

all those participating in the current efforts to solve the numerous problems of the country. This is a strength as well as a weakness of the book. It is an asset because it brings together the very nationalistic veneration of Aung San obviously shared by the author and the more pragmatic view of the ethnic minorities' leaders and foreign observers that Aung San was the only person then capable of unifying Burma to a certain extent and negotiating the terms of Burma's independence. On the other hand, this also conceals the many ambiguities in Aung San's political career that became obvious almost immediately after his death and the events of 1988.

One example of the book's weak points is the description of the Panglong agreement and its background (pp. 193–204). Naw correctly stresses Aung San's great interest in letting the non-Burman national minorities join the Union of Burma and informs us about some of his efforts to achieve this goal. The account of the second conference in Panglong that was later celebrated as the fulfilment of the difficult task is very incomplete. The main source is the version of the conference proceedings as found in the memoirs of the Chin leader Vum Ko Hau which are very sympathetic towards Aung San. The significant non-participation of the Karen in the negotiations is mentioned only in a footnote, the absence of the Karenni is totally ignored. The proceedings of the Frontier Area Inquiry Committee that contained many contradictory statements especially on the part of the Karen representatives invited by the commission, are also omitted. Finally, the book portrays the ethnic groups' leaders as having trust in Aung San, but does not reflect on the fact that this trust vanished with Aung San's death and that the agreement signed at Panglong did not contain any legally binding provisions. This missing information makes it difficult to measure the effect of Aung San's death on the delicate ethnic balance of Burma/Myanmar and limits Aung San's legacy in this point to one of moral sincerity, thus paving the way for the many black-and-white dichotomies so characteristic of the various judgments on Burmese politics.

Angelene Naw's book can be recommended as a summary of the basic facts of Aung San's life. Critical assessments of the role of Burma's national hero will have to differentiate and correct the overall picture presented here.

Hans-Bernd Zöllner

HANS-BERND ZÖLLNER, *Birma zwischen „Unabhängigkeit zuerst – Unabhängigkeit zuletzt“*. Die birmanischen Unabhängigkeitsbewegungen und ihre Sicht der zeitgenössischen Welt am Beispiel der birmanisch-deutschen Beziehungen zwischen 1920 und 1948. (Demokratie und Entwicklung, 38). Münster/Hamburg: LIT, 2000. XVII, 582 pages, DM 79,80. ISBN 3-8258-4360-2

The somewhat cryptic title of the book is not much illuminated by its clumsy sub-title which, at a closer look, appears to combine the three main themes of the book. The main title catches the first topic, the development of a national movement in Burma and its choice between the two options of "independence

first" and "independence last". While the former slogan seeks to catch the demand of the majority of the Burmese nationalists (or *thakins*, as they called themselves) for immediate and full independence, the latter describes the policy of the British government which put independence at the end of a political process of slow uplift. The second complex of the book tackles the question how the *thakins* perceived the outside world and borrowed from it, especially from India (of which Burma was part before 1937) and Germany. The two countries are represented by two persons, viz. Friedrich Nietzsche as the advocate of authoritarianism, and Subhas Chandra Bose as the organizer of active military resistance. The third part is a more general survey of German-Burmese relations during the first half of the 20th century, viewed mostly through the lens of German authors from this period (though this in fact contradicts the subtitle which purports to deal with how members of the Burmese independence movement perceived their contemporary world including Germany). A good amount of German writing on Burma from the period under consideration and relevant source material from German archives is utilized here, though the selection from both is far from being complete.

The book starts with an overview of the literature followed by methodological reflections. The main body of the text provides an analysis of the Burmese independence movement and a chapter entitled "Materials" which offers a detailed interpretation of a number of texts and statements. This chapter also contains Zöllner's most interesting discovery, the *Nagani Book Club* and its publications. The book club, which had been established to raise nationalist spirit through print media, served as an important medium for keeping the Burmese public informed about what was going on in the world. Its publications are listed here for the first time in a Western language. Furthermore, Zöllner records recollections from the last survivors of the club whom he interviewed in Burma.

However, the book has several shortcomings that seriously detract from its value. First, it is puzzling to find the British almost totally absent even in that part of the study which deals with political history, viz. the development of the Burmese independence movement. Even though the focus of the study points in a different direction, this seems to be an undue omission. More astonishingly, this disregard of British colonial policy and its makers goes along with an almost exclusive use of English language sources when it comes to analyzing the *thakins'* perception of the contemporary world. Zöllner tries to explain his almost complete dependence on English language sources by pointing out that the leading *thakins* were all bilingual and made their important public statements in English rather than in Burmese. This, however, appears to be a daring statement, given e.g. the frequent contributions by Aung San and others to the *Bama Khit* (Burmese Era) and other Burmese newspapers. Quite the contrary, leading *thakins* made use of their mother tongue for encoding messages that were not for the ears of the British or, from 1942 onwards, the Japanese. A striking example of this behaviour is Aung San's speech during the ceremony celebrating the first anniversary of Independence Day in August 1944, in the course of which he complained that Burma had not yet achieved full independence. While many Burmese among the audience felt quite uneasy because of his bluntness, the

top-brass Japanese officers and administrators present on the occasion remained unmoved, obviously unaware of what he was saying. It seems clear even from a mere two examples that the *thakins'* statements and writings in the Burmese language cannot be disregarded so easily, as they can render a much fuller picture of their true aims including their perception and representation of the contemporary world. It will be a task for future research to reassess the modes of communication and channels of information between the *thakins* and the Burmese public.

The second point is loosely related to the preceding remarks, and concerns Zöllner's focus on two key figures, Nietzsche and Subhas Chandra Bose. Bose is portrayed as influencing the Burmese with both Indian and Western (through his stay in Germany) ideas and concepts. This picture of Bose not only seems to overestimate his role considerably, it also unduly disregards other eminent Indians such as Gandhi who is referred to only twice (but without mentioning his visit to Burma in 1929, where he attracted and addressed huge crowds) or Nehru (who is just mentioned in passing), let alone other Indians outside the INC. In this connection, the Indian Home Rule League comes to mind first, given the fact that a Burmese Home Rule Party was formed in 1925 by U Pu, and furthermore, the *Dobama* movement had been named after the Irish *Sinn Fein* (which in turn was portrayed in a monograph of the *Nagani Book Club*). Likewise, the question may be raised whether the emphasis on self-respect displayed by the Burmese who addressed each other as *thakins* (the Burmese word for "master") had anything to do with the more or less contemporary Self-Respect Movement in Tamil Nadu. With ten thousands of South Indian workers commuting into Rangoon every year, information about this latter movement and its tenets may have influenced the Burmese nationalists as well. Again, it appears that more research is necessary to shed light on these possible lines of influence or networks of anti-colonial agitation.

Furthermore, the book is poorly edited (phrases like "Dagegen gibt es in der Einschätzung, ..., unterschiedliche Einschätzungen", p. 92, occur several times; on p. 488 the original text and its correction are printed) and contains a number of mistakes (e.g. on p. 297, the Quit India movement is listed under the year 1943 instead of 1942). Typing mistakes abound in the footnotes which were obviously not covered by the spell check programme. It cannot be denied that Zöllner's study has its strong points, among which the description of the *Nagani Book Club* deserves special mention. On the whole, however, the thesis is quite diffuse and one gets the impression that concentration on one of the topics announced in the title, tackled in a more precise and better organized manner, would have done a better service to all scholars interested in Burmese history and politics.

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