There have been various academic studies regarding political struggles, defense strategy, organization, and security policy adopted by the tatmadaw (Burmese for “armed forces”) to explain how it has been able to control the state for nearly half a century. Most scholarship, however, pays insufficient attention to the influence of the military mass media on the processes of nation-building and social engineering. In this essay, I try to uncover these efforts in the pages of Myawaddy1 magazine.

Myawaddy, a monthly literary periodical, was published by the Myanma Tatmadaw (Burma Army) starting in November 1952 and was a mouthpiece for the then ruling AFPFL (Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League) leaders and their tatmadaw colleagues, supported by ex-communist as well as some nationalist and socialist writers.

As the Burmese civil war and the Cold War reached their climaxes, and ideological competition became very intense to attract newly independent countries, such as Burma, to one side or the other, numerous propaganda and politically oriented writings appeared in Burmese magazines. These works are still influential in contemporary Burmese political culture. Furthermore, the 1950s have come to be considered the golden age of Burmese literature, one that enjoyed a fair amount of freedom of the press under civilian rule.

A military historian, Mary Callahan, points out in her book Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma that the tatmadaw, which assumed the role of state builders in the mid-1950s, also took on a range of extra-military functions, including magazine publishing, as a part of its counterinsurgency warfare against the

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1 Named after the famous Burman composer-warrior U Sa (1766–1853), of Myawaddy, from the last Burmese dynasty, Kongbaung era.
communists. Thus it will be useful to look through the popular magazine *Myawaddy*, which was published from late 1952 (until the first coup of the *tatmadaw* in September 1958) to understand more about how the *tatmadaw* took steps to build its own state as a replacement for the civilian one.

*Myawaddy*, which was set up by the Tatmadaw Directorate of Psychological Warfare, was indeed begun as a pet project of the then-civilian Premier U Nu (1907–95), who was also famous as a writer and playwright. He founded the magazine in 1952 in cooperation with his close friend Colonel Aung Gyi. From the pages of *Myawaddy*, we can assess the intellectual roots of the *tatmadaw*’s own ideology, which would evolve into the “Burmese Way to Socialism” (i.e., the state ideology that predominated during the Ne Win period [1962–88]) in the 1960s, as well examining the *tatmadaw*’s political awareness prior to taking power.

In order to understand why the *tatmadaw* became politicized even as it was trying to build itself up as a professional army, it is important to examine the origins of the *tatmadaw* in the pre-World War II nationalist movement, where most of the *tatmadaw*’s officials, the ruling AFPFL politicians, and also the insurgent communists were all closely involved with one another in student unions and strikes, the leading anticolonialist leftist association Dobama Asiayone (Our Burman Association), and in wartime struggles against the British and the Japanese. Networks linking these activists, writers, and other intellectuals can also be interestingly found in *Myawaddy* and other contemporary literature. This loose grouping of young nationalists was able to dethrone pro-British and right-wing politicians in the political arena and was able to get rid of British-trained (mostly Karen, who dominated the *tatmadaw* in the early days of independence) officials from the *tatmadaw*. But because of the influence of the Cold War and ideological conflict (in Burma’s case, between the communists and socialists), the personal competition among these freedom fighters quickly turned into a long civil war, in which they also fought against ethnic minorities.

The influence of these struggles is clearly reflected in the writings published in *Myawaddy*. But rather than engaging in ideological debates, most articles reveal the *tatmadaw*’s anti-communist agenda. Unsurprisingly, there were even accusations from the pro-communists that the *tatmadaw* was allying itself with the anti-communist policies of the United States, even though the regime was claiming to build a socialist state through democracy. An exiled Burmese journalist U Thaung wrote that numerous books on the evil red empire flooded the Burmese market in those days, financed by American dollars.

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3 Aung Gyi (b. 1918), who was later promoted to vice chief of general staff with the rank of brigadier, set up the *tatmadaw*’s business institutes and resigned early in 1963 because he disagreed with Ne Win’s radical economic reforms. He initiated the 1988 uprising with his open criticism of Ne Win but faded from the political scene after a split with Aung San Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy. See Mary P. Callahan, p. 183.


INPUT FROM PRE-WAR BURMESE LITERATURE

Aung San Suu Kyi has observed that, at the turn of the twentieth century, the Burmese language was beginning to change under the same influences that had led to the modern forms of many languages in India: the impact of Western literature, the growth of the press and newspapers, and the creation of a wider reading public that flourished as a result of a boom in the rice industry. Interestingly, the emergence of Burmese fiction following the decline of traditional Burmese theater in the early twentieth century coincided with the revival of national awareness that was spurred by the founding of religious organizations and the spread of published magazines. According to Aung San Suu Kyi, “The development of the true modern novel, together with the short story, is closely linked to the emergence of monthly literary magazines, from 1915 onwards.” Popular magazines (Thuriya [The Sun], Dagon [Rangoon], Kyi-bwa-yay [Progress], and others) served as vehicles of nationalist (and later leftist) political organizations, presenting articles on science, Western literature, and politics. Most editors and writers were also leading politicians, and thus Dobama thakin (Burmese for “master,” an honorific title used by nationalists in order to defy British rule) and other young politicians started their careers as contributors to these nationalist anticolonial papers and magazines.

In the early 1930s, there appeared a new literary movement, Khitsan, led by Pali Professor Pe Maung Tin (1888–1973) of Rangoon University College. Khitsan means “experiment for a new age,” and it was an attempt to simplify flowery Burmese prose into a modernized style suitable for interpreting Western ideas. If we wish to evaluate the Khitsan movement, the role of Ganda-lawka (World of Books) magazine, edited by J. S. Furnivall, the well-known economic historian of Burma, should also be mentioned, since its influence is still apparent in contemporary Burmese literature and in academic studies. This bi-lingual publication from the Rangoon University campus brought up several Khitsan poets and writers.

Leftist literature became available in Burma in the 1930s through individuals who had been abroad and through literary works circulated by Furnivall’s Burma Book Club. U Nu, Soe, and Than Tun, who later confronted each other in post-war Burmese politics, were among the founding members of the Nagani (Red Dragon) Book Club started in 1937, which published translations on economics, politics, history, and literature and made these available to the public at a low price. The Nagani era was also contemporary with the decline of liberal democracy in the West before World War II. Radical leftist ideologies disseminated by Nagani writers, combined with a strong Dobama xenophobic nationalism, produced an aggressive political style that ruled until 1988.

Although the leftist approach seemed to be dominant in pre-war Burmese politics and literature, a radical nationalist like Maha Swe inspired youths to take violent measures in the independence struggle through his column “Makyaut-taya” (Letters against Fear), and inspired university students like Aung Kyaw to become martyrs in the 1938 general strike. In one of Maha Swe’s novels, the hero was...
portrayed as an upper-class Burman science graduate who knew how to make a bomb. The novels of Maha Swe and other nationalist writers of the colonial period, such as U Po Kya, U Thein Maung (of the newspaper *Thuriya*), and Shwe-set-kyya, were republished in the early years of the ruling military regime in the 1990s as patriotic works with a radical anticolonial point of view.

**The Fervor of the Nagani Spirit and the Cold War's Knocking at the Gates of Burmese Literature**

After World War II, dozens of new journals and magazines appeared in Burma and became vehicles for the different political parties—socialist, communist, non-political liberal, and so forth. Burmese politics was in the hands of young leftist *thakin* who had grown up with Nagani books. The patriotic works of older nationalist writers were not as popular as leftist revolutionary fiction among the younger generation who had joined in the resistance against the British and Japanese. Thus, Burmese politics and literature at this time both seemed to be radical and violent in nature.

As Burma moved closer towards gaining independence, the various political groups faced difficulties in finding the most appropriate ways to engage with independence and rebuild the war-torn country. There was intense conflict even among the leftist groups, between Red Flag and White Flag Communist factions, and also between communists and socialists. Disunity had started as far back as World War II, during the formation of the anti-fascist alliance. After the expulsion of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) from the AFPFL and the emergence of a communist revolt in the immediate post-independence months, all attempts to reunite leftist forces were unsuccessful. To aggravate the chaos, Karens, Mons, and some ethnic tribes staged armed insurgencies, fighting for the right of self-determination, further heightening the intense civil war during the early crisis years of the Cold War in the region.

Burma, as a newly independent state, faced the fall of the colonial powers in Asia and the onset of the Cold War, marked by the formation of the Soviet bloc as well as the rise of the PRC (People’s Republic of China). This process pushed young leftist writers towards socialism, since capitalism was considered a tool of the former colonialists. On intellectual grounds, the rise of the left-wing literary movements, such as Sar-pay-thit (New Literature) and socialist realism, on the one hand, and “pure literature,” “neutral literature,” and “literature free from ideological tendencies,” on the other, led to fierce debates on ideological and literary matters, assisted by input carried along diplomatic channels from both blocs.

At the same time, the first Burmese prime minister and former Nagani publisher, U Nu, with the help of Khitsan scholars like Zaw-gyi and U Thant, also tried to build the new nation by means of education and literature through founding the Burma

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9 Dagon Taya (b. 1919), the main organizer of the new literature movement, was a close friend of the communist leaders Ba Hein and Than Tun and other AFPFL leaders and was also active in pre-war student politics.


Translation Society (BTS) in 1947, which aimed to translate valuable foreign books into Burmese and to encourage good writing through the award of prizes. U Nu, the translator of R. Page Arnot’s *A Short History of the Russian Revolution: From 1905 to the Present Day*, which was published as *Lu-mwe-doh-ei-hhtwet-yet-lan* (The Ways Out for the Poor Men)\(^\text{12}\) in 1938, then tried to launch anti-communist propaganda through his play *Ludu-aung-than* (People Win Through). Although the text of the play was disseminated widely via the popular media, U Nu could not influence the young intellectuals of the day too much because “his arguments were unconvincing and the sly kicks [he delivered] below the belt proved ineffective.”\(^\text{13}\)

Among examples of the anti-communist literature published by the BTS, the most influential book may have been the translation of George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* (*Che-lay-gyaung-taw-hlan-yay* [The Four-legged Revolution], 1950) by a veteran writer and founder of the *thakin* movement, Ba Thaung. *Animal Farm* was unpopular in Burma when it was first published in the 1950s. Many of the leading intellectuals at that time had leftist leanings and read it as a criticism of the socialism they admired. When the US Embassy printed excerpts as anti-communist propaganda, the book’s fate was sealed.\(^\text{14}\)

Having gained solidarity through fighting together in World War II against the British and the Japanese, the *tatmadaw* (under the political dominance of the ruling socialists) tried to stand firm against the rebellious communists, who had previously lectured them on ideology in their wartime quarters\(^\text{15}\) and also been their one-time comrades in the *tatmadaw* PVOs (People’s Volunteers Organization) in the 1950s. *Tatmadaw* leaders also opened their own media front against domestic and foreign communist influence in a market dominated by antigovernment publications like *Shumawa* (Readers’ Favorite), which “contained many cartoons and articles penned by leftist authors who criticised the tatmadaw.”\(^\text{16}\) But *Shumawa*’s publisher, U Kyaw (1910–74), was a liberal, non-political person who tried to present his magazine as an unbiased periodical and a meeting ground for both leftist and politically neutral writers engaged in literary and ideological debates.

**OF MYAWADDY’S MICE AND MEN**

“Over the next few years,” writes Callahan, “*Myawaddy* carried numerous articles by ‘famous Communist writers’ who had either returned to the legal fold or

\(^{12}\)See www.phil.uni-passau.de/fileadmin/group_upload/45/pdf/research/zoellnerw10.1.pdf


\(^{16}\)Callahan, *Making Enemies*, p. 183.
who had never formally rebelled.” 17 A famous Nagani writer and a leading figure from the main opposition pro-communist National United Front (NUF), Thein Pe Myint, published his masterpiece of a novel, *Ashay-ga nay-wun htwet-thi-pama* (As the Sun Rises in the East), 18 in *Myawaddy*, while a serialized fictional version of his memoir about anti-fascist resistance, *Sit-atwin-khayi-the* (Wartime Traveler), 19 was published in the popular magazine *Shumawa*, the main rival to *Myawaddy*. A veteran left-wing writer, Shwe-U-Daung, wrote an adaptation of an Andy Hardy story in *Myawaddy* where he praised the caliber of General Ne Win. 20 He had a personal hatred of U Nu, who had arrested him in the mid-1950s, and he seemed to favor the kind of strongman rule found in Egypt and Yugoslavia. Later, even the father of *sar-pay-thit* (new literature), Dagon Taya, contributed literary commentaries and translated short stories in *Myawaddy*.

Thus, “Aung Gyi stole *Shumawa*'s writers by offering them a little more money per story …,” explains Callahan. 21 *Myawaddy* also tried its utmost to beat its civilian rival with lower advertising rates and higher revenues, sporting covers with “prettier girls” (*Myawaddy* was a pioneer in using photographs on magazine covers in Burma; see figure 1, below). “Four years after *Myawaddy* started,” Callahan concludes in her brief discussion of the magazine, “*Shumawa*'s editor quit, and *Myawaddy*'s circulation rose to eighteen thousand.” 22 The rivalry between *Shumawa* and *Myawaddy* was so intense that each agreed to a maximum limit to the circulation of both magazines. *Shumawa* claimed that it never forced anybody to buy magazine copies, a tactic that *Myawaddy* seemed to employ with members of the tatmadaw.

*Myawaddy* received strong support from socialist writers, such as the revolutionary artist Yangon Ba Swe (1916–86), who had been allied to tatmadaw leaders since their participation in pre-war anticolonial movements. Yangon Ba Swe had been involved in the post-independence suppression of the insurgency by organizing paramilitary forces, and he led a mission to rescue Colonel (later Brigadier) Maung Maung and other tatmadaw officials from the hands of the Karen National Defense Organization (KNDO), but did not join the tatmadaw or involve himself in politics after these events. A veteran Burmese journalist–politician, Win Tin, recently mentioned Yangon Ba Swe in his memoir, identifying him as a civilian who had advance knowledge of the 1958 coup. 23

17 Ibid.
18 This novel won the Sar-pay-beit-man Prize for best work of fiction in 1958. In fact, Thein Pe Myint took inspiration from a famous Soviet work, Ilya Ehrenburg’s *The Fall of Paris* (1941), for this novel depicting pre-war anticolonial resistance.
22 Ibid.
Most writers in *Myawaddy* showed a preference for anti-communist and pro-democratic politics, although some people were more right wing, while others preferred socialist ideology. Most of the names of *Myawaddy* contributors who opposed communists and promoted the values of democracy in the 1950s were still to be found in the pages of post-1962 issues of *Myawaddy*, where they expressed their support for General Ne Win’s Revolutionary Council’s radical socialist policies. Among these authors, Saw Oo (1919–91) was first involved in both the CPB and the Burma Socialist Party, later serving as the editor of the Socialist *Mandaing* newspaper and as *Myawaddy*’s first editor. He became an officer in the Directorate of Education and Psychological Warfare (1955–62), policy director in the Ministry of Information (1962–65), and then head of the Burmese Socialist Programme Party Press Department. Under the guidance of the tatmadaw archivist Lt. Colonel Ba Than, Saw Oo and Chit Hlaing, an ex-Red Flag Communist who studied philosophy at the Sorbonne, prepared the drafts for the tatmadaw’s own official socialist ideology. Chit Hlaing (b. 1926) was described as an anti-Soviet, anti-communist Marxist in Burmese political circles. He also wrote books and translations on Marxism, Leninism, and the USSR while serving as the secretary in the Socialist-sponsored People’s Literature Committee during 1948 through 1950. He joined the Defence Directorate of Psychological Warfare as a civilian military official with the same rank as lieutenant colonel in 1955. Cooperating with Saw Oo, he wrote pieces for the *Dhammarantaya* (Dangers of Religion) campaign against the communists. Another returnee from the

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21 http://www.myanmarisp.com/Writer-Biography/sawoo/
Bo Bo

Communist jungle and an ex-economics student from Rangoon University, Chan Aye (b. 1927) gained the public’s attention by publishing his thesis in *Myawaddy*, in which he argued that the CPB should drop the armed struggle and re-enter the legal fold. He became a special officer in Ne Win’s Revolutionary Council Government’s Ministries of Information, National Planning, and Cooperatives in 1964, and resigned from those posts two years later.26

There were some women writers in *Myawaddy* who were the wives of senior tatmadaw officials. For example, Ma Myat Lay was the wife of Brigadier Tin Pe, who implemented radical socialist economic plans in Burma, and a sister of Colonel Tang Yu Saing, a member of the revolutionary council after 1962. The more accomplished Khin Hnin Yu (1925–2003), who also had family ties to the tatmadaw, could stand on her own in the literary field and even wrote in opposition to Ne Win and successive regimes’ propaganda warfare. She was a cousin of U Nu and the wife of a colonel who also served as an editor of *Myawaddy* in the 1950s and used to edit her writings. Khin Hnin Yu served as U Nu’s personal secretary before the 1958 coup and nursed him in his final days under house arrest. These women regularly contributed fiction with anti-communist themes to *Myawaddy*.

**Stories and Commentaries**

Articles in *Myawaddy* can be categorized according to a variety of anti-communist themes, ranging from gossipy personal attacks on leftist leaders to ideological formulations aimed at the consolidation of the tatmadaw’s political goals, formulations that might include pointing out the weaknesses and inconsistencies in the Eastern bloc’s position. One can also find short stories embodying the spirit of anti-communism and promoting democracy, as well as cultural commentaries focusing on the preservation and revival of traditional Burman culture, written in support of nationalistic values and against communism and Western influences.

Concerning the highly charged topic of the ongoing civil war, there was intense debate among pro-communist, neutralist, and pro-tatmadaw writers who disagreed about who had started it and how to stop it. Pro-communists supported the call for negotiation, while the *Myawaddy* group yelled for the extinction of communists, whom they considered to be the Dhammarantaya (enemies of religion) or stooges of the Eastern bloc. Among the works by these authors, some short stories and novels are still popular today, while most have been forgotten, dismissed as mere propaganda aimed by the tatmadaw against communists and other rebels.

A *Myawaddy* editorial published in 195327 even accused some communists of waiting for the outbreak of World War III, a crisis that they hoped would enable their comrades to conquer Burma. Similar to some AFPFL government propaganda,28 *Myawaddy* accused communists of deliberately destroying local transport in order to cause poverty and hunger in the villages and so provoke revolution. According to

26 Chan Aye later joined the NLD and was elected in the 1990 election, although he retired from politics after his release from prison. Now he is a leading economist and supporter of the current junta-sponsored 2010 elections, like Chit Hlaing. He is critical of the NLD and other opposition groups. See http://www.myanmarisp.com/Writer-Biography/writer0004

27 Editorial, *Myawaddy* 1,9 (July 1953).

the editorial, communists used to call for radical measures, as when they urged that British firms, such as the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company, should be immediately nationalized; they also asked the Burmese government to declare war against Britain and the United States, and called for Burma's resignation from the UN. After the Stalin era, the world political scene changed, and editorials in Myawaddy suggested that the rebels should lay down their arms, become farmers and traders, and engage in politics without weapons.

From the time of the Guomindang (GMD, also Koumintang, KMT) invasion in 1949, intense debates took place inside the Burmese parliament. A Myawaddy editorial in 1953 accused the opposition (i.e., the National United Front) of persuading the government to cooperate with the CPB to fight back against the GMD incursion. The editorial stated that the opposition had shown respect for the murderous insurgents by recognizing them as an honorable Red army of Burma and had urged the formation of a coalition government between the rebel governments and the Burmese government, allied to resist the GMD. Myawaddy also claimed that if editors or authors had dared to voice such an opinion in Russia, their families and relatives would most certainly have been eliminated. According to the editorial, these communists, who had once called loyal Burmese soldiers "Nga Nu's dogs," were now distributing leaflets, calling for unity with the patriotic soldiers in the tatmadaw. But, the editorial concluded, the tatmadaw had already obtained documents revealing the communists' genuine hatred for the tatmadaw; the new politeness was merely a strategy.

Dozens of similar editorials appeared throughout the 1950s in Myawaddy showing the tatmadaw's strong suspicion of and bitterness toward the CPB, and their complete lack of interest in reconciliation. The tatmadaw's experience in the turbulent late 1940s, the fear of Cold War intervention, which might be triggered by the Guomindang's presence in northeastern Burma and implemented as an extension of the United States' Korean action, and the perceived failures on the part of the civil government to achieve national unity and stability in the 1950s, led the military leadership to take matters into its own hands, beginning a project that continues to this day to remold Burmese into supporters of the state.

Myawaddy author Khin Hnin Yu was in favor of freedom of expression, which was not easily found in an autocracy (meaning here communist rule). She made the point that dictators try to overwhelm their subordinates by force, but artists do not need to do so to win people's support. Artistic talent cannot thrive under the restraints of dictatorship. Like a hidden moon under dark clouds, the arts are suppressed by a dictator's might. She also worried for young people, as some politicians tried to mold them into something they were not.

The most frequent theme that recurred in Myawaddy's articles and stories had to do with the lack of democracy in the insurgents' jungle territories (especially in

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29 Editorial, Myawaddy 2,1 (November 1953).
30 An impolite form of address for U Nu.
31 Callahan, Making Enemies, pp. 221-22.
32 Khin Hnin Yu, “La-min-hnin-tain-tite” [The moon and the cloud], Myawaddy 4,1 (November 1955).
33 Khin Hnin Yu, “Ta-goe-daw-shin-ie-kyay-thaw-marna” [The fallen pride of the wizard], Myawaddy 5,12 (October 1957).
Bo Bo

No communist writers from Rangoon described and critiqued communist oppression, even though they had seldom visited the insurgent areas. U Nu had already announced that it was impossible to form a coalition government with the rebels because even as they were squeezed by the influences of both Eastern and Western superpowers, they ruled the people as dictators and made them suffer. In her defense of freedom of expression, Khin Hnin Yu echoed her cousin’s speech.

Apart from the Burman-based communist insurgents, there were several ethnic separatist movements alive in Burma at this time. In a famous novel, Khin Hnin Yu related the distrust of the tatmadaw felt by both Shan “feudalists” and Pa-o “ethnics” who fought each other in the southern Shan State. Both sides assumed that the tatmadaw would align with one side and suppress the other. The tatmadaw tried to explain that they came to the Shan State to repel the invading GMD, not choose allies among the Shan people. As Khin Hnin Yu stressed, the tatmadaw did not fight the insurgents because they were Karens or communists, but only because they threatened the peace and security of the state. In this novel, Khin Hnin Yu tried to suggest that the ethnic rebellions were plotted and incited by the pro-West elite class.

Socialist writers like Yangon Ba Swe portrayed communists as those who were aligned with the Karen insurgents and who received assistance from the GMD. He also accused communists and PVOs of urging naïve peasants to fight among each other. He praised Aung Gyi and other wartime comrades in his famous novels, for example, Thura San Kyaw (a tribute to San Kyaw, who received the military medal “Thura” for his bravery), published in the December 1954 edition of Myawaddy. Ba Swe would later be highly regarded for his satirical play Min-tha Ko Gyi Kaung (Big Brother “Good”), featuring U Nu and also Khin Hnin Yu as emotional political fools in the 1959 Caretaker Government era. In this work, Ba Swe sharply criticized U Nu’s acts during the 1958 AFPFL split. A Columbia graduate in psychology, Tetkatho Phone Naing (1930–2002), wrote a 1958 novel with a similar perspective; his work blamed the opposition for the recent chaos in Burma, accusing it of having persuaded young people to revolt against the AFPFL government. Another neutral writer, romance-bestseller Tint Tae, wrote a similar story, in which a villager who had joined the insurgency turned into a demon.

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35 Khin Hnin Yu, “Ahmaung-ei-naut-we” [Behind the darkness], Myawaddy 1,2 (December 1952).
36 Khin Hnin Yu, “Kyun-akari” [Queen of the island], Myawaddy 1,3 (January 1953).
37 Yangon Ba Swe, “Lei-thu-ma-tay-thahn” [The song of the peasant maidens], Myawaddy 1,10 (August 1953).
38 Phone Naing was later dismissed from the service after he became involved in the 1988 uprising.
40 Aung Myin (Tint Tae), “U Inn Ba”[ Mr. Inn-ba], Myawaddy 3,6 (April 1955).
ASSIMILATION VERSUS SECESSION

The \textit{tatmadaw} tried to impose a kind of civic nationalism on the people, framed in accord with the 1947 constitution, while at the same time trying to suppress ethnic insurgencies ongoing since 1949. But its propaganda machine found it difficult to promote a collective nationalism for Burma’s numerous ethnic minorities, with their different religious backgrounds and political traditions. However, not all the main ethnic tribes were against the Burman-dominated state at the outbreak of the civil war. Colonel Saw Myint\textsuperscript{41} thanked Kayah\textsuperscript{42} leaders who cooperated with the army in suppressing the pro-British KNDO. Later, most of these leaders were detained after the 1962 coup, accused as federalists who threatened to destroy the Union. Some \textit{tatmadaw} leaders at the time even referred to the Kayah State Minister Sao Wunna, a loyal supporter of U Nu in the 1958 coup against the \textit{tatmadaw}, as “Kayah general.” A Kayah guerilla leader, Thaing Than Tin, who had served in the wartime Burma Defense Army under the Japanese and also during the anti-Japanese resistance, recruited about two thousand soldiers and ran a military police battalion when the KNDO insurgency broke out.\textsuperscript{43}

Although a pattern of patron–client relationship between the Burman court and ethnic chiefs was dominant in the precolonial state structure, the British promoted European nationalism in Burma’s frontier areas and gave some favors and protection to certain ethnic groups and feudal chiefs in order to maintain the political balance with the majority Burmans. This policy had the result of creating a new political atmosphere, in which rival ethnic nationalities came into conflict with strong Burman nationalism, later dominated by the left wing.\textsuperscript{44} R. H. Taylor argues that the establishment of egalitarianism as a principle of the state and “the eternal principle of equality,” as stated in the constitution’s preamble, meant that the unique privileges created by the colonial state were denied to some groups after independence, resulting in the never-ending civil war against Burman regimes.\textsuperscript{45} This political scenario was worsened by the GMD invasion of eastern Burma, which led to a military administration and interference with existing feudal powers, provoking new rebellions. The Burman-dominated \textit{tatmadaw} had to fight ethnic forces not only through guerrilla warfare but also on the media front, where serious questions arose, asking, for instance, how the insurgencies took the wrong path—a path detrimental to the welfare of ethnic people—and how ethnic insurgents should disarm.

There were several articles in \textit{Myawaddy}, written mainly by \textit{tatmadaw} personnel or Burmese civil officers working in the frontier areas, concerning social welfare development programs. These discussed the difficulties faced by such programs as a result of the insurgencies, the GMD invasion, and the lack of cooperation from, and sometimes interference by, local feudal chiefs (\textit{sawbwas} in the Shan and Kayah

\textsuperscript{41} Saw Myint later became the minister of information in the Revolutionary Council and a publisher of a famous periodical, \textit{Mahaythi}, in the 1980s and 1990s.

\textsuperscript{42} Kayah is a different tribe of Karen (also known as Karenni or Red Karen).

\textsuperscript{43} Bohmu Thamain, “Ngwe-daung-pyi-oo-si-tho” [Towards the state of Silver Mountain], \textit{Myawaddy} 1,11 (September 1953).


\textsuperscript{45} Taylor, \textit{The State in Myanmar}, p. 289.
Some civil servants recorded the cultural and anthropological traditions of the tribes, while others pointed out the needs of ethnic people. Although these writings were full of anthropological and cultural information, they failed to show how so much ethnic diversity could be added to the mainstream Burman way of life in order to produce a unifying synthesis (see figure 2, below, showing a woman from the Kachin tribe on the front cover of the September 1953 issue of Myawaddy). The ethnic groups were assumed to be primitive tribes left behind by the colonialists. The Burman’s duty was to protect and raise these people’s living status, acting as a kind of big brother. As these ethnic people were cut off from access to Burman media outlets, it was hard for them to propagate their own narratives about their cultures and social lives. There was no way for them to publish their own views on the AFPFL or on the tatmadaw’s services to the frontier areas in the pages of Myawaddy, for example.

Figure 2. Front cover of the September 1953 issue of Myawaddy, showing a woman from the Kachin tribe

A military administrator in the GMD-occupied Shan State, Colonel Saw Myint, narrated his experiences in the frontier areas of eastern and northernmost Burma. In

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46 Daw Yi Kyain, “Lut-myaut-pyi-thaw Maing-ton-myoo-tho” [To the liberated Mong-tun], Myawaddy 3,8 (June 1955).
a short story,\textsuperscript{48} he pointed out the weaknesses in the local administration, which did not offer adequate remuneration to the police. He also pointed to the villagers’ low level of education, which he attributed to the fact that, during the colonial period, there were no lay schools anywhere in the state—only monastic schools were available. He concluded that military administration must be the ideal. There were also some writers close to the ruling socialists, such as Yangon Ba Swe, who were sent to live with the hill tribes by the AFPFL government.\textsuperscript{49} But their writings mostly focused on the beauty of ethnic girls and seemed to be influenced by the stories of the Victorian adventure writer Rider Haggard. The distrust between Ministerial Burma and the Frontiers, referred to as “civilized” and “wild” regions, respectively, and the contempt of the former for the latter, were also evident in these writings, although such sentiments were masked in the name of ethnic unity.\textsuperscript{50} Even in the humor section, some images that showed ethnic assimilation into the \textit{tatmadaw} could be found. Colonel Van Kul of the Chin battalion ordered his soldiers to speak only Burmese in quarters and prohibited the use of Chin and English; he also founded a school for the Burmese language. He was cheered as a unionist.\textsuperscript{51}

As a newly independent state army, the \textit{tatmadaw} needed its own official chronicles to claim a political legacy in Burma’s independence struggle as a counter to communist dominance in Burma’s ideological warfare (see figure 3, below). Leading \textit{tatmadaw} scholars like Ba Shin and Ba Thaung were also outstanding experts in Burmese history and literature, and they both tried to develop a standardized culture for the new Burmese nation-state along with their civilian colleagues. Thus, dozens of cultural commentaries and a series of memoirs on the independence struggle appeared in the early years of \textit{Myawaddy}, written by neutral civilian scholars (mostly from the \textit{Khitsan} group), veterans, and military personnel.\textsuperscript{52} In these writings, nationalist fervor was heard again, in tones of Nagani pamphlets flavored with socialism, Buddhism, and anti-Western values. The Burman scholars dug out the forgotten court customs from Mandalay and bygone eras and tried to apply them to the post-war Burmese socialist republic. The AFPFL government also sent some artists and historians to London to find, collect, and draw examples of art and objects illustrating the old Burmese heritage. Redrawn old Burman sketches, accompanied by scholarly explanations, were often seen in the pages of \textit{Myawaddy} (see figure 4, below). Most frequently, \textit{Myawaddy} articles about the traditional Burmese focused on Burman courtly martial arts, the romantic lives of some famous Burman warrior-poets, and analyses of their works of classical literature and music. Through such

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{48} Bohmu Thamain (Saw Myint’s pseudonym), “Bo-kyauk-lon-thi-de-kan-baw-za” [Kambawza known to Colonel Stone], \textit{Myawaddy} 1,9 (July 1953).
\textsuperscript{49} San-nat-kyaw (Yangon Ba Swe), “Saya O Naing-gan-yay ma-lote-par” [The old writer avoids politics], \textit{Myawaddy} 6,12 (October 1958); Yan Aung, “Naga hma Yan Aung” [Yan Aung from Naga Hill], \textit{Myawaddy} 6,11–6,12 (September–October 1958).
\textsuperscript{50} Bahmo Nyo Nwe, “Ah-naung-aphwe” [Bondage], \textit{Myawaddy} 3,1 (November 1954).
\textsuperscript{51} Later, Van Kul became a state councilor in the BSPP (Burma Socialist Program Party) era (1974–88).
\textsuperscript{52} Thiri Maung (Ba Thaung), “Sit-myay-tar-hnint-chit-pay-hlwa” [Literature from the battleground], \textit{Myawaddy} 1,3 (January 1953); Zaw Gyi, “Guli Gaza-bwe” [Burmese royal polo], \textit{Myawaddy} 1,2 (December 1952); Bo Taya, “Ye-baw-thone-gyate-pyi-daw-byan” [Return of the Thirty Comrades to Burma], \textit{Myawaddy} 1,7–2,2 (May–December 1953); Bohmu-gyi (Colonel) Aung Gyi, “Gabi-ma-htoo-ya-thay-thaw-aphyi-at-ta-khu” [An unrecorded event], \textit{Myawaddy} 2,5 (March 1954).
\end{flushright}
essays, *Myawaddy’s* writers presented a perspective on modern Burmese culture that showed it having been polluted by the West and in need of purification through a return to the Burman’s own original culture.

Figure 3. March 1957 *Myawaddy* cover celebrating Armed Forces Day, March 27

Figure 4. A drawing made from a *parabaik* (Burmese folded paper text), held in the British Museum, showing carriages and royal elephants from the court of King Mindon (1853–78), reproduced in the October 1953 issue of *Myawaddy*

Even more, adding newer chronicles written by Burman patriots during the anticolonial movements diminished the politico-social status of the ethnic groups from highland Burma who had once been allies of the British. Fostering the spirit of
unity by developing a historical perspective was mostly carried out by pre-war nationalist writers and scholars like Zeya (son-in-law of Thakin Kodaw Hmaing [1876–1964], Burmese most distinguished patriotic poet and the leader of Dobama Asiayone), Zawgyi, and a famous cartoonist, U Ba Kyi, through his comic strips on Burmese history, which portrayed the success of the Burman dynasties and explained the conflicts among different tribes in the past as merely a form of feudalistic power play (see figure 5, below). Zeya praised the four kings’ gathering at Pinya (near Ava) for the opening of the Shwe-zi-gon Pagoda in the fourteenth century as an historic example that demonstrated the spirit of unity, but in fact three of the four kings he mentioned were from outside modern Burma, i.e., from Lan Xang (Laos), Yun (Chiang Mai), and China, the exception being from Arakan.53

The cultural impact of post-World War II Hollywood movies was also seen as an imminent threat by the xenophobic tatmadaw and its nationalist officials. They assumed that social and cultural changes in the arts, media, fashion, and social relations were evidence of attempts at neo-colonization by Western capitalist states. In Myawaddy articles from this period, one finds, for example, a high official scolding his wife for her Westernized hair style, or for wearing a brassiere and lipstick, and criticism of teenage girls for their Westernized behavior, for their adoption of Western dress and food, and for dating.54 This kind of radically traditionalist view, which felt confronted by the Westernized social life of Christian ethnic groups—a sort of life that included parties, night clubs, ballroom dancing, poker, and horse racing—led to the curtailment of such activities after the 1962 coup. Authors who adopted this view indicated that communal hatred towards foreigners, inherited from pre-war days, was still a strong component in relations between Burmese villagers and Indian shopkeepers, who thrived by exploiting their naïve customers.55

It was this kind of ethnic tension, they explained, that had led to the post-1962 nationalization of foreign business firms and to the repatriation of thousands of Indians.

In addition to promoting national unity, Myawaddy also published critiques of forces that promoted disunity. On the tenth anniversary of the Panglong Treaty,56 in February 1957, the magazine printed Chit Hlaing’s accusation that the Union was being endangered by those who were claiming the right to secede after ten years under Chapter 10 of the 1947 Constitution.57 This controversial right to secede had been granted in the constitution due to the demands of the feudal chiefs who did not trust the Burman nationalist leaders. The issue arose in the Shan State when it faced the GMD invasion and the introduction of the tatmadaw military administration that

53 Zeya, “Pinya Pyidaungzu Seit-dat” [The spirit of unity from the Pinya era], Myawaddy 5,4 (February 1957).
54 Phone Myint, “Padonma hnit Nylon” [Brands of foreign-exported clothing Burmese women adore], Myawaddy 1,5 (March 1953); Ngwe-khe, “Thamee-htan-shaut-hlwa” [Letter to a daughter], Myawaddy 1,5 (March 1953); Ma Myat Lay, “Du-nay-yar-du-so-daw-la-e” [As a wife of an official], Myawaddy 4,1 (November 1955); Min Yu Wai, “Yint-mya-ywet-sin” [Maturity for a maiden], Myawaddy 5,7 (May 1957).
55 Maung Kyaw Tha, “Kali-kama” [Cheating and fraud], Myawaddy 3,8 (June 1955).
56 This treaty was signed by Aung San and the leaders of non-Burman ethnic groups of the Frontier Areas on February 12, 1947, pledging unity based on the principle of co-independent states with equal rights of self-determination.
57 Chit Hlaing, “Pyidaungzu Alan-go Myint-ma-swa Pyant-lwint-thaw” [Raise the union flag high], Myawaddy 5,4 (February 1957).
followed. Chit Hlaing portrayed the demands for self-governance as a counter-defense by some sawbwas who were worried about losing their feudal powers; he also suggested that the Shan secession movement was closely linked to the “imperialist” group’s conspiracy (here was meant the GMD invasion, which was

![Figure 5. From a 1953 issue of Myawaddy, showing a comic-book version of the story of the three Shan brothers who founded new capitals after the fall of Pagan in the thirteenth century](image)

popularly held to have been sponsored by the United States). He claimed that these calls to secede from the Union did not represent the Shan people’s genuine desire. Only ruin would result from these attempts, he warned, arguing that all states had equal opportunities and self-rule in the Union and that there was no point for dissociation.

The editorial in the February 1957 issue of Myawaddy also encouraged building support for the AFPFL’s official Pyidawtha plans and adopting a correct political ideology (here it seemed to refer to a leftist parliamentary approach). The ethnic insurgencies’ attempts to exercise the right to secede from the Union, and their moves to preserve the old feudal class, again, did not reflect the desires of ordinary Shan people, Myawaddy argued (this same assertion can be found in the current Burmese military junta’s slogans). Zin Min also stressed that General Aung San did not want other people to rule in ethnic areas apart from local tribes, and he pointed out that the Panglong Treat had promised democratic rights for the hill tribes, their full autonomy in local affairs, and suitable aid from Burma. Bohmu Ba Shin, the defense historian who recorded the official anthropology of the ethnic tribes, argued

58 Mary Callahan (Making Enemies, p. 246, n. 62) observes: “The Pyidawtha [‘Happy Land’] program was an all-encompassing scheme of economic and social welfare policies first introduced in 1952.”

59 Editorial, Myawaddy 5,4 (February 1957).

60 Zin Min, “Pyidaungzu nay” [Union Day], Myawaddy 5,4 (February 1957).
that the administrative, political, social, and democratic rights granted to the “backward” areas changed the local people from ruled to rulers.\textsuperscript{61}  

During his trip to Yawnghwe Haw, Bo Ta-ya\textsuperscript{62} criticized how feudalism suppressed ethnic people and exploited them; he wished that feudalism would fade from the world.\textsuperscript{63} A young leftist writer, Mya Than Tint, portrayed the conflict between the feudalists and leftists in the GMD-threatened Shan State through his story of a love affair between a feudal princess and a leftist Shan student.\textsuperscript{64} The two young students in his tale met in Rangoon University and fell in love with each other despite the fact that the status of the princess in highland feudal society was so far above that of the student. But when the leftist student started an anti-feudal movement in the Shan State, their love affair was destroyed by the feudal family, which had close contacts with GMD intruders and the Western missionaries. In this way, the writer, Mya Than Tint, made the feudal chiefs responsible for the backwardness of the Shan State and interpreted their close relationship with American missionaries as an act of collaboration with Western stooges. The story gives the impression that the communists and the ruling socialists shared a common suspicion of ethnic groups and Westerners, who seemed to be united in a conspiracy against their leftist aspirations. This anti-feudalist and anti-imperialist fiction by a pro-communist writer reminds the contemporary reader that in 1962 some aboveground communists supported a government coup, thereby countering the ethnic leaders’ desire to found a federal union that would give equal power to ethnic groups and majority Burmans. In raising this federal issue, both the feudal chiefs and leftist ethnic politicians worked together, and most were detained for several years, charged with endangering the stability of the Union. Thus, the tatmadaw seemed to fail to reconcile the ethnic nationalist political movements and the ruling AFPFL’s Burman leftist policy, despite claiming a good record in frontier development and cultural assimilation (i.e., “Burmanization,” as it was perceived by ethnic people). The tatmadaw’s decision to target and accuse the traditional ruling class of being imperialist stooges, combined with its drive to build a socialist economy, worsened the relationship between the rival elites. The Shan and Kayah chieftains had already felt that the military administration was a threat to their sovereignty, while the tatmadaw was not impressed with inefficient feudal rule. In 1961, these conflicts would reemerge, as demands increased for a federal union that would grant more administrative power to the state; this dissension made it more likely that the tatmadaw would stage a coup to prevent the dissociation of the Union. That said, certain descendents of ethnic feudal chiefs, such as Chao Tzang Yawnghwe, the son of the first president (Yawnghwe Sawbwa), have interpreted the situation differently

\textsuperscript{61} Thu-tay-thi (Bohmu Ba Shin), “Kyun-nok-do-ei-kone-myay-myint-day-tha-mya” [Our highlands], \textit{Myawaddy} 4,4 (February 1956).  
\textsuperscript{62} Bo Ta-ya (1919–93), a member of the 30 Comrades who founded the Burma Independence Army under the Japanese; he joined the communist rebellion, disarmed early, and became U Nu’s Union Party MP in 1960.  
\textsuperscript{63} Bo Ta-ya, “Kyun-taw-thi-thaw Kam-baw-za” [Kam-baw-za as I know it], \textit{Myawaddy} 4,4 (February 1956).  
\textsuperscript{64} See Mya Than Tint, “Lite-khe-daw Mya Nanda” (Follow with me Princess Mya Nanda), \textit{Myawaddy} 6,1 (November 1957). Mya Than Tin would later be detained in the Cocos Island during the Caretaker (Bogyoke, “General”) regime (1958–60) and the Revolutionary Council era (1962–74).
and maintained that the federal movement and the Shan uprising were reactions to the highhandedness of the Burman military and their ill-disciplined soldiery.  

**Tatmadaw’s Way to Socialism**

A study of the articles published in *Myawaddy* sheds light on how the *tatmadaw* constructed its Burmese socialist ideology. As explained by Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, “State socialism was a way for non-Western countries to become part of the modern, industrial world without appearing to mimic the metropolis of capitalist imperialism. This alternative route to modernity was tried in Egypt, Iraq ... and many other places. And it failed.”  

Burma was no exception to this trend. In the Burmese case, the ruling civilian social democratic regime lagged behind their enthusiastic comrade colonels, who were driven by more intense distrust of the communists and Sinophobia. A Sorbonne-trained intellectual, Chit Hlaing, who was also a brother-in-law of the then-minister of home affairs, a leading socialist from the AFPFL, seems to have taken the lead in the *tatmadaw’s* own ideological formation. His most important contribution to *Myawaddy* and to the *tatmadaw* was the formulation of a new socialism for Burma. He focused on materialism and spiritual issues rather than the practical steps needed to install his desired ideology through the parliamentary system in communist-threatened Burma. Though his writings are mostly against communism, he was not a supporter of liberal democracy. Moreover, he did not promote pluralism or a free-market economy of the sort that typified states in the West. Yet his model seems to have been Yugoslavia, rather than either the USSR or the PRC. His writings reveal an admiration for Tito, a leader who dared to take a stand against the USSR. It seems that Chit Hlaing may have been taking personal revenge for having been refused permission to attend the international communist youth conference in Moscow in 1951; he was distrusted by the Burmese communists who had sent a delegation there. Since Tito had stood up to a much more powerful neo-imperial power, Chit Hlaing could cite him as a figure who gave expression to the nationalist sentiments of a newly independent state like Burma.

Chit Hlaing’s office, the Directorate of Psychological Warfare, “sponsored projects aimed at convincing *tatmadaw* officers and soldiers that they were part of a legitimate national army fighting for a just cause.” Aung Gyi, Maung Maung, and Ba Than “invited former communists and socialists to draft an ideological statement synthesizing communism and socialism within the context of a Buddhist society;” Saw Oo, Chit Hlaing, and Ba Than prepared a draft and submitted it to the 1956...

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Following a decision at this conference, Saw Oo and Chit Hlaing were appointed to study and formulate the tatmadaw’s ideology, and they became the masterminds behind the declarations of the tatmadaw in the 1950s and early 1960s. But these ex-communist writers had been already recruited for Myawaddy. In support of the attempts by tatmadaw ideologists to synthesize these philosophies, Paragu (b. 1921), an ex-monk and writer who had studied in India, wrote an interesting article on Buddhist monks’ participation in the evolution of tatmadaw ideology. He wrote that Colonel Ba Than sent some specially selected soldiers to a famous nationalist monk, U Oat-kha-hta, to study and compare Buddhism with Marxism. Furthermore, Chit Hlaing, Saw Oo, and Bo Thein Dan consulted a famous Ceylonese monk and scholar in Rangoon.

As Aung Myoe points out in Building the Tatmadaw, there were eight stages in the ideological development of the tatmadaw. Chit Hlaing’s ideological writings coincided with the fourth stage of ideological study and the discussion prior to the 1958 declaration of the first ideological formulation of the tatmadaw, which was redrafted repeatedly to turn it into its final form, known as “The Burmese Way to Socialism.” Chit Hlaing even referred to the national hero, Aung San, as if he were supposed to have Burmanized socialism, just as Mao had Sinicized it. Aung Myoe also remarks that the tatmadaw’s decision to plant Marxist elements at the core of the “Burmese Way to Socialism” enabled the regime to neutralize and draw support from prominent, openly leftist leaders, and, in so doing, project itself as a revolutionary force that could achieve socialist objectives in postcolonial Burma.

Yet Chit Hlaing’s usage of the phrase “democratic socialism” echoes the ruling socialist leader U Kyaw Nyein’s social democratic ideology rather than Marxist socialist doctrine. It also echoed Premier U Nu’s goals for a socialist state based on democratic principles. But the phrase Narna-rupa Wada, used by Chit Hlaing and his associates, was changed into Lu-hnint-pat-wun-gyin-do-ei-ei-nya-min-nya-tha-baw-taya (The System of Correlation of Man and His Environment) in the “Burmese Way to Socialism,” a revision that seemed to make it clearer and more acceptable to the urban intellectuals. Chit Hlaing also wrote against dictatorship in leftist states.

Reading through his articles, one gets the impression that he preferred a third way of

69 Ibid., p. 184.
71 U Oat-kha-hta (1897–1978) studied in India in the 1920s and wrote Marx-wada-hso-da bar-lae (What’s Marxism?).
72 Bo Thein Dan (? – 1995) was a former member of CPB, Leftist Unity Council (1948), and later a senior member in BSPP.
74 Maung Aung Myoe, Building the Tatmadaw, pp. 60–61.
75 Chit Hlaing, “Kyun-naw thi-thaw U Naung Cho” (U Naung Cho as I know him), Myawaddy 4,9 (July 1956).
76 Maung Aung Myoe, Building the Tatmadaw, p. 59
founding a just society, modeled along the lines of the Scandinavian states, India, or Sukarno’s Indonesia, and achieved by blending a socialist economy with a parliamentary democracy.  

In addition to Chit Hlaing’s writings, ex-communist Comrade Chan Aye’s analyses of CPB policy throughout the civil war are of interest. When Chan Aye was sent to negotiate with the AFPFL in 1956, he did not put forward the CPB line, a decision that led to his dismissal from the CPB for a period of time, during which he wrote a paper criticizing the CPB’s 1948 revolutionary strategy and urging the acceptance of parliamentary democracy. Chan Aye was subsequently arrested in Rangoon while working for the underground movement. He gave his paper to the then-socialist information minister, and it was published widely, not only in Myawaddy but also in the form of booklets circulated throughout the countryside by the tatmadaw for the purpose of reaching the CPB.  

Other writings on socialism before the AFPFL split were those of Lay Gyi and Jin-dat. Those authors seemed to be trying to counteract the overwhelming influence of communism—which was so strongly attractive in the midst of the chaos and moral depravity tolerated by the ruling civilian regime—by promoting (and also criticizing) moderate socialism. Although it has proved impossible to determine the real identity of the author Jin-dat, his introduction to Milovan Djilas’s New Class agreed with anti-communist views popular in the West. Another author who contributed to Myawaddy during this period, Comrade Thein Maung, wrote an article on Yugoslavia’s army. At that time, Yugoslavia served as a prominent example for the Burmese, as it was a small nation, like Burma, that wished to found a socialist state independent of the USSR and the PRC. Military dictators who attempted to lead leftist states (as in cases of Tito and Nasser) attracted left-leaning Burmese army officers.  

**NEPOTISTIC DEMOCRACY**

In opposition to the communist call for revolution against capitalism, Myawaddy tried to find a third way to build a socialist state by means of democratic or parliamentary systems of government. The victory of the Indian Communist Party in Kerala State in 1957 and the declaration that the communists there would maintain the parliamentary system (this declaration was pronounced at the international meeting of communist parties in Moscow in that same year) were offered as events

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79 Chan Aye, “Chan Aye Sit-tan” [Chan Aye’s analysis], Myawaddy 5,7 (May 1957).
81 Jin-dat, “Dilas,” Myawaddy 5,11 (September 1957); Jin-dat, “Yugo-Soviet padi-pat-kha” [Yugo-Soviet Rift], Myawaddy 6,7 (May 1958); Jin-dat, “Imre Nagy-hnint communit-wada” [Imre Nagy and Communism], Myawaddy 6,8 (June 1958); Jin-dat, “Gaba-thit” [New world], Myawaddy 6,9 (July 1958).
83 Callahan, Making Enemies, p. 181
that supported Myawaddy’s position. According to Myawaddy, in Soviet Russia’s constitution, the Communist Party was described as the guiding party. Thus, the Soviet Union would be eternally dominated by the totalitarianism of the Communist Party. No democratic right to criticize communism or the communist party existed in the USSR. That was what one could expect from communist democracy or proletariat dictatorship. Myawaddy openly accused the Soviet Union of being a state run by the secret police and an absolute dictatorship.

Myawaddy praised the role of elections in limiting corruption and the abuse of power among politicians. It accused the communists of following the same path as Aung San’s assassin, Galon U Saw, by trying to take power by force. Myawaddy thus invoked the name of the Burmese national father to legitimize its political position and linked the communists to Aung San’s killer. But the AFPFL always won elections because U Nu and the socialist leaders asked Ne Win and the colonels for the tatmadaw’s unofficial support; tatmadaw leaders still thought that helping the AFPFL to retain leadership was a patriotic duty. The tatmadaw’s leaders’ political connection to the AFPFL and their unhappiness at seeing the emergence of support for the pro-communist opposition inside the parliament were revealed after the 1956 election. Myawaddy openly accused the opposition (here, the pro-CPB NUF) of gaining support in this election from “bullet votes,” i.e., by cooperating with the CPB insurgents, actions revealed in tatmadaw and civilian reports. But the NUF countered with its own publications, arguing that parliamentary elections held amidst the ongoing civil war had become tarnished because of murders, arrests, threats, and kidnappings, making people distrust the AFPFL. These statements show that the tatmadaw was not prepared to accept communist forces back into the political arena, although they persuaded them to surrender and contest the elections. The worries of tatmadaw officials about a communist takeover of the state appeared vividly in the pages of Myawaddy when the AFPFL officially split into two factions at the end of April 1958, and U Nu’s Clean AFPFL won support from the leftist NUF when he faced a non-confidence vote from the far-right “Stable” faction.

In fact, after that 1956 election, signs of a looming AFPFL split were clearly visible, and Myawaddy’s columnists started to call for the reorganization of the league. Chit Hlaing wrote that, although the AFPFL managed to survive through the climax of the civil war in 1949–50 and despite the defection of the radical socialists in 1950, now sectarianism, jealousy, and a thirst for power had contaminated the

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84 Jin-dat, “Parliament sanit-phyint-lae Socialist lawka ti-htaung-naing-thi” [Socialist society can be founded by a parliamentary system], Myawaddy 6,7 (May 1958).
85 Editorial, Myawaddy 6,11 (September 1958); Chit Hlaing, “Let-wa-gyi-ok Arnar-shin-sanit” [Constricted dictatorship], Myawaddy 6,5 (March 1958).
86 Editorial, Myawaddy 5,9 (July 1957). This issue of the magazine coincided with the tenth anniversary of the assassination of Aung San and his cabinet ministers.
88 Editorial, Myawaddy 4,8 (June 1956).
AFPFL leadership. It was only due to the threat of radical rebellions that the AFPFL remained united. 90 He also warned AFPFL leaders about the growth of sectarianism inside the league and the leaders’ inability to expel disruptive or dishonest followers due to personal relationships.91 The split in the party occurred just one year later. It seems that although the tatmadaw leaders wished to foster the modernization and building of a strong democratic AFPFL, rather than continue as part of an umbrella organization united for the sole purpose of exercising power, their civilian comrades failed to pay heed to their advice. Moreover, U Nu’s attempts to overhaul the AFPFL and unite it into a single party with mass support threatened the network of Rangoon socialist leaders and their local subordinates, thus increasing the severity of the split within the AFPFL. Apart from U Nu, most AFPFL leaders had their own power base in satellite mass organizations, and they linked business benefits, such as licenses and government posts, to local political bosses’ promises to collect needed votes during elections.

The great importance of social and family connections in the Burmese politics of the U Nu era also played a role in the schism. The main reason why senior tatmadaw officials aligned with the Stable faction of the AFPFL was because of their family ties, regional backgrounds, and shared school and political experiences. Stable AFPFL leaders Kyaw Nyein and Ba Swe, and tatmadaw leaders Maung Maung, Aung Gyi, and Ne Win, had all cooperated with each other since participating in the underground activities of the People’s Revolutionary Party in pre-World War II days and during the founding years of the Burma Socialist Party. In addition, there were other opposition politicians who had attended school and worked together before this time, and who maintained close ties to one another. Even some Clean AFPFL leaders with socialist origins formed close bonds with the tatmadaw while struggling to suppress the insurgency.92 Thus, unity between the tatmadaw and the Stable faction seemed to be linked to their personal interests, a common antagonism toward U Nu’s policy favoring the ethnic minorities and communists, and also a right-leaning approach in domestic and foreign policy. There might also have been hidden agendas related to post-election power and interest sharing. Arrest of the (Stable) AFPFL leaders in 1963 revealed the subtle relationship between the tatmadaw and its civilian allies.

After the AFPFL split, clashes between the local Clean AFPFL and tatmadaw posts in the countryside began. It was rather hard to claim that the tatmadaw would always obey the government elected by the constitution and the parliament. But when the local Clean AFPFL leaders urged their Rangoon leaders to protect them from the brutalities of the “fascist” tatmadaw,93 Myawaddy angrily replied in its editorials, accusing these politicians of assaulting the tatmadaw and assaulting the state, the people, and the constitution, as well as cooperating with the communists.

90 Chit Hlaing, “Pha-sa-pa-la-hint aneik-sa Dhamma-yin” [AFPFL and the law of impermanent truth], Myawaddy 5,6 (April 1957).

91 Chit Hlaing, “Gaing-gana-wada-go-sunt-pe-gya-lot” [Drop sectarianism], Myawaddy 5,8 (June 1957).

92 Along with other socialist and PVO leaders, like Bo Min Gaung, Tun Win, and Bohmu Aung, Ba Swe raised paramilitary forces to suppress the insurgency under the Ministry of Home Affairs. See Ko Than (Kemman-dine), “Myaut-kyuang-chi-tat-hnit-atu” [With levies toward the north of Rangoon], Chin-dwin no. 38 (May 2009): 113.

93 Some delegates at the Clean AFPFL Congress (held in Rangoon in September 1958) declared the tatmadaw to be “Public Enemy Number One.” See Callahan, Making Enemies, p. 185.
Declaring the tatmadaw would not become stooges for any political party (this meant refuting their links with the Stable AFPFL), the tatmadaw promised it would defend the democratic state in Burma and crush the “cunning” communist threat. Finally, the tatmadaw’s claims that it was protecting parliamentary democracy as mandated by the constitution, while at the same time it accused the opposition leftists of being pro-communists who threatened the democratic order, sound like the statements of an organization protecting its own political interests, which were linked to those of the ruling AFPFL regime.

Michael Aung-Thwin has argued that the Burmese parliamentary system during the U Nu era was not able to bring the precolonial state ideology of the Dhammaraja (righteous ruler), which had been interrupted by British rule, back into being. That is why scholars like Donald Seekins think that the Burmese politics of 1948–58 amounted to “anarchic democracy,” in which the social order always seemed to be on the verge of falling apart, with few limits to the exercise of personal power or the excesses of destructive factionalism. Due to the destructiveness of the civil war and also the emergence of the tatmadaw as a supra-state structure, U Nu’s idealistic goals to build a democratic Buddhist socialist state were never fulfilled. Despite the tatmadaw’s psychological warfare and attempts to formulate a domestic socialism mixed with Buddhism, the armed forces could not resist Mao’s radical doctrines as they were accepted and promulgated by his Burmese comrades. The clash between these ideological camps was evident during the 1967 anti-Chinese riots in Rangoon.

CONCLUSION

After the inauguration of Myawaddy in 1952, the tatmadaw’s establishment as a national institution took place within a half decade, while the civilian political structure was deteriorating due to personal conflicts and a lack of credibility deriving from its failure to accomplish the task of building a democratic state. Although this propaganda mouthpiece of the tatmadaw was initiated as a vehicle for the army’s ideological defense against the communist threat emanating from the CPB and the PRC, it later developed into an official organ for the tatmadaw, dedicated to formulating its own political ideology, called “Democratic Socialism.” In its pages, the tatmadaw dared to criticize openly the ruling Clean AFPFL’s negotiations with the insurgent communists, and it accused U Nu of offering the CPB an opportunity to share power.

From the early years of Myawaddy, before the first coup in 1958, we can see how the tatmadaw tried to convince the public of the dangerous threat posed by communists and communism to democratic Burma, even while it was searching for a suitable brand of socialism for the country. The tatmadaw promoted its own views on the survival of parliamentary democracy in a country that was engaged in an intense civil war. It also tried to show how modernization and cultural assimilation could bring the minorities a better and secure place in the Union even though these

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94 Editorial, Myawaddy 6,12 (October 1958).
adaptations might not allow them to bargain for more administrative power and resources from the Burman-led Union government.

But the tatmadaw’s association with the ruling socialists inside the AFPFL, and its support for election rigging throughout the period of civilian rule, made a bad impression among an increasingly distrustful public. This people’s distrust became apparent in the 1956 parliamentary election, when the AFPFL fared poorly, a failure that largely contributed to the split of the AFPFL in 1958. Though Myawaddy always claimed that the tatmadaw was protecting the democratic constitution of Burma, as well as parliamentary democracy, in reality the tatmadaw were focused on the communists’ gaining a significant role after the AFPFL split and the government’s attempts to draw the rebellious CPB into the legal fold. This showed that the tatmadaw was unable to allow a democratic culture under a constitution to come into existence. The tatmadaw attempted to topple the unstable U Nu regime twice in five years. The second coup was concerned with ethnic autonomy and the desire of ethnic groups to build a federal state to replace the Burman-dominated quasi-union. This struggle paved the way for the tatmadaw to seize complete power, a move that was intended to prevent the disintegration of the Union amid external threats. The military’s hold on power in Burma has lasted nearly half a century. Following a credo that posits Burman superiority, an assumption inherited from the 1930s Dobama Asiayone nationalist movement, the tatmadaw were bound to adopt a Nietzschean belief in the need for a strong state built by a noble race. Such a state could not be allowed to fall apart due to imperialist stooges, feudalists, and separatists. Although the AFPFL government formed an alliance with the tatmadaw to impose some democratic rule while fighting a strong communist insurgency, the tatmadaw decided to end parliamentary democracy and suspend the constitution until a welfare state, based on a socialist economy and ethnic unity, was established and “feudalist” ties were swept away.97

That is why the tatmadaw and its magazine, Myawaddy, ultimately failed to win the real hearts and minds of the public during the campaigns to propagate democratic ideals, discredit leftist radicalism, and bring the dream of a unified Burma to reality. The impact of the magazine’s efforts to invent the tatmadaw’s version of political biography, formulate an official myth of Burma, and present political issues persuasively in fictional terms seem not to have been great enough to achieve the goal of building a socialist welfare state while preserving basic democratic rights. Though the editors of the magazine understood that “culture” had an important role to play in the struggle for power in these critical years of the civil war in Burma, they tried merely to revive old Burman court culture. But this attempt failed to project a unified cultural model and so deepened the existing cultural fault lines between Westernized ethnic Christians, Burman Buddhist nationalists, and ethnic Buddhists like the Mons, Arakanese, and Shans. What Myawaddy’s fictional works did convey to its readers, whether or not they were inclined toward socialism, was a fear of communism, an enthusiasm for traditional culture and its preservation, and a desire for a unified, modern state free of insurgency and the threat of foreign intervention.