

Jan Bečka: *The National Liberation Movement in Burma during the Japanese Occupation Period (1941-1945)*. (Dissertationes Orientales, no. 42). Prague: Publishing House of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, 1983, 387 pages.

Jan Bečka gives, in largely chronological order, a most comprehensive and profound study of the national liberation movement in Burma during the Japanese occupation, i.e. the period from December 1941 to August 1945. In the first part of his monograph, an expanded version of his (Czech) thesis, Bečka sketches the growth of the nationalist movement from its early days around 1900 through the upheavals during the 1930s up to its manifestations at the beginning of the Second World War. He then analyzes the different plans the British and the Japanese had for the future of Burma and the antagonistic views of the Burmese nationalists on cooperation with one of these two powers. In the following two chapters, Bečka describes the Japanese conquest and the situation of the Burmese under the Japanese. This constitutes the base for the main part of the book, a well-reasoned analysis of the resistance movement in Burma, especially in the years 1944-45, and the roles the Communist Party, the Army and other groups played in its activities, which culminated in the formation of the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL). The study ends with the re-occupation of Burma by the Allies and a summary of the political impact of the liberation movement on the developments in Burma.

In his preface, Bečka underlines "the fact that the basic materials relating to the Japanese occupation period in Burma are extremely scarce and/or inaccessible and ... (the) impossibility to fill up the gaps by an extensive field research in the country." Nevertheless, he has collected an amazing amount of information not only from British government publications but especially from first-hand accounts of contemporaneous Burmese witnesses. He thus makes available material which often exists only in a few libraries outside Burma (the archives of the Burma Defence Services Historical Research Institute in Rangoon are inaccessible for foreign as well as Burmese scholars). The use of these Burmese language books and pamphlets enables Bečka to present the history of the Burmese liberation movement to a very large extent from the inside. By emphasizing, e.g., the impact which the Burmese Communists (as individuals more than through the forbidden party) had on the creation and functioning of the underground resistance, Bečka's analysis corrects, quite rightly, the picture drawn by Western, i.e. Anglo-American, scholars and memoir-writers as well as by official Burmese authors. Bečka uses his sources critically with great care and very often explains his preference for a certain view in the notes. The reader can rely on the accuracy of the facts presented and check them himself, when different versions exist.

There are only two circumstances which may make it difficult to use the book: the lack of an index (most regrettable in view of the many details treated in the text and notes of this study) and an unusual transcription of the Burmese names (with few exceptions). Although the "Prague Method Romanization of Burmese", which Bečka was evidently forced to follow, is surely closer to the actual Burmese pronunciation than the usual English transcription, someone who is not a specialist on Burma might have difficulty identifying "Mólămyáin" as the town of Moulmein, "Cjis" as the name "Chit", or "Shwéitigóum" as the famous Shwedagon Pagoda (fortunately, not all transcriptions are so confusing). In spite of these two points, the reviewer has no hesitation in regarding Bečka's book as the standard work on this period, which laid the foundations for the creation of an independent Burmese state in 1948.

Klaus Fleischmann

Kernal Singh Sandhu/Paul Wheatley (eds.): *Melaka: The Transformation of a Malay Capital c. 1400 - 1980.* Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press (issued under the auspices of The Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore), 1983. Volume 1: XXIX, 816 pages; volume 2: XXIX, 784 pages. Singapore \$ 350.

This book focusses on Melaka (Malacca), once a major urban center in the Southeast Asian island world and nowadays a small town mainly of touristic attraction. Fifty one social scientists from the ASEAN countries, Europe, the U.S.A. and Australia cooperated to produce this book which describes and explains the course of development of this famous place. The result is a landmark of scholarship in the field of Southeast Asian studies. It is to be praised for the wealth of data and interpretive insights contained in its 1630 pages covering two big, hardback volumes.

Favourably located on the Straits of Malacca the harbour town of Melaka emerged in the fifteenth century as the dominant link connecting the emporia trade between China, Java and the other Southeast Asian islands on the one hand with the seaborne trade from Europe, the Near East and India on the other. Melaka's rise to prominence was partly due to its favourable location and partly to the Islamic nature of its trading community, attracting Muslim merchants from India, the Arab World and the Southeast Asian hinterland. When the Portuguese conquered the town in 1511 the Islamic traders were eager to redirect trade to other ports in the archipelago. In accordance Melaka diminished in economic importance, but no single alternative center could assume its former role as the leading