century or early 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1880 Saya Ku wrote *Pan -dow Rama Pt. I The Palace Rama* as a play performed by all female which was influenced by Thai *Ramayana* in the Ayudhya Period in terms of costumes, masks, story lines and characters. Later, the story was adjusted to suit Myanmar culture, *Ramayana* and oral culture from India, Assam, Manipur and Laos. Myanmar kings favored Rama as the story is similar to Jakata in which the protagonist represents goodness who defeats evils (ibid., 138-145). According to Pe Maung Tin's *History of Myanmar Literature*, a well-known version of *Ramayana* is the one written as a musical play entitled *Yama Yakan* by U Toe, a poet in King Bo Daw Paya's court, to be used for a play in the royal court (Pe Maung Tin, 1987: 224-234).

However, we may interpret the traditional *Ramayana* differently. In other words, instead of a war between the good and the evil, it can be interpreted as a fight between different ethnic groups and a symbol of inequality. That is, the war between Rama and Ravana reflects Aryan invasion to India to expel native Dravidians. Aryan is a representative of human while Dravidian of giant and other ethnic groups of monkeys. This war ended with the victory of Aryan who could successfully expel Dravidian people (Madan Lal Goel).

The interpretation in such perspective suggests power relations and creation of colonial discourse in the literary work. "Discourse" is the concept initiated by Michel Foucault, which is used to explain the mechanism of power. Discourse is a system to create meaning for the surrounding entities through the knowledge and conceptual frameworks of people in each period. Discourse creates power to certain groups of people hidden in the form of knowledge, truth, and naturalness, which are all made up. Therefore, there is no such universal truth (Mills, 1997: 16-27). When *Ramayana* is viewed as a discourse, unequal power relations are revealed in the content through the creation of Rama as a god,

and Ravana as a giant. In addition, the antagonist is appointed an inferior status, while legitimate power is given to the god who expels the giant out of his land.

### **Anti-colonialism in the Contemporary Myanmar Novel *Lin-gar Di Pa Chit Thu***

Tiffin proposed that one important post-colonial strategy is the creation of novels to counter the canonical literary works of colonizers like Britain and France since their canonical works often depict other nations as outsiders or unimportant figures to the West in order to use their power to suppress others who don't belong to their groups. In using such strategy, the writer of *Lin-gar Di Pa Chit Thu* rewrote his country's canonical work to counter colonialism. However, *Lin-gar Di Pa Chit Thu* is different from what Tiffin proposed in that anti-colonialism is not expressed through the Western canonical novel, but through a classic Myanmar literary work borrowed from India.

The theme of *Lin-gar Di Pa Chit Thu* is that Datha Giri or Ravana and his giant followers lived peacefully in Lin-gar Di Pa, the town of giants, and kings from all over the place sent tributes to Datha Giri. Later, Yama Mintar or Rama, Lakshmana or Lakshman and the monkey followers sent out a troop to attack Lin-gar to steal Sita. The Rama troop attacked Lin-gar, while Lin-gar built camps, ditches, gates and bastions to defend the town against the Rama troop like the practice of the ancient king's war. The Rama troop had to attack its opponent many times as Lin-gar had a good defense. Finally, Rama killed Datha Giri with his arrow, and took Sita with him. Datha Giri fought to prove his love for Sita until he died. The word "Chit Thu" in the novel means "lover" which refers to "Sita." Thus, the novel *Lin-gar Di Pa Chit Thu* means Lin-gar Di Pa's lover. The protagonist of this novel is Ravana whose town was invaded by Rama who came to steal Sita. Ravana was entitled to marry Sita according to the rule of the husband choosing ceremony held by Sita's father. The novel depicts Ravana as the protagonist who had great love for his lover and could sacrifice his life for love.

One factor which can be used to support the interpretation of this novel as a post-colonial novel in the Myanmar-Britain context is the setting. Although the setting is in India, some scenes expose "Myanmar characteristics", such as the creation of Datha Giri or Ravana (In this article, Datha Giri is called Ravana) as a symbol of ancient Myanmar king. That is, the creation of Ravana as "the Conqueror of Ten Mountains," to symbolize the role and image of King Bayinnaung who is called "The Conqueror of Ten Directions" in the Myanmar history. Furthermore, Ravana also represents the last king of Myanmar, Thi Baw Min, before Myanmar was colonized by Britain. He was degraded and expelled by Britain to India and finally died there. The description of the scene when Ravana was asking his followers to bury his body in Myanmar before his death says "Don't bury my body on the hill of Mohenjodaro, but by San Chaung Canal. Do you understand?" (Chit Oo Nyo: 128). From the excerpt, the writer mentioned some places in Myanmar today, such as San Chaung, which is currently one of Yangon's wards.

In a rewrite of *Ramayana* as a contemporary novel, the writer created a new image for the characters. In other words, the writer twisted the characters' roles from the original *Ramayana*. Rama was turned into the antagonist and Ravana into the protagonist. This suggests that the writer tried to create a new image of native people from his own point of view, which is different from that of the West. The

traditional *Ramayana* was written by Valmiki or Vayasa who is an Aryan and who created Rama as the protagonist to represent the white Aryan. Meanwhile, in the contemporary Myanmar novel, Ravana is turned into the protagonist instead. While Rama is an Aryan, Ravana represents a native Dravidian. Ravana has become the protagonist in the contemporary Myanmar novel because the writer is a native Myanmar. Some features of Myanmar culture have been depicted as mentioned earlier. This leads to the interpretation that “Ravana” is “a native Myanmar” while “Rama” is “a colonizer.”

The creation of “power” through binary opposition between Rama and Ravana symbolizes the power relations between a native Myanmar and a Western colonizer. In this novel, native people are not inferior like those created by the West. The West describes Myanmar people from the British colonizer’s perspective as uncivilized and superstitious. Moreover, the West always depicts the East as having an inferior status. This novel created new power to the native people and countered the colonizers. The writer did not create a new pair of contrasting characters, but switched their roles from the original *Ramayana*. This anti-colonial strategy is interesting in that the colonizer is depicted as uncivilized, which is in contrast to the original *Ramayana* where the Ravana troop is considered as an evil troop who bullied the weaker and represented an invader and a bad character as Ravana kidnapped Rama’s wife Sita. However, this novel depicts Ravana in an opposite way.

### **Ravana Character Creation**

The writer depicts Ravana as the protagonist and the ruler of Lin-gar who is respected by Lin-gar people for his courage and bravery, particularly since he could expand the territories through wars. Ravana is the spiritual center of Lin-gar people as reflected through the acclaim of the giant followers at the opening scene of the novel where the giant followers were having an audience and expressing loyalty to Ravana. One part of the scene is as follows:

The followers’ acclaim from downhill echoed in the air and could be heard uphill, “Ravana the Brave” “Our Dravidian warrior” “The Heart of Hindu.” The followers at the foot of the hill were throwing turban into the air (Chit Oo Nyo: 1977, 1).

The mightiness of Ravana in the novel is also reflected through the loyalty of giant town rulers who sent tributes to him. Moreover, Ravana had King Asura as his supporter who gave a chariot to Ravana. When in need of aiding troops, Ravana could send this chariot to ask for help from King Asura, who would send troops to help him. Moreover, the writer also depicts Ravana as a benevolent king who brought peace and happiness to his relatives and giant followers in Lin-gar Di Pa. From this instance, it can be assumed that ancient Myanmar used to be a colonizer in the Myanmar territory.

Although Ravana already had Mondodari as his wife, he still fell in love with Sita and wanted her as his wife. Thus, Ravana joined the husband choosing ceremony held by Sita’s father. Ravana in the novel is represented in ancient literature as both warrior and lover at the same time. The writer depicts Ravana as a character who had great love for Sita and could sacrifice his life to possess Sita. On the contrary, Ravana in the international version is an evil who had an affair with other’s wife by stealing Sita from Rama. However, in this novel, such act is not the focus. Instead, Rama is depicted as an

invader who came to steal Sita. The fact that Rama, Lakshmana and his followers took Sita represents the concept of colonizers who came to steal resources and occupy the land. It can obviously be seen that in the novel, Ravana is not an invader, but the victim as he was exploited in his own land.

Despite the fact that the writer depicts Ravana as the protagonist, finally Ravana died in the fight to take Sita back like in the original *Ramayana* and the person who possessed Sita was Rama. The death of Ravana reflects the native people's struggles in the fight against the colonizer to protect their motherland. In other words, it showed the great love for the nation. Even though Ravana was defeated by the Rama troop, the novel shows that it was not easy to defeat Ravana as Rama and his followers had to fight against Ravana more than once. In addition, Ravana built a camp according to Myanmar's ancient art of war. The death of Ravana reflects his great love for the motherland as evident in the part when Ravana instructed his followers before his death that "Don't bury my body on the hill of Mohenjodaro, but by San Chaung Canal. Do you understand?" (ibid: 128). San Chaung Canal is currently one of Yangon's wards. Although Ravana's body was gone, his spirit still remained to protect the land. This also reflects that the writer tries to pass on the native people's strong spirit to the readers.

### **Rama Character Creation**

Rama and his followers in the novel are depicted as bad people and "enemies" of Lin-gar Di Pa, as well as thieves who stole Sita. The writer's description of Rama in the novel is not as prominent as that of Ravana. On the other hand, in the original *Ramayana*, Rama is an avatar of Vishnu who became a prince on the Earth whose status is higher than Giant Ravana. However, the novel does not mention Rama's great power and high status, but tries to deemphasize those features. This is evident in the way the writer tries to reduce the status of Rama to be equal to Ravana, without giving importance to Rama as a god. Instead, the writer refers to Rama only as the prince of Ayothaya who has the status of an heir to the throne since during the war with Ravana, King Thotsaros, Rama's father, was still the ruler of Ayothaya. On the other hand, Ravana had the status as the king of Lin-gar. This is evident in the novel when King Chanasit, father of Sita, arranged a husband choosing ceremony for his daughter. He informed the kings of various towns that the king who could lift his bow would possess Sita. Rama, Lakshmana and Ravana also participated in the bow lifting competition while in the international version of *Ramayana*, Ravana did not take part in the competition. The outcome was that Rama could lift King Chanasit's bow, but the aristocrats blamed Rama and Lakshmana for being disqualified for this competition as they were just princes, not kings of Ayothaya. Therefore, the result was invalid, as the aristocrat presiding over the ceremony said:

May everyone stop! I oppose to this unfair competition. Suddenly, things became silent [...] Yama (Rama) is not a king, but only a son of a king, and is not a person invited via the gold stamping. He should not be qualified to take part in this competition since the beginning (Chit Oo Nyo, 1977: 37-38).

The person who deserved to win is the one with the gold stamping and had the status as a king. Thus, the opposing aristocrat decided that Ravana should be the winner as he met the qualifications. The creation of the Rama character turned upside down from the original. In other words, Rama was not

the possessor of Sita since the beginning, and he no longer was a good person. Instead, the writer depicts him as a character who did not respect the rule and deserved to be opposed by the aristocrat. The reduction of Rama's mightiness in this novel reflects that the writer tries to create legitimacy to Ravana and also reflects the conflicts which led to the war between the two people. This is to create new meaning which is in contrast to the meaning in the traditional *Ramayana*.

### **Ravana VS Rama: Ethnic War**

In the novel *Lin-gar Di Pa Chit Thu*, there is a chapter talking about the war between Aryan and Dravidian (Chit Oo Nyo, 1977: 85-104). The writer views that the war between Ravana and Rama is the fight between two ethnic groups. The above interpretation is in accordance with the history of Aryan who migrated to Northern India and expelled the native people or Dravidian down south. The interpretation of the fight between Ravana and Rama as an ethnic war is reflected in a part of the novel when Vibhitaka or Vibhishana, Ravana's younger brother, told Ravana as follows:

No...it is not . Sita is not the main problem. Love between Lin-gar Di Pa King and Aryan Prince is also not a problem. But, it is a war between Dravidian and Aryan, isn't it, brother? (Chit Oo Nyo, 1977: 91)

In the chapter about the ethnic war, the writer wants to describe the fight between ethnic groups that wanted to possess and occupy land and expel the native people. It could be compared to Western colonizer's occupation of Myanmar. Therefore, the binary of opposition between Ravana and Rama in the writer's sense is not "Dravidian and Aryan" but "Myanmar and Britain."

### **Sita: Symbol of "Land"**

Literary critics (such as Saksri Yamnadda) interpreted Sita in the original *Ramayana* as a symbol of "land" as the word "Sita" means "plowing." In addition, in the original *Ramayana*, after Sita was born, Vibhishana, Ravana's younger brother, told Ravana that Sita would bring disaster to the giant fellows. However, Ravana could not kill his own daughter, so he put Sita in a golden casket and let it float in the water. The casket flew to the hermitage of the hermit who ruled Meiktila. When the hermit opened the casket, he found a lovely baby girl inside. However, since he was a hermit, it was not appropriate for him to raise the girl, so he buried that golden casket and asked the earth goddess to take care of the baby. Later, after he returned to the secular world, he arranged a plowing ceremony to find the buried casket. When the plough touched the casket, he dug it. After the casket was opened, there appeared a very beautiful lady. The hermit then adopted her as a princess of Meiktila and named her Sita.

The idea of using female as a symbol of "the land of Myanmar" appears in the contemporary poetry by Zaw Gyi's *Baydar Lan* or the journey of water hyacinth (Zaw Gyi, 2003). The content was about water hyacinth that floated in the river and was obstructed by flocks of ducks, attacked by wave, and got stabbed by coconut leaves. However, finally the water hyacinth could overcome all the obstacles and bloomed. The beautiful and colorful flower then kept floating in the stream gracefully. The poet



identified the water hyacinth as a female called “Ma Baydar.” The word “Ma” is the title in Myanmar, meaning “Mrs.,” which is the symbol of motherland. When such concept is used to interpret Sita in this novel, it can be explained through the post-colonial perspective that Sita symbolizes “motherland.” Therefore, the word Lin-gar Di Pa’s “lover”, which is the name of the novel, might not refer to Sita as a human, but “the land of Myanmar” and Ravana’s great love for Sita refers to love for the motherland, and that he would fight against all the enemies who invaded his land. If “Sita” is interpreted as “land”, the war between the two ethnic groups in the novel suggests the fight for land between the colonizer and Myanmar native people. Moreover, Ravana’s great love for Sita can be interpreted as the strong love of Myanmar native people for their land.

### **“East” against “West” in the Myanmar Novel *Lin-gar Di Pa Chit Thu***

Edward Said, a post-colonial scholar, proposed the concept of “orientalism” by analyzing the discourse on “the East” and “Easternization.” Said pointed out that the word “East” does not refer to the physical area of the countries to the East of Europe only, but it has hidden meaning as being inferior “other”, underdeveloped, barbaric, and uncivilized. In this case, “East” means the discourse set by the West as knowledge to justify their power over the East (Said, 1987). The discourse on the East has become prevalent in Western writings and represents their opinions on the East. Colonial discourse is a discourse created by Western countries to develop the self for themselves and otherness for other countries in the same way Dravidian native people in *Ramayana* are created as bad people or evils who deserved to be defeated by the white Aryan, the colonizer.

The creation of “power” of the East in this novel is obvious in the description of Lin-gar Di Pa, the town of Ravana and his giant followers. It described the mightiness of Ravana as the ruler of the vast and extended land and praised Ravana as a great king as in an excerpt describing the scene when giant followers praised Ravana and participated in the celebration of Ravana’s conquer over ten mountains as follows:

“The sun fade out and the war to conquer the ten mountains ended, Ravana....  
Ravana... The name Datha Giri, King Datha Giri, is our King. The name Datha Giri means the Conqueror of Ten Mountains, which is the grandest name of Dravidian” (Chit Oo Nyo, 1977: 3)

The interpretation of the symbol “Conqueror of Ten Mountains”, which implies mightiness of the Myanmar king, also indicates that Myanmar native people are entitled to occupy the land as they were the one who built this great Kingdom as Ravana said “Dravidian...We Dravidian could win a number of wars, from defeating King Asura to King Makha last winter...After such remark, the followers acclaimed out loud [...] I am Datha Giri, the King of Dravidian and the King of other ethnic groups in the South of the Hindu River” (ibid.:27). The writer claimed superiority of the native people, or in this case Myanmar, who had a king as their ruler and who fought against other ethnic groups, such as Mon, Shan, Rakhine, Karen, etc. that also lived in this land. Such claim is to indicate that Myanmar is the ruler of this land. Thus, if Rama, who represents Britain, is viewed as a new colonizer, the status of Myanmar is not inferior to Britain.

In the novel, the troop of Rama and his followers is depicted as “enemy” who invaded Lin-gar and should be fought against by Lin-gar people. Although the main factor leading to the war was only a woman named Sita, it became a war where all the followers took part. “Minister Surakumpan said that no matter through what means, it is all Dravidian people’s duty to fight against the enemy” (ibid.: 88).

Binary of opposition used by the West to occupy the East is through creating various ethnic groups who are different in language, religion and complexion. Later, those characteristics become a stereotype, such as being underdeveloped, barbaric, lazy or dull which is used by the West to establish its superiority over the East, and to justify their invasion and occupation of the Eastern land. When such conceptual framework is applied in Chit Oo Nyo’s novel, it can be seen that the writer tries to counter such stereotype by depicting the native people as having the same status as the colonizer through the description of greatness of Lin-gar which has many giant supporters, and the emphasis that Ravana’s ethnic group, Dravidian, is not inferior to Aryan. This example can be seen in the description of the two characters as the writer always puts an emphasis on their ethnic groups. The representation of greatness of the East through the description of Ravana’s Lin-gar is based on the greatness in the literature to counter the West, not based on recreating “Easternization.” Instead, the same picture found in the original *Ramayana* is depicted, which shows that Lin-gar is not inferior to Ayothaya in terms of greatness and number of troops. The only difference is that Lin-gar is the town of giants. The writer’s emphasis on the picture of the East as appeared in the original literary work is aimed at creating a counter discourse. That is, the writer depicts the East as not inferior to the West by characterizing the native people or the Easterners as the protagonist and reducing the power of the white or Westerners. The West no longer brings prosperity as the writer shows that the East is also prosperous and not barbaric as evident in a part of the novel saying “Lin-gar Di Pa is not an uncivilized town” (Chit Oo Nyo, 1977: 37), which could be interpreted as “Myanmar is not barbaric.”

“East” in most of the Western works is usually appointed the concept of otherness. However, in the novel *Lin-gar Di Pa Chit Thu*, the writer also uses the same strategy to depict the colonizer as “other” in the Eastern literary work, which is in contrast to Western literary works.

### **Conclusion: Wise Strategy**

The novel *Lin-gar Di Pa Chit Thu* is Myanmar’s post-colonial literary work using post-colonialism through the rejection of the colonizer’s ideology. The writer counters the basic ideology which nurtures imbalanced colonial relations. The creation of power for the native people is the strategy the writer uses for keeping Myanmar people informed of the colonizer’s trick. In other words, Chit Oo Nyo’s novel paves the way for Myanmar people towards decolonization.

One outstanding feature which is a wise strategy of this novel is a rewrite of classic literary work by twisting the role of the contrasting characters. This anti-colonial strategy is different from other nations’ anti-colonial novels which usually counter the colonizer’s classic literary work or language, while also showing power relations in the classic literature. The reason why the writer chose to rewrite

*Ramayana* is because it shows imbalanced power relations. In this case, classic literature does not hold only the status of masterpiece, but it is used by the writer as a tool for critiquing power relations hidden in the text and in the context of power relations between Myanmar and Britain.

The creation of post-colonial literature by Chit Oo Nyo by turning upside down the traditional writing approach makes the anti-colonial novel *Lin-gar Di Pa Chit Thu* complicated and unique.

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