

Title	The Impact of Post Sino – Japanese War on the Economic, Social and Political Institutions of Myanmar
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THE IMPACT OF POST SINO – JAPANESE WAR ON THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS OF MYANMAR

Abstract

In trying to estimate the impact of after Second World War (Sino – Japanese war) on the economic, social and political institutions of Myanmar, one is handicapped by reliable data. Nevertheless, one can find encouragement in the fact that of the limited material available, some of the best relates to key facets of Myanmar life such as material or physical impacts, cultural impacts and psychological impacts. One can learn not only a good deal about the economics of Myanmar but also some things about its politics and psychology and as a result, one can begin to understand and evaluate the real impact of war on Myanmar's life. Therefore the purpose of this paper is to bring together all the relevant data available about material, culture and psychology post Sino-Japanese War in order to evaluate the impact of war on Myanmar.

I focus, for the purpose of this paper, to raise three basic issues: psychology, material and nationalism. The impacts of the Sino – Japanese war spread to Asia, compounding the confusion and turbulence of the period.

May I present about the psychological impacts. The Japanese formed *Letyonetathpwe* (Dependable Units) as the reserved force and gathered or recruited new soldiers. Village headmen had to take responsibility of recruiting new soldiers for the Japanese army. In fact, if the village headmen failed to get recruitment, there was a plan to arrest and punish the village headmen. For instance, on 24 December 1944 Police Sergeant Bo Aung, Sanchaung Police Station in Yangon, reported the office of the Minister of War about the recruitment cases in Oakkan village that it was not necessary to ask the village headmen to gather recruits.¹

On 15 January 1945, there arose a wave of displeasure when the Japanese army horses that were harnessed to carts. Cases of Limitless recruitment of *Letyonetat* and gathering of forced labourers called Heiho occurred in Tharwaddy District. This problem was presented by the Secretary of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Dr. Ba Maw's Government on 23 January 1945, to the Department of

Labour and General Affairs of Japanese Myanmar Cooperation Committee in spite of the fact that as it was the harvesting season, the task of harvesting crops would be affected; that there was no one to work as paddy field workers even at the rate of fifty rupees per acre; and that such occurrences as confiscating of horses and oxen, gathering forced labourers called Heiho and in adequate field workers for paddy harvesting all together emerged as a great malady.²

Another factor that made either the Government of Dr. Ba Maw or the people of Myanmar to become displeased with the Japanese was the separation by the Japanese government of some regions of Eastern Shan State from Myanmar territory and combining them to the land of Thailand. Thus Kyaington and Mengpan townships in the Shan State were combined to Thailand by a Thai-Japan Agreement treaty signed in Bangkok on 20 August 1943. This treaty was signed, on behalf of the Japanese Government by the Japanese Ambassador to Thailand, Teiji Tsubokami and by the Prime Minister of Thailand, Phibun Songkhram on behalf of the Thai Government.³ These places were handed over to Thailand as a token of present for Thai co-operation with the Japanese. This deed of the Japanese was disapproved and resented by Myanmar people and Dr. Ba Maw's Government, which assumed the name "Independent Myanmar Government.

The railway lines also known as Railway of Death, from Thanphyuzayat reaching, via Thailand, as far as Malaysia were being constructed by the Japanese and the work of collecting forced labourers called Heiho became more drastic. It was declared that the labourers who took part in this railway line construction work would be given all the privileges that regular soldiers got. Wages would be at the following rates: an ordinary labourer would be given one kyat per day; a labourer gaung (leader) who had to control twenty-five labourers under him, would be given one kyat and fifty pyas (cent) per day; a labour supervisor who had labourgaung leaders would get two kyats per day and an overseer who had to control ten supervisors would be given living quarters, food and medicine free of charge. And those who would be sent back to their respective homes.⁴ However

these privileges were not given to them, so most labourers ran away. It was assumed that gathering of forced labourers was more drastic in Lower Myanmar. The deserters were hunted down to their native villages and then were beaten by the Japanese. Such factors produced phobia as well as each other created grudge or hate towards the Japanese. These impacts were not easy to efface in the mind of people.

Secondly, I would like to present about the material impacts during and post World War II. Mr. B.O. Binns, Rural Development Commissioner, described the Burmese farmer's plight in April 1946 as follow:

*"The Burman farmer is discouraged and despondent. For several years he has grown rice which no one seemed to want and which has rotted in his granaries. He cannot buy the things he wants. His land is covered with weeds. He is short of cattle and his carts, plows and implements are old and worn. The cost of living and cost of cultivation are high and money is short. Parts of the country are overrun by bands of well armed robbers."*⁵

The rise and fall of the area of land irrigated by State and private irrigation works in Myanmar can be studied in the following table:

Table-I

The Rise and Fall of The Area of Land Irrigated by State and Private Irrigation Works

Irrigation Works	1910-11⁶	1929-30⁷	1943-44⁸
Canals	378,547	640,516	555,222
State-owned			
Tanks	93,898	103,266	122,811
Canals	233,255	213,545	60,575
Private			
Tanks	107,411	92,602	49,115
Wells and others	96,850	163,095	135,186

Total	909,961	1,213,024	922,909
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According to this table, 51.91% of irrigated area was irrigated by State irrigation works in 1910, whereas 37.43% was irrigated by private irrigation works. In 1929-30, 61.31% and 25.23% of the irrigated area were irrigated by State and private irrigation works, respectively. In 1943-44, the area irrigated by State irrigation works rose to 73.46%, while that irrigated by private irrigation works fell to 11.88%. A comparison of the percentages of irrigated area irrigated by State and private irrigation works by year, indicates that the area irrigated by State irrigation works increased, whereas that irrigated by private irrigation works decreased. It can therefore be assumed that the government invested more than the private entrepreneurs in irrigation. Total irrigated acreage increased from 909,961 in 1910-11 and to 1,213,024 in 1929-30. In 1943-44, only 922,909 acres of land were irrigated; therefore, compared to 1929-30 figures, irrigated acreage decreased by about three hundred thousand acres in 1943-44. The decrease was due to the deterioration of irrigation works brought about by the political instability caused by World War II and short supply of labour, the Irrigation Department's inability to maintain the irrigation works, cultivators' violation of the rules concerning irrigation, and to the Japanese government's concentration on the war.⁹ The Irrigation Department repaired the irrigation works in 1946,¹⁰ and the irrigated acreage increased to 1,143,332 in 1948.¹¹ With the improvement of irrigation systems, the British Government was able to make great profits from paddy production. This probably was because irrigation enabled cultivators to raise paddy in the areas in which rain was insufficient, because irrigation increased the per-acre yield as it prevented crop failures caused by insufficient water supply, because embankments protected cultivated lands from inundation and because irrigation facilitated multiple cropping. Therefore, it can be regarded that the construction of irrigation works was important for agriculture.

On 13 October 1944, the Japanese army ordered 23, 00, 000 baskets of paddy for the Japanese army. But Dr. Ba Maw Government reported to the Secretary of the Ministry of Commodity and Transportation on 14 October 1944 that it could not be obtained necessary which were for Japanese army. However, the Japanese army issued an order that efforts must be made to positively acquire one hundred percent of the necessary paddy.¹² This event created the heavy burden on the Myanmar people and Dr. Ba Maw government.

Due to the lack of transportation in 1943, in the cities and Upper Myanmar, the prices of rice soared. Rice prices no longer included gunny sacks; sacking of all types was cut up for clothes by the people who needed clothing as badly as they needed food. Dr. Andrus, in his postwar analysis of the consequences of the Japanese occupation said as follow;

Aside from the virtual cassation of rice export and diminution of rice production already mentioned, perhaps the chief food problem introduced by the Japanese was that of distribution within Burma of existing stocks. The central part of the Dry Zone was normally deficient in rice, receiving part of its consumption needs either from lower Burma or from the Upper Burma Wet Zone and irrigated tracts of Shwebo and Lower Chindwin districts. Lower Burma, in turn, received most of its daily needs of cooking oil from the vegetable-oil presses of the Dry Zone. The breakdown of internal transport, and the flight of many of the Indians and Chinese who were skilled in effecting exchanges of products within Burma, left the country without a reasonable price structure for agricultural products.¹³

Therefore, the role of transportation is significant in the economy of Myanmar because its breakdown and control by an alian force clearly indicated how vital its service was to a prosperous and productive Myanmar. The war-time destruction of

the transport network proved to be one of the most difficult sectors of the economy for the Myanmar to rebuild.

Another factor that the inflation during and after the Japanese period seems to have wrecked great numbers of societies especially co-operative. The official *Burma Gazette* of 13 April 1946 contains a list of 150 co-operative societies to be wound up by a Co-operative Department official in Pakokku and Mandalay districts alone. On 31 December 1946, 156 societies were reconstructed, and 66 new consumer societies had been registered.¹⁴ By 1944 the inflation that was affecting every other facet of civilian economic life became apparent in civilian transportation. The fare on the buses running occasionally between Rangoon and Lepadon stood at Rupees 50 as against Rupee 1 in the prewar years.¹⁵

The oil production in the Japanese period could only fulfill the domestic needs. Because about 7 small oil refineries which were used to refine oil, the production was between 200 and 800 barrels of crude oil per daily. According to survey made, in 1943, the Japanese enabled to produce 80,000 tons of the byproduct of petroleum. It was assumed that from 1942 to 1945, Japan exploited three million barrells of crude oil from Myanmar.¹⁶

On 18th February 1942, a Japanese plane flew to Mandalay and bombed the Upper Burma Association building which was situated inside the Palace. In this way the Japanese started military operation. The people of Mandalay, being unfamiliar with bombing, went out and watched the planes. The Townsfolk were of the opinion that the bombers would bombard only the Palace and not the town. There were even some people who applauded the planes by clapping. Some people however, being afraid of further bombardment, moved to Sagaing Hills and Mingwun ravines, and villages in the vicinity. Some townsfolk were not afraid as they had no experience, and even thought that it was still a good time for business. And accordingly, they proceeded with their business. As expected by some people, on 3rd April 1942 at 11:00 am, about 80 Japanese planes came and bombarded the town. There were very few people who took cover. People numbering 2000 to

3000 were killed and nearly 3000 people were wounded. It was the greatest damage and casualty due to bombardment throughout the war.¹⁷

Two third of the town was damaged. Only 50 policemen remained as all the others deserted. On 6th April 1942, Governor Sir Dorman Smith and wife paid a visit to Mandalay and inspected the bombed sights. It was expressed in the diary of Lady Dorman Smith as follows:

*The scenes all over the town are very miserable more than what one can express. There were ashes in every street. It is hard to see a civilian. If compared to this town, the damage of Rangoon is very little.*¹⁸

Prior to the coming of the Japanese army, the British army burnt down some civilian quarters.¹⁹ Mandalay, after being heavily bombarded on 3rd April, was further bombarded four times and was nearly reduced to ashes.²⁰

To rebuild Myanmar's infrastructure which was badly damaged by World War II and to build a new nation, a conference for the rehabilitation, chaired by General Aung San, was held at Sorrento Villa, Yangon, on 6 June 1947.

The war destroyed \$ 5 million worth of government property and about \$ 95 million worth of privately owned property.²¹ As it was necessary to revive Myanmar's economy, which was virtually destroyed by World War II, and to create jobs for Myanmar's growing population.²²

In 1946, the British government formed a Reparation Enquiry Commission headed by Dr. Seth to study the magnitude of destruction caused by Japanese during the war. The Commission estimated the total value of destruction at \$ 8,000 million. On 3 July the British War Reparations Mission in Tokyo sent a letter to the Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs in Myanmar made the enquiries about the Samaw sugar factory. The government of Myanmar sent a reply letter to the British War Reparations Mission in Tokyo.²³

There were 165 items of machinery and equipments which Myanmar government demanded from Japan. Myanmar needed them for the reconstruction

and development of industry. The Ministry of Industry and Labour of Myanmar government drew up a list of the necessary for machinery and equipment to be presented to the conference on Japan's War Reparations, scheduled to be held in Tokyo from 12 to 15 September 1947.²⁴ Basing on the war reparations, Myanmar government tried to reestablish the economy of Myanmar. In the AFPFL period, Rehabilitation works were carried out through various economic plans but no one was fully be carried out. Even 1947 Sorrento Villa Conference was held under the leadership of Bogyoke Aung San. Thus the Pyidawtha Plan was included as an important one in the impact of World War II.

Finally, I would like to present that impact of World War II on the development of nationalism. The Second World War caused more damage in Myanmar than elsewhere in the region as the Japanese and British fought across the country. Nationalists organized in the Burma Independence Army (BIA) and led by General Aung San, first fought alongside the Japanese in the hope that expulsion of the British would pave the way for independence. However, they joined with the British forces who reoccupied Burma in 1945. The military role played by BIA during these years was relatively limited. Yet, it has subsequently formed the basis for claims by military leaders that the army liberated Burma and remains the nation's natural guardian, with a right and duty to lead its affairs, political and otherwise. The final British departure took place in a relatively friendly atmosphere in 1948 after Aung San successfully negotiated an independence agreement. Unfortunately though, not everyone accepted the settlement: Aung San and most of his cabinet were assassinated by a rival in 1947. This was arguably the single most damaging blow to the new nation which lost the only man who enjoyed wide respect and trust among the diverse political and ethnic forces that made up the Union of Burma. Soon after this tragedy, the Burma Communist Party (BCP) went underground, claiming that the independence agreement was a sell-out by bourgeois politicians to British commercial interests. They were followed by Karen ethnic nationalists, who had remained loyal to the

British during the war and resented not having been granted an independent state. Over the next decade, other ethnic groups also rebelled, seeking more autonomy from the Burman-dominated central government.

In conclusion, the World War II produced certain fundamental changes in Myanmar. It led on the one hand, to better organized and more intensified struggle for Independence. The historical legacy of World War II imposed a definite structural impact on the Myanmar. Political parties and organizations in Myanmar politics had no sound principle and policy with clear visions. By studying the prevailing conditions during 1944-46, it is found that they only contained all the bombastic words and phrases of demagogic politicians of the nation, not of practicable plans and works. Therefore people did not have a chance to know and understand what their leader's political belief on ism was, what their guiding principles were and what their holding policies were. Thus they did not even know the names of these political organizations, which claimed that they were doing for them. Instead they know them by the name of their organization. In this way, Myanmar politic became, not of the politics of ideology and ism, but of the politics of persons, leading to the occurrence and emergence of personality cult, personal rivalry by which to prevail the subjectivism, cronyism, favoritism and so on. This is the impact of the WW II, which are similar to in every colonized country.

¹ "Problems Arising from the Recruitment of Troops for the Latyonetat," Yangon, National Archive Department, Series – 10/1, Acc; NO. 225, Year 1945, p. 2 (Henceforth: Latyone Recruitment, 1945)

² Latyone Recruitment, 1945,6

³ Thet Tun, "*Japanese Emissary and the Myanmars of Japanese Descent*", Yangon, collection of U Kyaw Nyein, Director of University of Historical Research Center (Henceforth: U Kyaw Nyein collection)

⁴ See Appendix (i)

⁵ Andrus , J.R., *Burmese Economic Life*, Stanford University Press, Fourth Printing, 1957, P.85 (Henceforth: J.R. Andrus, 1957)

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- ⁶ *Season and Crop Report of Burma for the year ending the 30th June 1911*, Rangoon, Government Printing and Stationery, 1911, pp. 16-17
- ⁷ *Season and Crop Report of Burma for the year ending the 30th June 1911*, Rangoon, Government Printing and Stationery, 1930, pp. 24-25
- ⁸ *Season and Crop Report of Burma for the year ending the 30th June 1911*, Rangoon, Government Printing and Stationery, 1946, pp. 22-23
- ⁹ *Myanma Lè-ya-mye Tha-maing (A History of Myanmar's Cultivated Land)*, Vol. I, Yangon, Sarpebeikman Press, 1970, p.379
- ¹⁰ *Season and Crop Report of Burma for the year ending the 30th June 1946*, Rangoon, Government Printing and Stationery, 1946, p.3
- ¹¹ *Season and Crop Report of Burma for the year ending the 30th June 1948*, Rangoon, Government Printing and Stationery, 1948, p.20
- ¹² "The Issue of the Paddy Purchased by the Nippon Military", Yangon, National Archive Department, Series-1/15(D), Acc: No-3893, Year-1944, File no-2T-5, p. 5
- ¹³ J.R. Andrus, 1957, 337
- ¹⁴ J.R. Andrus, 1957, 92
- ¹⁵ J.R. Andrus, 1957, 231
- ¹⁶ J.R. Andrus, 1957, 121
- ¹⁷ Ludu U Hla, *Thatinsarmyar Pyawpyate Sittwin Bamarpyi* (Burma at war told by the newspapers), Vol. I, Mandalay, Kyipwarye Press, 1969, pp.139-143 (Henceforth: Hla, 1969a)
- ¹⁸ *Ingaleik- Myanmar Nauksonteikpwegyi 1941-1948*(The last Anglo-Myanmar battle 1941-1948) (translated by U Khin Mg Gyi 1965), Yangon, Mangala Press, 1965, p.267-268 (Henceforth: *Ingaleik- Myanmar Teikpwe, 1965*)
- ¹⁹ Hla, 1969a, 143
- ²⁰ *Ingaleik- Myanmar Teikpwe, 1965, 286*
- ²¹ Widura Thakin Chit Maung, *Lutlatyay Yapyinauk Myanmar Pyi* (Myanmar in the post Independence), Yangon, Bagan Publication House, 1969, p.24 (Henceforth: Chit Maung, 1969)
- ²² *The Hanthawady Newspaper*, 12.8.1952, 1
- ²³ "Reperations Samaw Sugar factory and others machineries", Yangon National Archive Department, Series: 15/3(23), Acc: No-13, File no- 308D(EA) 47 III, pp. 22-24
- ²⁴ "Japanese Reparations Machine Tools", Yangon, National Archive Department, Series: 15/3(23) Acc No-15, File no-308D(EA)47 V, p.6