

# Myanmar Literature Project

မြန်မာစာပေစီမံကိန်း

Hans-Bernd Zöllner (ed.)

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**The Nagani Book Club - An Introduction**

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## About the Contributors

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### **On the History of the Myanmar Literature Project**

#### **A Rather Long March**

At the great Burma Studies Conference in 2002 held in Gothenburg, Sweden, the project, then still called “Nagani-Project”, was displayed for the first time at a meeting of Burma specialists. The presentation told the story of how the idea, to undertake an investigation into the Nagani Book Club as a joint venture of scientific bodies of Germany and Myanmar, came into being and how it developed. In addition, some information about the Club's activities was presented to illustrate why a thorough investigation could be rewarding. One reason given was the assumption that it could be most instructive to know how foreign ideas were translated and transformed into the Burmese context through the Book Club's publications.

However, in 2002, the story ended with a double failure. The most important German association supporting scientific research turned down the application to finance the project and the Myanmar Ministry of Education neither accepted nor declined the research proposal. In other words, there was no reaction from the Burmese government.

This coincidental refusal of official support could be interpreted in several different ways. It could be seen as an indication to abandon the project due to lack of support from both partners of the intended joint venture. On the other hand, the resistance could be interpreted as a sign of the project's importance because it revealed a sensitive constituent of the project as well as the object it aims to explore, that is the very crucial location of both at the interface of Burma and the world.

From the beginning, the project had two levels that reflected the nature of the Nagani Book Club's efforts. The Club intended to transform international literature and knowledge into Burmese language and a Burmese cultural-political context at a very critical time in world history. It combined intellectual, literary and political ambitions. Consequently, the research about the Book Club had to deal with each of these segments at a time which was characterized by global tension similar in intensity, but different in kind from the one that electrified people in Burma and all over the world before the beginning of World War II.

Tensions can create different results, positive energy or its antithesis, destruction, but they can also cause a third alternative, avoidance, which is a field of neutral non-commitment. Perhaps, this third alternative was instrumental in the failure of the first approach to start the project. To establish it at a rather high level would have resulted in putting it into a field under high volatility, both

scientific and political. To manage such a situation would have been extremely difficult. Therefore, the unsuccessfulness of the first attempt could be regarded as a blessing in disguise.

### **First Steps**

Four years after the Gothenberg Conference, at another Burma Studies Conference in Singapore (July 13-15, 2006) the first results of a more modest but in some respects still ambitious approach towards Nagani were presented. This working paper was part of that presentation. Before introducing the various chapters of this volume, a short narrative of the project's story after the Gothenburg Conference may be useful.

The interest of some conference participants, who listened to the story of the project's first stage, was an encouragement to carry on. In order to do this, two things needed to be done. First, new information about Nagani needed to be collected and put together to develop a preliminary picture of the whole enterprise. This endeavour resulted in a paper entitled “Entertaining Knowledge: An Introduction into the Nagani Book Club”. It was written for the Myanmar Historical Research Center’s conference on “Traditions of Knowledge in Southeast Asia” held in December 2003. Unfortunately, the paper could not be presented at this conference or at a conference in Yangon in January 2005.

Instead, the attempt to receive some financial support was successful. The Friedrich Ebert Foundation, named after the first post-World War I President of democratic Germany, promised assistance. This decision rested partly on the conclusion by the German government to encourage activities in Myanmar again after relations had almost completely ended in 1988.

The first step of the redesigned project was to obtain the books published by Nagani. Most of them had been found at the libraries within the old campus of Yangon University. However, access to these libraries was limited and books could not be borrowed. Consequently, it was necessary to purchase books at second hand book shops. Fortunately, this task as well as any other business related ones to the project was dealt with by a book centre cum souvenir shop in Yangon. In addition to obtaining Nagani books in Myanmar, English sources or models that were used for the writing of the Burmese books were tried to obtain through internet antiquarian bookshops. These books were necessary for comparing in detail how the work of transforming foreign ideas and literature into the Burmese context was performed.

The second stage of the project was an attempt to find Burmese people, who were willing to write reports about the Nagani books.<sup>1</sup> One intention of these reports was to provide information about the contents of the books published by the book club for Burma scholars outside Myanmar. To them, Nagani was well known by its name, but not by its activities. Another purpose of the call for participants was to provide the opportunity for Burmese from different layers of society both inside and outside the country to comment on the book's impact on Burmese society and, maybe, on their own lives. Thus, the project's mission was to invite Burmese people to join the project and at a later stage to bring them in contact with foreigners. To achieve the second aim, it was planned to send each report to a foreigner for commenting. The comments and questions asked by the foreign commentator would be sent back to the reviewers, who were free to react on the comments accordingly. These basic ideas were worded into a "Call for Participants"<sup>2</sup> which was sent to Burmese friends living in Germany, among them several Ph.D. students. In January 2005, the project was introduced at the Yangon University in connection with the participation in the Golden Jubilee Conference of the Myanmar Historical Commission (January 12–14, 2005).

The reports were meant as a kind of "re-translation" of the Nagani books into English for the international community. At the same time, they served as a basis for further investigation into Burma's/Myanmar's intellectual and literary heritage, methods and techniques used in transforming foreign ideas and concepts into Burmese language and culture, the role of literature in the task of nation building, and other points of interest.

The "Call for Participants" was well received. Before the next journey to Yangon, Myanmar, in October 2005, about 88 reports on 48 books were promised. However, at that time only 49 reports on 35 books were submitted.<sup>3</sup> By the end of 2005, about 70 of the 101 books published by Nagani were assembled in Hamburg and Yangon as well as 20 English models of these books. It is expected that the remaining Nagani books, which could not be purchased or copied yet, will be acquired soon. The number of English models or sources will increase after all reports have been studied. A list of all Nagani books and the models already obtained by the end of 2005 will be published in this volume.

After finishing reports on all available books, the reconstructed "Nagani Library" is intended to be made accessible to interested readers and researchers both in and outside Myanmar.

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<sup>1</sup> At the beginning, foreign Burma experts were invited to write book reports, too. However, there was no response.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 1.

<sup>3</sup> Two reports on each book were possible and one person could write up to three reports. For a handout given to the reviewers see Appendix 2.

### **Future Issues**

The purpose of the next visit to Yangon in October 2005 was to meet the participants of the project as well as discuss problems and exchange views about the next step. The focus of this exchange was on how the project could be presented at the Singapore Conference. The participants were asked to identify topics for several papers dealing with different aspects (i.e., content and aim) of the Nagani books. As a precondition for such an endeavour, copies of all reports were offered to the participants.

Both the establishment of a collection of Nagani books and the presentation at the Singapore Conference served the common goal of this project, which is to extend the group of participants in the project by inviting them to contribute to the study of issues dealt with by the Nagani publications as well as during other times in Burma's history. The change of the project's name from “Nagani Project” to “Myanmar Literature Project” reflects this broadened view. After the change of name, the investigation into the Nagani Book Club can be regarded as just the starting point for an investigation into the wide range of intellectual and literary life in Burma/Myanmar vis-à-vis the world and the task of nation building that commenced at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

To illustrate future issues, the following ideas were proposed by the before mentioned contributors:

- The translation of political terms and concepts into Burmese with reference to Nagani Publications.
- The style of Nagani books compared with books from other periods of Burmese history.
- Socialist economic literature and nation building in Myanmar.
- The world's and Burma's situation through the lenses of Nagani publications.
- The role of Asian political models for Burma's politics.

The output of this endeavour is available in Working Paper 100 of this series which can be downloaded from the homepage of the Southeast-Asian Department of Passau University which generously agreed to put the outcome of the whole project on the internet.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> All Working Papers published are also accessible at the online Burma Library (<http://www.burmalibrary.org/show.php?cat=2083>)

## **Introducing this Publication**

### **Fundamentals**

As can be expected from a “Working Paper”, the following pages present ongoing research. The contents of this booklet present an interim report on the project drawn up in early 2006. It contains information on the activities of the book club, some background material on the circumstances of its origins and development, and a few hints at the impact of Nagani books on the readers and Burmese literature as well as intellectual life. The main objective here is to stimulate a discussion to inspire readers to take further interest in the project. Some of the first book reports will be published along with this introductory paper. In the near future information about the discussions at the Singapore Conference, further book reports, and additional articles will be published.

### **Categories of Interest**

The following contributions of this volume represent different categories of interest in the Nagani Book Club each of which needs to be supplemented. Some examples of what could be supplemented are given after introducing the components of this volume.

### **Nagani in Different Contexts**

The introductory essay “Entertaining Knowledge” is reproduced without alterations as written for the conference in 2003. It outlines the development of the Book Club in the context of Burma’s struggle for independence. The essay suggests that the Club’s ultimate goal was a “cultural revolution” undertaken by the Burmese people. The essay also suggests other topics needing further discussion, such as a comparison of the Book Club with the activities of John S. Furnivall to promote Burmese intellectual life through the spread of literature, a comparison of Nagani with other publishing houses of that time, Nu’s efforts after the war to continue educating the people through the Burma Translation Society and other means, and the assessment of the Book Club during Burma’s “Socialist Period” between 1962 and 1988. These and other discussions would be helpful to achieve a broader picture of Burma’s/Myanmar’s literary and intellectual heritage and its interaction – and non-interaction – with related international developments.

### **People**

The second contribution presented here focuses on Tun Aye, one of the founders of Nagani, who is not as well known as Nu, who eventually became Prime Minister of Myanmar. He is introduced mainly through the translation of an interview he gave to a Burmese journalist in 1991. The

translation together with the collection of some additional information was done by an elderly gentleman, Thakin Hla Kun, who still remembers reading Nagani publications as a young man. One can say that Thakin Hla Kun's life was heavily influenced by some of the books published by Tun Aye and his colleagues. The life sketches and personal recollections of both men clearly show a strong albeit differentiated connection between literature and the “political socialization” of Burmese people. This is underlined by the remembrance of the old days by one of the still living Nagani writers, Dagon Taya, who was interviewed by the author of this introduction in 2001.

Moreover, through the information gained from these three personal stories, a small part of personal interaction - in contemporary terms, a network - comes into view. This interaction deserves a closer investigation because it could shed some light on the transformation of close personal connections and the sharing of common political ideas before a parting of the ways or even enmity. We know that many of the leading figures of Burma's independence movement - besides the already mentioned Aung San, Ba Hein, Nu, Soe, Than Tun, and Thein Pe - shared “leftist” ideas, cooperated to make the Book Club a success and were, each of them in a special manner, *hommes de lettres*. However, these common interests and successes did not help them to stay together as a cohesive group even as they sought to achieve a common goal, independence for Burma (Myanmar). To answer the question as to why they broke ties before independence was achieved, a survey of the biographies of the many other contributors to the Nagani enterprise and their political affiliation could be helpful. Anyway, such an overview would fill a gap in respect to the lack of information in the Western literature about Burmese writers and intellectuals, who did not attract attention outside their homeland.

### **Books**

This volume contains the first complete list in English of the books published by Nagani and Tun Aye's enterprise after he split off from the Nagani Book Club, which he had helped to found. Single volumes of working papers, containing book reports, commentaries on the reports, and additional material on the books, will be published at a later time. This material will allow a first look into what was thought to be “good literature” by the Club's managers. The phrase “first look” must be emphasized. What is still missing besides a complete set of book reports is a thorough examination of the books' publication histories. What is known, for example, is that many Nagani books were reprinted after independence. Parts of Nu's translation of Carnegie's best-seller “How to Make Friends and Influence People” was even made compulsory reading for six graders in the 1950s. Another story is related to one of Daw Dagon Khin Khin Lay's books entitled “Rays of War”,

which told the story of a British nurse working in Belgium, who was executed by the Germans. This publication was financially supported by the British authorities, who wanted to discredit their German enemies.

More information on the stories related to the published books is needed to assess the importance of Nagani books. The same applies to another central point of interest, the use of foreign models and sources in the production of the Club's publications. The attached list shows titles of English books, which, up until now, were identified to be translated or transformed into both the Burmese language and the Burmese context. The list is by no means complete, but it does offer an opportunity to study one of the most crucial topics of the whole project, the mode of adaptation of foreign terms, concepts, and world views into Burmese language and culture both in the fields of fiction and non-fiction.

### **Public Relations**

“Nagani” was more than just a publishing house. From the beginning, it created a special meaning attached to the books it offered. The aims of the Club were advertised by various means. This volume contains a translated reproduction of a leaflet heralding the Nagani enterprise signed by Than Tun, Maung Soe und Maung Nu, the subsequent political leaders of Burma's two communist parties and the Burmese government. It explained the “difference” of Nagani from other political and publishing undertakings and listed the aims of Nagani as well as the means to attain them. It has yet to be seen what aims and means heralded in the leaflet were or were not put into practice by the Club.

More instrumental for the Club's success than the leaflet's intellectual presentation was another medium to make the new venture known to the public. It was the “Nagani Song”, which was composed by a famous musician and sung by a well known film star of the time. Like the “Dobama Song” almost ten years earlier, the “Nagani Song” became a hit and immediately popularized the Nagani enterprise. This popularity still exists today. An English translation can be found in this volume's introductory essay. The song showed the outstanding ability of Nagani to create public awareness.

Another PR-activity was the distribution of a news magazine launched in May 1938. A short description of the contents of some of the first issues is included in this volume, but a much more detailed study is needed. Such an inquiry might yield answers to questions about whether the Burmese Book Club carried out its intention of establishing study groups in addition to providing

individuals with food for thought as based on the English Red Book Club, which served as Nagani's model.

Eventually, it would be intriguing to learn more about the function of the Book Club's office on Scotts Market (now Bogyoke Aung San Market) beyond what is already known from the few anecdotes interspersed in Nu's autobiography.

### **Others**

There are still many more open or unresolved issues related to the Club.<sup>1</sup> Two documents reproduced here may give an idea about what is still undetected or needs further investigation. There is a copy of a share issued by “Nagani Publishing House, Ltd.” and the title page of the “Nagani Book of Verse”, a book which provided help for Burmese high school students in their English classes. In particular, the “capitalistic” side of the Book Club that contributed to Tun Aye's withdrawal needs closer investigation.

### **A Note on Editing the Book Reports**

From the beginning, this project aimed at enlisting as many participants as possible both inside and outside Myanmar. This seemed necessary in regards to the project's goal, developing an overview of a great number of books within a relatively short period of time. A second reason was the expectation that it would be appropriate to look at Nagani from more than the perspective of “pure” scientific scholarship. Nagani books wanted to reach ordinary people and, therefore, published books in Burmese, thus taking a low-threshold approach. The same applied to the project. Reviewers were allowed some freedom in dealing with the criteria prescribed and they were given the choice to write in English or in Myanmar.

This policy surely helped to enlist many reviewers very quickly, but it also caused significant problems. One problem was that most reports were written in the same language as the reviewed books. Therefore, the reports had to be re-translated, which meant that some of the books' meaning was lost in translation. Another problem faced by the project was its difficulty in finding knowledgeable translators, who were willing to accept the rather low fee that the project's budget allowed. Theoretically, when a text is translated, some of its original meaning is lost. However, the re-translations performed for this project most likely doubled this effect and in some cases could

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<sup>1</sup> For more material on the Nagani Book Club see Working Paper 1.1 of this series.

have lead text to have a very different meaning from the original, especially concerning geographic names and specific terms denoting, for example, economic and psychological issues as well as political ideologies. Due to these and other reasons, the reports that were submitted and are to be reproduced in this series vary considerably in style and content. Deliberately, the editing of the reports did not try to eliminate this variety. Some proper names like “Dobama” and geographical designations were harmonized. In a few cases, footnotes are inserted to provide some additional information.

A joint venture undertaken today by Myanmar and non-Myanmar people with different biographies cannot be expected to produce even and easy results. The publication of the reports hopefully to be published later intends to arouse questions, discussion and creative suggestions on how to deal best with disparities that will arise. This volume and the following “working papers” are not meant to present examples of academic perfection, but kind of a replica of what the inventors of Nagani would invent today – an open project with an absolutely open end.

The readers of these papers are invited to contribute to the project by:

- writing **comments and criticisms** on the contents of this and other volumes of this series;
- contributing **essays** on Burmese/Myanmar literature as a medium between the international world and Burmese society;
- providing **material** that sheds more light on the Nagani Book Club, its context and impact on Burmese intellectual and literary life;
- offering **assistance** as translators and commentators of Burmese texts and as co-editors of Working Papers.

Through such contributions the endeavour introduced here could develop into a project that is corresponding to the requirements of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It links present Myanmar to Burma's past and tries to bring together people with a concern on Burmese literary and intellectual life past, present and future inside and outside the country.

Hans-Bernd Zöllner

June 2009 (last update)

## II. ENTERTAINING KNOWLEDGE: An Introduction into the Nagani Book Club

*Dedicated to the memory of U Than Htut*

### 1. Introduction

When Myanmar regained independence on January 4, 1948, an *homme de lettres* became the country's first Prime Minister. U Nu's dream had been to become the “George Bernhard Shaw” of Myanmar.<sup>1</sup> He wanted to write entertaining as well as meaningful plays that could change the social and political climate of Myanmar. Shaw, Nu's model, was not only a play writer, he was a political writer as well, who wrote essays propagating the gospel of Fabian socialism.<sup>2</sup> U Nu confessed Fabianism as well, at least for some time,<sup>3</sup> and it cannot wonder that he tried to establish a kind of socialism in Myanmar that was a blend of modern knowledge about man and society and of Myanmar's popular culture. This merger was typical for U Nu's political life in many ways. Political events prevented him from realising his personal dream fully. His early plays never entered the stage. Only after becoming Prime Minister he could try to make use of his play writing ambition and skill by writing two plays that took up crucial political issues of the time connected to the elections of 1951-1952 and 1956.<sup>4</sup>

In his autobiography, U Nu ironically called himself a political “amateur in office“. That was true, of course. Any other first Prime Minister of a formerly colonized country had no choice but to be an amateur in this office. But U Nu, like his colleagues in other countries, was an experienced amateur. Besides his political experiences as a student leader and bearer of different offices in the Dobama Asiayone, the Freedom Bloc and the Government led by Dr. Ba Maw during the war, he founded and ran a quite successful enterprise in 1937, the Nagani Book Club (NBC). This company could be regarded as the first materialisation of Nu's – and others - desire to bring together the

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<sup>1</sup> Nu, U (1975), *Saturday's Son*. Translated by U Law Yone. Edited by U Kyaw Win. New Haven and London: Yale University Press: 32. Richard Butwell (1963), *U Nu of Burma*. Stamford, California. Stamford University Press.

<sup>2</sup> The Fabian society was founded in 1844 in England. Named after the Roman consul Fabius “the Delayer”, the society developed and propagated a reform orientated socialism that influenced the political philosophy of the Labour Party.

<sup>3</sup> Deedok U Ba Choe founded a Myanmar Fabian Party that participated in the elections of 1936 and won one seat. Nu was a member of the party (Butwell: 26). The man who introduced Fabianism to Myanmar was most probably J.S. Furnivall.

<sup>4</sup> The play entitled *The People Win Through* was written in 1950 and published in English in 1957 (Nu, U (1957), *The People Win Through*, a play by U Nu with a long biographical introduction by Edward Hunter. New York, Taplinger; for the play's genesis see pp. 49-50). Nu's „Wages of Sin“ was written after the communists' success in the 1956 elections and published in English in 1961. (Nu, U (1961), *Wages of Sin*. Rangoon, Dho Ta Wun Press).

worlds of literature, politics and social work in a comprehensive way and thus help Myanmar become a truly independent country in its own right and not just a copy of other countries' political, cultural and social systems.

This introduction into NBC rests on the assumption that the Club was a trial to lay the foundations for a popular Myanmar political culture vis à vis the “modern world“ through entertaining knowledge. The study of the Club's activities may contribute to the understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of post-independent Myanmar under U Nu and his successors.

This paper intends to demonstrate that the Club was much more than a provider of leftist literature in Myanmar language as it is usually labeled.<sup>1</sup> A look at the first books published by the NBC may illustrate this claim. The first book was a biography on U Lun (Thakin Kodaw Hmine) who had successfully merged literature and politics since starting his career as a writer before World War I. The second Nagani-book contained six of Maung Nu's early plays. And the third book was a reprint of Fabian U Ba Khine's “Political History of Burma”. This special coexistence of disseminating knowledge and diversion was a distinguishing mark of the Club throughout its existence.

The following presents a short history of the Club in the context of Myanmar's intellectual history in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, an overview on the books published, an assessment of its role in Myanmar's history and – most important – an invitation to join the club of researchers on Nagani. There is still a lot to do. What will be presented here is just a very modest and limited beginning.

## 2. History and Stories

### Roots

The pre-history of the NBC can be traced back to the foundation of the Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA) in 1906. The association's aims were the promotion of national Buddhist teaching and education. Five years after the start of the YMBA, one of its co-founders, the young barrister U Ba Pe established the daily newspaper *thuriya* (“Sun” in English translation) that became the first influential publication in Myanmar language shaping public opinion. Saya Lun and other writers gained or increased their popularity through articles published in the newspaper. A very popular series was Saya Lun's *daung tika* (Peacock Commentary) serialised in 1919. It supported the delegations of the YMBA in London by advocating Home Rule in Myanmar. The

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Robert Taylor (1987), *The State in Myanmar*. London: C. Hurst & Company: p. 208.

commentaries discussed international developments in a literary as well as popular style, and thus disseminated political meaningful “entertaining knowledge”.<sup>1</sup>

Even before 1919, the issue of how entertaining social and political commentaries could be had contributed to a split in the YMBA. The Sun had taken up the “shoe question” - whether Westerners had to follow the Myanmar custom to take off their shoes when entering a pagoda or not – in a quite aggressive way. Cartoons criticised the British shoe-bearers as well as their (alleged) Myanmar supporters in a way that caused some of the educated British members to leave the association. The most prominent to leave was U May Oung, co-founder of the Burma Research Society and minister for education in the Executive Council under the Dyarchy System.

The 1920s saw many more splits in the Myanmar nationalist movements and the decline of their reputation in the eyes of the public. At the same time, new and different trends developed. In the field of Myanmar literature, the Khitsan (Test the Times), writers developed the artistic techniques of writing prose and lyrics that left old traditions behind. On the other hand, J.S. Furnivall founded the World of Books magazine in 1924 and the Myanmar Education Extension Association in 1928. Both served the purpose of bringing the young generation of Myanmar students in contact with the diverse amount of international literature and stimulating a discussion on current affairs. Furnivall's magazine was bilingual thus stressing the importance of a good performance in English.

Almost unnoticed by the general public, a new chapter in Myanmar history was opened in 1930 with the Dobama Asiayone entering the country's political and literary scene. Shortly after the Indo-Myanmar riots of May 1930, the self-proclaimed Thakin (Master) Ba Thoung launched a series of short articles dealing with the lessons that could be drawn from the riots. In August of the same year, a second series followed concentrating on the necessity of modernization of Myanmar and the acquisition of modern knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

These articles did not have a great impact on public opinion. This was different with the *Dobama*-Song, which was introduced to the public on July 20, 1930, on Shwedagon Hill after a rehearsal at Thaton Hall on the University Campus. In both cases, Maung Nu was present at both

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<sup>1</sup> Tin Htway (1972), „The Role of Literature in Nation Building (With Special Reference to Myanmar)“, in: Bernhard Grossmann (Ed.), *Southeast Asia in the Modern World*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harassowitz (Schriften des Instituts für Asienkunde in Hamburg, Bd. 33).

<sup>2</sup> The Myanmar text is reprinted in Khin Yi,(1988), *The Dobama Movement in Myanmar (1930-1938)*. Ithaka, New York: South East Asia Program, Cornell University. Appendix: pp. 1-9; 13-35. (U) Maung Maung gave a translation of parts of the texts into English in the appendix on his MA thesis *From Sangha to Laity*. These translations were reprinted in Hans-Bernd Zöllner (2000), *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*. Hamburg, Lit-Verlag: pp. 508-513.

occasions.<sup>1</sup> The association's song propagated “Myanmarness” as an attitude to regain the former glory of the country and quickly made the Thakin movement well known. It was this entertaining as well as political piece of music that helped the movement to survive until 1935, when a new generation of leaders transferred the loose organisation into a strong one. The Dobama Asiayone gained strength after a split in 1938. Nu, Aung San and other participants of the 1936 student strike had joined the movement and became members of the Dobama's “Thakin Kodaw Hmine-faction”. The foundation of the NBC happened shortly before the “year of strife”, 1938 or 1300 of the Myanmar era. It is thus closely linked to the turbulent developments in Myanmar and their interrelation with the pre-war situation all over the contemporary world.

### **The Genesis of an Idea**

According to U Tun Aye, co-founder of NBC, the idea of the establishment of a book club was conceived in India.<sup>2</sup> Tun Aye and Nu had gone there to meet Thein Pe, who had just published his controversial book *Thetpongyi* at the *Myanmar Alin* (Light of Myanmar) Press, where Nu and Tun Aye were working. Because U Nu had written the book's foreword, he was accused by monks of damaging Buddhism. To avoid trouble from members of the *sangha* and their lay supporters, he and Tun Aye traveled to India undertaking a pilgrimage to Bodhgaya.<sup>3</sup>

In Calcutta, Thein Pe introduced the two travelers to student groups that turned out to be types of communist cells. Here, they borrowed some books on socialism, but they did not understand them. They later bought novels such as Maxim Gorki's “Mother” and Michail Sholokhov's “Virgin Soil Upturned” and “And Quiet Flows the Don”. They eagerly read these books on their pilgrimage and got an idea what “socialism” meant. Later during their half year long journey, they turned to books published by the Left Book Club in London like Page R. Arnot's “A Short History of the Russian Revolution” that Nu eventually translated into Burmese after their return. Excited by their reading Nu and Tun Aye resolved to translate books such as these into the Myanmar language and culture, then publish them and thus spread the doctrine of socialism in Myanmar.

If this story contains at least some truth, the godparents of NBC were angry Myanmar monks who caused a Buddhist pilgrimage, communist discussion groups and Russian authors of socialist

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<sup>1</sup> On the *Dobama*-Song see: Khin Yi (1988): 6-10; Ohn (1963), “Face, Butterfly and Two Songs: A Prologue to a Study of the Elements of Myth and Magic in Myanmar Politics”, in: *The Journal of the Myanmar Research Society*. 46,1, June 1963: 11-25 and Zöllner 2000: pp. 145-180.

<sup>2</sup> Interview given to Soe Myint Latt (Soe Myint Latt, “Nagani U Tun Aye“, in: *Dee Hlaing Magazine*: 163-170: pp. :165-166). See part 3 of this Volume.

<sup>3</sup> This journey is neither mentioned in Butwell's biography nor in U Nu's autobiography.

novels. That shows that the NBC came into existence through a combination of accidents. On the other hand, it was a product of a turbulent period of world history and the wind of change that could be felt all over the globe.

The three protagonists of this story were dedicated to letting this wind of change blow powerfully through their homeland. All of them had had contact with literature. Thein Pe was a well-known writer, Nu had literary ambitions and Tun Aye as the youngest – he was born 1917 – started his political life as a seller of magazines in his home town of Dawei. All had experienced how books helped them understand new ideas. All of them were full of enthusiasm, idealism and confidence. They had a model that could be used as a guide for the realisation of their idea: Victor Gollancz's Left Book Club.

In 1936, British publisher Gollancz together with John Strachey, a Labour Member of Parliament (MP) and Harold Laski, Professor of Political Science at the London School of Economics, formed this Club. The main aim was to spread socialist ideas and to resist the rise of Fascism in Britain. Beginning with a membership of 10,000, numbers rose to 50,000 by 1939.<sup>1</sup> This success may have made the young Myanmar believe that a similar interest could be awakened in Myanmar, too. On the other hand, the first books published after the return from India showed the very independent way in which the English model was taken up. Both elements, international outlook and autonomous implementation, are typical for many of the Myanmar book club's activities. This raises the crucial question of how these two elements were related.

### **The Beginnings**

If the idea of the Club was conceived in India in early 1937 – the date has still not been confirmed – it took Nu and Tun Aye about 9 months to deliver. The British Intelligence mentioned the name “Nagani” in December 1937 and noted: “Its aim is to train leaders to fight against Imperialism and it proposes to issue books in furtherance of this object and to publish a monthly periodical to be called the ‘Nagani News Bulletin’”.<sup>2</sup>

The note apparently depended on information from the Myanmar press and indicated that NBC did not commence its activities with a big bang, but instead began slowly and softly. A proper name for the new establishment had to be found. Deedok U Ba Choe, who ran the journal that became

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<sup>1</sup> For a recent publication on the Left Book Club see Paul Laity (ed.) (2001), *Left Book Club Anthology*. London, Weidenfeld & Nicholson.

<sup>2</sup> British Library-Oriental and Indian Office Collection, M/5/54: 22. December 37 is also stated as date of foundation in Patricia Milne's introduction to Thein Pe Myint's Short stories (Milne, Patricia M. (1975), *Selected Short Stories of Thein Pe Myint*. Translated, with Introduction and Commentary by Patricia M. Milne. Supervised by Mrs. Anna Allott with the help of Professor Hla Pe. Rangoon, Sarpay Yeiktha Publishers: p. 14).

part of his name, had an idea. Nu, who had worked for the journal, was born on a Saturday, Tun Aye as well. Naga was the animal of that day, and the word “ni” fit into the astrological Myanmar alphabet.<sup>1</sup> *Nagani* was an auspicious name.

As a next step, rooms had to be rented at a low cost. A shop situated in the West Wing of Scotts Market No. 151 served the purpose of office and meeting place. Money had to be raised and arrangements had to be made for the selection, printing and distribution of the books.

U Tun Aye recalled that he and Nu contributed 500 Rupees each,<sup>2</sup> a sum equaling US \$375 at that time. Nu got the money from his wife, Tun Aye got the money from his parents, who wanted to help him study in London where he could live in the house of Maurice Collis, Deputy Commissioner in Mergui at the time. However, they had to help Deedok U Ba Choe's Deedok journal, so they spent 150 Rupees to buy paper. Therefore, only 850 Rupees were left to start the Nagani enterprise.<sup>3</sup>

No wonder that the first book by the new company, Thein Pe's biography of Saya Lun, did not yet carry the Nagani name. It was published and printed by U Tun Hla's Lawkadan Press in January 1938.<sup>4</sup> 2,000 copies were printed and were sold for a price of 2 Rupees, 8 Annas.<sup>5</sup> In those days, this was a modest print run with a rather high price.<sup>6</sup> Most books published at this time were sold for one Rupee or less. The need of a book club to publish books in great numbers at low prices was not fulfilled with this first book. The printing of this book was to pay homage to the patron of Myanmar's political literature, and thus it was thought that this act of respect would eventually bear fruit.

A list of the first several books published by Nagani suggested that improvisation was needed in launching this project. The next two books published were reprints. At first, Nu's one act play, which had previously been published in Ba Choe's Deedok journal<sup>7</sup> and second, Ba Khine's “Political History of Myanmar”, which also had already been published in 1936.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Soe Myint Latt: p. 168.

<sup>2</sup> The same information gives Kyaw Hoe in his MA-Thesis on the NBC (Kyaw Hoe (1975), *List of Books Published by the Nagani Book Society*. MA-Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Library Sciences, Yangon).

<sup>3</sup> Soe Myint Latt: p. 167.

<sup>4</sup> Soe Myint Latt: p. 169; in the “catalogue of books“ issued by the Judicial Department of the Government of Myanmar in accordance with section 19 of the provisions of the Press and Registration Act, 1867, January 15, 1938, is given as the day of publication or notification of the book.

<sup>5</sup> One rupie had 16 annas.

<sup>6</sup> A biography of the famous monk U Ottama was published by Bandoola Press in November 1937. 2,000 copies were printed, the price was 1 rupee.

<sup>7</sup> Nu 1975: p. 80.

<sup>8</sup> Tin Htway 1975: p. 174.

In the beginning, only few people carried the burden of the publishing business. If we look at the information given about authors, forewords and editors, the five books published were the work of three men: Ba Choe, Nu and Thein Pe. Ba Khine's "History" is an exception, but the author was a Fabian like Ba Choe and Nu. At 20 year old, Tun Aye had developed his skills of distributing printed material and learned a lot about the publishing and printing business. Thein Pe's book on the student strike, published in March or April 1938, was the first book that carries the name of "Tun Aye Press" as the publishing institution. The official Government records give the "Red Dragon Book Society" as publisher and the "Myanmar Cinema Journal Press Rangoon" as the printing-office.

Without more information, it was not clear what these different terms really meant. However, it was obvious that the "Nagani Society" was started as an enterprise organized along the lines of personal seniority. Ba Choe (born 1893), literary entrepreneur and politician, acted as the patron. Nu, born 1907, teacher, student leader and ambitious writer, was his protégée and the man who had shaped the idea of the Club. Thein Pe (born 1917), prolific and political conscious writer, contributed his writings. Tun Aye (born 1917) did the background work of organizing the "Nagani Society" meaning that he was the one who performed the different and sometimes odd jobs to implement the idea conceived in India.

Tun Aye remembered that because of the principle of seniority he had to do what Nu had envisaged, but many others contributed as well. He mentioned teachers and students from the National School Movement that started after the first University and School Strike in 1920. Everyone contributed to the best of their abilities.<sup>1</sup> Books became cheaper<sup>2</sup> and print runs increased<sup>3</sup> although in the first days of the enterprise, they could not bring out books according to what they had announced in the Nagani News.<sup>4</sup> But the perseverance of the people involved on the production and receiving sides made the regular production of books possible, which would soon impact the Myanmar book market of the time.

After some time, the enterprise was able to catch up with its announcement made to the public: "Nagani is a book club that translates good works from world literature, history, economics, politics and sells them at the low price of 10 Pay each. There is no admission fee, no monthly membership fee, no compulsory meetings, no duties as are imposed on members of other political, religious and

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<sup>1</sup> Soe Myint Latt: p. 168.

<sup>2</sup> The biography of José Rizal, published in May 1939, was sold for 10 annas.

<sup>3</sup> Of the above mentioned biography 3,050 copies were printed.

<sup>4</sup> A thorough investigation into the Nagani Newsletter will provide more detailed information.

economic associations. Everybody who buys monthly one book for six months is regarded an ordinary member. Persons who pay in advance for one year are regarded as special members and enjoy privileges.”<sup>1</sup>

Nagani wanted to make a difference. It was a difference of freedom and independence, the aim of the club's founders. This aim had to comply with the organization and the practice of running the club. The aim and the means were down to earth and utopian at the same time.

### **Success and Split**

The turbulent year of 1938, year 1300 according to the Myanmar era, began in early January with a strike in the oil fields of Chauk. In July, anti-Indian riots broke out. These events and the tense international atmosphere – end of September the Munich agreement was signed – contributed to an increase of public interest in political affairs of national as well as international importance. That created a demand for books and this demand was met by Nagani as well as other companies.<sup>2</sup>

Nagani was a newcomer to the publishing scene. Nevertheless, it became well known in a very short time due to a song that popularized it. This parallels the spreading of the Dobama Asiayone through the Dobama Song. A well known composer, Shwedaing Nyunt was approached and had to be taught about the aims of Nagani.<sup>3</sup> After the teaching he composed a song that was first performed at a special ceremony. A popular film star, Khin Maung Yin, sang and a famous actress, Dee Tha Khin Thway, danced. Ba Choe explained the aims of Nagani. The song became an immediate success. This was due not only to the tune, but also to the message. Both have survived the changes of time.<sup>4</sup>

Here is the text, translated by U Tin Htway:

#### **1. Stanza**

- a) To be free from poverty and paucity, (we) will guide and lead.  
(Indeed,) variety of gems, gold, silver are enriched. That is OUR NATION'S LAND.
- b) Poverty-stricken people will be able to do charity, (such as) building monasteries, also erecting pagodas.
- c) Similar to the times of Bo Bo Aung and Shin Ajjagona (when they helped poverty-stricken people) now, our predestined ostentatious time has arrived.

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<sup>1</sup> Kyaw Hoe: p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> In 1937, the Judicial Department registered 9 “political” books published in Myanmar, 8 of them written in Tamil. In 1938 the number increased to 15, eleven of them written in Burmese.

<sup>3</sup> Soe Myint Latt: p. 168.

<sup>4</sup> You can buy new recordings of the song on MC and CD in Yangon's shops.

### Chorus

- a) (We) will be healthy (and) wealthy, protected and defended from all the dangers and perils.
- b) Poverty-stricken people will soon be rich and no more out-of date (and left behind).
- c) With the power and the potency of our *Nagani* Book Club, poverty-stricken people will not be withered or wasted. They are bound to enjoy “Special Results”.
- d) (We are) going to establish a “NEW AGE” (for us), peaceful and prosperous,
- e) With the competency and capability of *Nagani* Book Club, (we are) going to raise (our) “National Pride, Glory and Honour”.

### 2. Stanza

- a) For (everyday living) dwelling and eating, (these things) must be disburdened and unencumbered without delayed.
- b) We, the *Nagani* Book Club, will endeavour to help poverty-stricken people feel comfortable and content.
- c) The Light of (our) Religion, The Light of Buddha *Sasana* will be luminous and glitter.
- d) Our Land of Myanmar people will be prosperous and successful. Golden Rain will fall (i.e., our land will be blessed with prosperity, happiness and well-being).

### Chorus

### 3. Stanza

- e) All sorts of perfections will be secured and protected. Without practicing alchemy day and night, (we) can enjoy (good and prosperous) results.
- f) Myanmar – our Myanmar Land, with the power and potency of *Nagani* Book Club, will be able to submerge in to the earth (or) will be able to fly in the sky.
- g) For the poverty stricken people will not suffer scarcity (in terms of) money, (we will) struggle and endeavour. Aiming (to reach our National Goal) (we) will guide and show “THE WAY OUT”.

### Chorus

The last words of the song – in Myanmar: *htwet yat* - refer to the legend of Bo Bo Aung, a Myanmar mystic whose story was very popular at that time and whose name is mentioned in the

song.<sup>1</sup> The same words are used in Nu's translation of Arnot's "Short History of the Russian Revolution"- a Red Book Club-book - published in November 1938. The title was changed to "Way Out of Poverty", a clear allusion to the Nagani Song.

A thorough interpretation of the song cannot be given here. In short, it could be stated that the world of knowledge represented by the Nagani books was incorporated<sup>2</sup> into an entertaining song that recalled Myanmar's mythological history.

The song was a big success and helped to promote the club and its different activities. In May 1938, the first magazines were published. According to the "catalogue of books" kept by the Judicial Department of the Government, 4,000 copies each were printed in Vol. 1 and 2 of the magazine. Both were sold at the price of 3 Annas, volume I had 44 pages, while volume II had 36 pages. The number of copies printed increased from 2,000 at the beginning of 1938 to 5,000 at the end of 1938.<sup>3</sup> In 1939, almost each book published was around 200 pages in length and 5,000 copies were printed at an average price of 10 Annas. Publications of a similar kind by other enterprises were more expensive and fewer copies in average were printed.

During 1938, the club reached its goal of publishing at least one book a month. Books were delivered to the members who had not to pay any membership fee but just to pay for the books. Besides these monthly publications, other books were published with high printing runs, such as Thein Pe's booklet on the Indo-Myanmar riots of 1938. Thein Pe's book was 24 pages long. 10,000 copies were printed in Rangoon<sup>4</sup> and each was sold for 6 Annas. The date of publication, mid-September 1938, was close to the happenings reported and analyzed in the book. This indicates the club's endeavour to publish up-to-date books, thus influencing public opinion as well as being economically successful by meeting the demands of the market.

From the beginning, there was a constant shortage of capital due to the financial status of the founders and the aim to sell books at low prices. U Tun Aye remembers the difficulty of raising 500 Rupees to pay a government required insurance fee for the publication of the Nagani journal.<sup>5</sup> According to U Tun Aye, students from various parts of Myanmar offered their pocket money to raise the needed funds. Another consequence of this capital shortfall was that Nagani had to publish

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<sup>1</sup> See Ba Maw (1968), *Breakthrough in Myanmar. Memoirs of a Revolution*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press: pp. 67-69.

<sup>2</sup> On the concept of "incorporation" see O. W. Wolters (1982), *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives*. Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

<sup>3</sup> According to U Tun Aye, there were 5,000 members as well (Soe Myint Latt: p. 169).

<sup>4</sup> Another 1,000 copies were printed in Bassein by Maung Ba Kun.

<sup>5</sup> Soe Myint Latt: p.169.

more books than other companies to turn a profit. At least in the beginning, the distribution of the books was carried out partly by volunteers who carried them in rucksacks to customers in remote areas.<sup>1</sup>

The idealism and cooperation together with a smart publication policy that had helped the club to establish itself as a leading enterprise could not overcome the laws of the business, however. More financial problem occurred in late 1938 with a failed attempt to obtain a loan or increase donations.<sup>2</sup> That led to serious discussions as to whether or not to transform the club into a financially strong company that sold shares. Nu supported the idea, but Tun Aye was against it. Finally when Nagani Publishing House, Ltd. was founded at the beginning of 1939 with a capital of 50,000 Rupees, which was divided into 500 shares each worth 100 Rupees, Tun Aye decided to leave and to set up his own enterprise that aimed to uplift the revolutionary spirit of the people without relying on the capitalist way of doing business. To avoid a confrontation with Nu, who was his senior, he set up the Myanmar Publishing House on Phayre Street, which published its first book in June, 1939.<sup>3</sup> The new enterprise followed the pattern of Nagani and was popularized by a song as well.<sup>4</sup> The books were sold at still lower prices, 8 Annas on average, but with a lower print run (3,000 in the beginning).

The new Nagani Company moved its headquarters at 248 Lewis Street. The original place on Scotts Market was kept as a place for selling books and for meetings and discussions.

### **The Final Years**

From mid 1939 on, the Nagani idea was realized by two corporations that had the same goal but tried to realize it through different methods. Nu's Publishing House tried to incorporate the ways of doing business and to prove that a Myanmar company could educate people as well as be an economic success. Tun Aye's Publishing House tried to preserve the idea of a “pure” and uncorrupt enterprise that did not compromise its aims of a “new Myanmar” with the old ways of doing things (i.e., doing business).

There was cooperation as well as competition between the two enterprises. Some authors published at both firms with similar topics. For example, Myoma Saya Hein, who had written two

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with U Htein Win on January 13, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> U Tun Aye tells about an unsuccessful attempt to get a donation of 5000 Rupees from by Sir U Thwin, a MP of Mergui, because Nu and Tun Aye missed the fixed time of appointment by five minutes (Soe Myint Latt: p. 170).

<sup>3</sup> The first title carried the programmatic title “The World of Capitalists” written by student leader Ba Hein. (See Vol. 3 of this series.)

<sup>4</sup> The Burmese text of the “Song of the Capitalist World” is reprinted in Kyaw Hoe's MA thesis. A proper translation into English is still missing.

books about the Irish revolution published by Nagani in August and September 1939, wrote another book together with Khin Myo Chit on “Secret Agents of the War” brought out by Tun Aye's Publishing House in October, 1939. Moreover, both enterprises seemed to have distributed the books of the other publishing house together with their own publications.<sup>1</sup> This made quite an impact on the Myanmar book market of that time. In the second half of 1939, the Judicial Department registered 10 books published by Nagani (at least three more apparently did not make it into the register) totaling 44,800 copies and six by the Myanmar Publishing House totaling 19,500 copies. That gave each enterprise a leading position in the field of book publishing in Myanmar and the possibility to inform readers about current affairs and their historical background.<sup>2</sup>

The quantity of books printed declined during the first half of 1940 on, although the publication scheme remained the same. If the introduction of pre-censorship after the outbreak of the war in Europe had an impact cannot be said until more sources, in particular the Nagani magazines are consulted. When the clubs ceased publishing during the first half of 1941, the struggle for independence due to the dissemination of knowledge had turned from theory into practice.

The Freedom Bloc had connected the promise of Myanmar's independence by the British with the Myanmar support of the British in the War. Thakin Nu, like other members of the Bloc, was arrested. He was sentenced to two years in prison in July 1940 and brought to Mandalay jail. Here, he continued to produce write novels, such as “Man, the wolf of man”.<sup>3</sup>

Time had shown how effective the dissemination of knowledge undertaken by Nagani Book Club, the Myanmar Publishing House and other similar enterprises of the pre-war era was and could be. The main issue to be discussed was that of the quality of knowledge disseminated through the activities of the enterprises. In terms of quantity, the figures were impressive. In three and a half years time, Nagani published more than 70 books<sup>4</sup> and one or two magazines on a monthly basis.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kyaw Hoe: p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Because of the limited reliable sources available it is difficult to give a precise assessment of the share of the “two Nagani” clubs in the segments of “entertaining knowledge” of the book market in the late `30s and the early `40s. To give an approximate idea, the entries of the 41 books in Myanmar registered in the “catalogue of books” under the headings “Biography” (5), “History” (5) and “Politics” (31) shows: Nagani and BPH together published 17 books with a total of 113,300 copies (Ba Hein's book on “Students' Struggle” totaled 50,000 copies) with an average number of 184 pages each. The 24 books published by other companies totaled 56,850 copies (among them 10,000 copies of the minutes of the Moulmein conference of the Dobama Asiayone) with an average number of 100 pages each.

<sup>3</sup> The work was serialized after the war in the *Guardian Magazine*.

<sup>4</sup> The number of 71 books given by Kyaw Hoe in his thesis does not seem to be correct.

<sup>5</sup> Details about how many magazines were printed throughout the period are not yet known.

Moreover, Nagani Press also printed for other publishing agencies.<sup>1</sup> This was, in any case, a great achievement for an enterprise started by amateurs.

### 3. Books and More

The publication of books is just a means towards a goal, Myanmar's independence. Independence has a comprehensive nature and the twofold assertion of the Nagani Book Club expresses it in its program as well as in its song reflect this nature in different ways. The following points examine this comprehensiveness from different angles. It should be stressed that this examination can only be a preliminary one because of the still very limited knowledge of the club's publications, activities and inner life. Moreover, the following remarks are mainly based on the activities of the Nagani Book Club, but more specifically the Nagani Publishing House.

#### Classification and Nature of Published Books

The “catalogue” of the Judicial Department classified the books published according to language under 27 rubrics plus a miscellaneous section, some of them denoting traditional aspects of Myanmar life like Astrology and Palmistry.<sup>2</sup> Nagani books were or could be<sup>3</sup> listed under at least 11 of these categories: anthology, biography, drama, economics, fiction, history, politics, natural science, sexology, sociology, travels. This enumeration alone gives an impression of the broad spectra of themes the Nagani books dealt with. It also shows that the club's program was not comprehensive like an encyclopedic, but concentrated more on those issues that interested the reader as well as cultivated and educated the reader's mind.

Of course, the number of books falling under each rubric was quite diverse. There was only one book published in each of the following categories: “sexology”<sup>4</sup>, “natural science”<sup>5</sup> and “travel”.<sup>6</sup> The “travel” book provided a good example for the problems of a simple classification and the special meaning of “comprehensiveness” that Nagani tried to achieve. Nu's report of the journey into Chiang Kai Chek's China was beyond doubt more than a simple travelogue. It tried to give a

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<sup>1</sup> According to the “catalogue of books”, in December 1940 Nagani Press printed a book about the student martyr Ko Aung Gyaw published by the All-Burma Students' Union.

<sup>2</sup> The rubric included Agriculture, Anthology, Architecture, Arts, Astrology, Biography, Drama, Economics, Fiction, History, Language, Law, Literature, Medicine, Music, Palmistry, Philosophy, Physical Culture, Poetry, Politics, Religion, Science (Natural), Sex(ology), Sociology, Sports, Travels, and Zoology. Not all rubrics appeared in every issue. “Sports” and “Zoology”, for example, appeared only once each between 1937 and 1941.

<sup>3</sup> The catalogue was not complete and many books could, of course, be classified under a variety of headings.

<sup>4</sup> Hla Shwe, *A Treatise on Sex* (or: Husband or Wife), January 1940.

<sup>5</sup> Myat Soe, *Our World*, November 1940.

<sup>6</sup> Nu, *Gandalarit*, May 1940, a report on the travel of a Myanmar delegation to China 1939/40.

general picture of the country and was kind of a follow up to previous publications of the Club that had dealt with Sun Yat Sen's ideas. One can assume that Nu's book presented a broad picture of nationalist China that helped the Myanmar reader to understand his or her own situation. For a more specific assessment, the book had to be reviewed in detail - and one of the main purposes of this paper is to invite other scholars to write such a review.

Let's have a look back to the categorization of Nagani books. Most of the books were listed as dealing with politics, history or biographies, while other books were written as novels. Here once more it must be noted that this categorization is only a formal one. Thein Pe wrote two books entitled "Boycotters" that were listed as novels. However, they dealt with the very political issue of the student strikes in recent Myanmar history and thus contained facts and knowledge in the form of fiction and entertainment.

The club's publications transgressed the boundaries of given categories in more than this way. Some books needed headings not yet invented by the British officials. This is true for two books by Ohn Myint on the Shan princess Saw Mun Hla and "Our Shan State". In today's terminology, these writings could be labeled as dealing with one of the "Ethnic Nationalities".

The club clearly had a general educational purpose. The "Nagani Book of Verse", published in June 1940, showed that this is true in a special sense, too. The book, which was written in English and sold for 1 Rupee, gave interpretations of eight English poems for students including model questions. The higher price shows that this publication was a special one. It could be assumed that Nagani had become a trademark that could be used for commercial purposes.

### **The Reception of World Literature**

Another way of categorizing the books was to look for the Non-Myanmar models that were used to write the published books and to investigate the mode of how these models were transformed or transplanted into the Myanmar language and culture. The latter tasks need a detailed study of the particular books and the material used in them. Before such an inquiry, the following general remarks need to be made.

If one had to name any general theme that may have influenced the selection of foreign books to be translated or transformed as a Nagani publication, the theme of "success", in a very broad sense, would be the first choice. The books published in 1938 illustrated this statement. Three books (No. 4, 9 and 11)<sup>1</sup> informed the reader about the first two of Sun Yat Sen's "Three Principles",

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<sup>1</sup> The numbers given follow the numeration of Kyaw Hoe's thesis.

Nationalism and Democracy, and thus about the background of the Chinese way to modern life. The two books on democracy outline the Chinese politician's and political philosopher's view of the bourgeois revolutions in Europe and America. These events in the West were presented to the readers from an Asian perspective.

The biography (No. 6) of another prominent Asian advocate for his country's independence, José Rizal, was also introduced. José Rizal was a Philippine national hero, who was executed by the Spanish in 1896. The path to independence was a very thorny one and required the readiness to sacrifice one's life. That was one lesson that could be drawn from Rizal's life and death.

Three other books published during the “Year of Strife” introduced socialist ideas and practice to Myanmar readers. In the context of the strikes of that year, Soe's “Socialism“ (No. 7) and Nu's translation of Arnot's already mentioned work on the Russian Revolution (No. 13 and 14) could be read as handbooks unveiling the secrets of success of a new political concept. Thein Pe's first novel dealing with the student strikes in Myanmar (No. 5) and the same author's analysis of the Burmese-Indian riots (No. 12) showed that Myanmar was in line with international developments and on its own way out of poverty and dependence.

Finally, the first volume of Nu's translation of Dale Carnegie's bestseller “How to Win Friends and Influence People” was published in 1938, two years after publication in the United States. According to U Tun Aye, Nu saw a copy of the book in a Yangon bookstore, realized that it had become a tremendous success worldwide and persuaded the Club's organizer to get it printed.<sup>1</sup> The book was a manual about how to sell material and immaterial goods to other people. In Myanmar, Nu's translation (the second part was published in 1939) was reprinted several times after the war. The 10<sup>th</sup> edition was issued in 2000.

The Nagani publications of the first year can be summarized under the heading “How to make independence a success – politically, socially and individually”. New topics unfolding under this heading were added over the course of time, most prominently books on Irish revolutionaries, spies all over the world and works that helped to understand the current world situation.

Without anticipating a detailed inquiry into the mode of how foreign sources were incorporated into the Nagani concept it can be stated that the selection was done in an eclectic and pragmatic manner and in accordance with the comprehensive goal of the Club.

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<sup>1</sup> Personal communication to the author.

### **Personal and Political Affiliation**

The Nagani Book Club was an independent enterprise and from 1939 on, a registered printing company. It was not formally affiliated with any political or societal group. But there were informal contacts. A note in the files of the British intelligence service showed that the Club was regarded as an anti-imperialist agency. In other word, it was seen close to the most radical of Myanmar independence movements, the Dobama Asiayone. A short look at the founders and contributors underlines this assumption. Thakin Ba Thaug, the founder, contributed four books and articles. Besides Nu, the young Thakin generation, was involved, too. Thakins Aung San, Ba Hein, Hla Pe, Soe and Thein Pe were contributors who gained prominence later. Thakins Bo and Tin Maung were less known. Thakin Than Tun together with Nu was responsible for the selection of books.<sup>1</sup>

But the Thakins from the beginning were only a minority among the founders, supporters and contributors of the NBC. This fact is in line with the later claim of the Association expressed in its manifesto (end of 1939) to represent the whole of Myanmar society including the non-Burmans. It could be assumed, again without anticipating further necessary studies, that the people who took part in the work of Nagani in one way or another represented the majority of the Myanmar political and intellectual class of that time with the exception of the “old Thakins” like Ba Sein and Tun Ok and U Saw and his followers.

What all these co-workers may have shared was a common albeit rather vague vision of the future of independent Myanmar. The Club was one means to express this vision in a manifold way. At least for some people, it was a means to discuss this vision and its implications. What we know is that the club's office at Scotts Market served as a meeting place as well as a business centre. U Nu in his memoirs recalls some important events that happened there.<sup>55</sup> What we do not know yet is the existence of group meetings both formal and informal at other places after the model of the Left Book Club.

### **4. The Club's Impact**

Based on this discussion, it would be premature to give a well founded assessment of the Nagani Book Club's impact on Myanmar history both pre- and post-war. Therefore, only two very different statements will be presented here to underline the thesis, but it is absolutely necessary to further investigate further this matter.

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<sup>1</sup> Kyaw Hoe: p. 3.

A) Asked about his personal recollections of Nagani books, U Thet Tun, who must not to be introduced here, wrote:

“When I was eleven years old, I fell into a deep ditch and broke my thigh. That put an end to my athletic ambitions and turned me into a bookworm. I was attending the foremost nationalistic school of Myoma renowned for strong Myanmar language and weak English. Since political books in English were beyond my comprehension, Nagani books on politics in Burmese original or translation were my cup of tea.

I started with Thein Pe's biography of Saya Lun .... In his inimitable style of weaving political themes into poetry, he followed the tradition of Sibani Sayadaw and Achoketan Saya Pe. I am not sure if I fully understood his stanzas but I certainly enjoyed adoring the national literary hero.

Politics in plain prose was presented by Fabian U Ba Khine in his "Political History of Myanmar". It formed a good antidote for me to history books on Myanmar, which I later read in English by foreign writers like G.E.Harvey.

"Nationalism" by Sun Yat Sen with a foreword by Deedok U Ba Choe was a tougher nut to crack for a teenage reader, probably because it was a double translation, from Chinese into English and then English into Myanmar.

More straightforward and, therefore, more inspiring was the Biography of Jose Rizal by Mogyo. The tragic end of the Filipino revolutionary at the hands of the Spanish colonialists added poignancy to the story of the brave western educated Asian hero. (Many many years later as Director of Asia at UNESCO, I took part in the dedication of the house he frequented in Paris with a historical plaque).

A story of successful nation building was provided by Tun Kyaing's translation of Kemal Ataturk's biography. The Turkish dictator's forceful modernization of the former Sick Man of Europe appealed to the radicalism inherent in every youthful heart.

For the same reason I enjoyed reading Mya Daung Nyo's "The World's Secret Organisations", which included Japan's Black Dragon.

Myoma Saya Hein was my history teacher at school. So naturally his book on "Irish Revolution" as well as his translations of Bratt O'Connor's "Me and Michael Collins", and Dan Breen's "My Fight for Irish Freedom" became my extracurricular readings.

I also remember reading U Nyi Pu's "De Valera", a success story of struggle and fulfillment. One reason why there were so many Irish titles in the Nagani series may be the common struggle against British Imperialism.

For lighter reading I enjoyed U Nu's translation of Dale Carnegie's "How to Win Friends and Influence People" in the hope doing the same.

I also tried to understand my boyhood hero Strike Leader Dr. Hla Shwe's "Capitalism" as well as "Husband and Wife" but failed probably due to age and inexperience.”

B) If you look after “Nagani” in one of the internet's search machines you will get over 1,750 results. Most of them reflect the activities of the Web site address [www.nagani.com](http://www.nagani.com). The enterprise behind this site introduces itself as “a guide to prosperity and happiness with a lot of information on Myanmar”. Its a company dealing with information about Myanmar (news, business, entertainment, travel etc.). The only link to the activities of the Book Club is the reference to the Nagani Song that can be downloaded if your computer provides the appropriate software. You will discover, too,

some other Myanmar firms carrying the name and that there is a dining place in Tokyo named Nagani and an Indian company producing and selling cold drinks and deep fried food. In short, today, the name Nagani has been almost fully commercialized.

U Tun Aye could take these findings as a late justification for setting up his non-commercialized enterprise that was solely dedicated to the dissemination of the pure truth in printed form. On the other hand in looking back he admitted that he was too purist when he opposed, for example, the early publication of Dagon Taya's novel "May" as a Nagani book.

In a way, the task of providing entertaining knowledge as a means to educate people in meaningful ways along a path between dogmatic or purely scientific instruction and sheer commercialized diversion is still an unfinished task not just in Myanmar but all over the world.

## **5. Invitation to Join the "Club of Researchers"**

It has been mentioned earlier that the main purpose of this paper was to invite others to participate in the further exploration of the Nagani Book Club. If we compared the enterprise to an iceberg, only the proverbial top of it has been discovered so far. It cannot be doubted that further investigation is worthwhile because the Club's activities were located at the interface between Myanmar and the contemporary world at a crucial period of Myanmar's and the world's history.

The following is an incomplete list of tasks that should be done to obtain a fuller picture of the NBC's performance and importance:

1. The writing of "book reports" on the books published that tell us how international literature and wisdom was transferred into Myanmar language and culture. Besides a short summary, the reports also should inform the reader on how the alien models merged indigenous and foreign thought, coined new phrases and, if possible, assessed the book's importance for Myanmar's intellectual and literary history.
2. Producing short biographies of the Nagani authors and translators as well as of the foreign authors of the works adopted are needed.
3. Collecting and evaluating material other than books connected to the NBC, such as copies of the Nagani-Magazine, records of the Nagani-Song, books for use in schools published and others.
4. Listing secondary literature on the NBC in Myanmar language, informing about how to get access to the sources and translating some of them into English.
5. Collecting oral remembrances and assessments of the NBC and translating some of them.

Most of these tasks can best be performed in Myanmar. Most of the Nagani books are available at the Universities Central Library. Most of the sources listed under points 2 to 5 are available here. It is intended to publish the contributions together with this paper as a series of working papers.

### **III. INFORMATION ABOUT U TUN AYE**

Compiled by Thakin Hla Kun

#### **1. Life Sketch of U Tun Aye**

- Born January 17, 1917 of Forest Officer U Po Thein at Kannyon Quarter of Dawei town in the Southern part of the country. Mother's name was Daw Shin.
- Passed 10th Standard (Pre-university Level) in 1936 from Govt. High School of Dawei. He was one of the 1936 students' strike leaders at Dawei, closely working together with U Ba Swe, who later became Socialist Party Leader after World War II, as well as the deputy prime minister in the first government of the independent Burma. (U Ba Swe also served as prime minister for several months.)
- In 1937 (December) U Tun Aye founded the Nagani Book Club together with former Prime Minister U Nu (Thakin Nu). But, owing to his disagreement against forming the Nagani Book Club into a private publishing house (a company limited), he parted ways to establish his own book club with the name of Tun Aye Book House from 1938 to 1941.
- Then, when the Burma Independence Army's civil administration branch for Yangon was formed in 1941-42 he served on that branch called PPC (Peace Preservation Committee)
- Later he became the principal of the Central Cooperative School in 1942-45.
- When the country rose against the Japanese occupation army in March 1945, he led a section of the Resistance Movement.
- He became an audit officer of the People's Construction Corporation of the Govt. for three years up to 1949.
- Then came the Civil War in March 1948. He took up arms with the Communist Party of Burma against the Nu Government as one of the central leaders. He was arrested in the Delta Region and released one year later.
- He served the Gen. Ne Win Govt. as a member of the managing committee of the Trade Corporation No.5 (textiles) from 1971 to 1976 and then retired from that post.
- Since then he had lived at the Nagani Garden, Bagone Quarter of the Insein Town.
- He died on September, 27, 2001.

## **2. Translation of an Interview given by U Tun Aye**

(Thakin Hla Kun comments are put in brackets. Translation was completed 9/21/05 in four days.)

### **Foreword by Editor Soe Myint Latt, who interviewed the founder of the NAGANI Book Club on Sunday, June 30, 1991:**

If one wants to talk about the history of Burma's (Myanmar's) independence struggle, one cannot leave out the role of the Nagani Book Club. The life of the Burmese people then was one of slavery under an alien rule. So the spirit of national liberation and anti-imperialism was innate (inborn, natural). The NAGANI Book Club made a huge effort to awaken that spirit by conveying to the people the leftist literature which has begun to make its way into the world literature in a dominant and popular style. This it did by publishing translated as well as original books to help people gain up-to-date progressive political outlook.

Therefore, it is indisputable that the Nagani Book Club had served, from the historical viewpoint, as a "brick in the construction of an edifice" and as a "grain of sand in the building material" in the struggle for national liberation.

As one of its founders, U Tun Aye is still living (in 1991) I could meet him several times in that year to try to make a picture of the birth and progress of the Nagani Book Club through repeated interviews made in 1991.

(The interviews took place from 30 June 1991, by taping on a cassette).

Editor Soe Myint Latt, of the Tidal Wave Magazine (now defunct)

In the interviews, his friends (painter Yin Min Paik and poet MM Htek Khine) helped the editor in arranging the meetings. So these two friends rightly earned the editor's deep thanks.

The interviews were held at U Tun Aye's residence - a place named Nagani Garden situated at No. 1299, Kamahtan-Kyaung Lane, Bogone Quarter of Insein Town, (12 miles north of Yangon City Centre)

Justifiably, people began to give U Tun Aye the name Nagani U Tun Aye since the inception of the book club in late 1937. He had a deep love for that name. So he gave the name also to his residence and garden. [Interviewers questions and U Tun Aye answers] follow:

#### **Question: May I know your native place and your life when young.**

**UTA:** My native town is Dawei (town) Kannyon Quarter, born on 17 January 1917. Father was U Po Thein, a forest Officer (Extra - Assistant Commissioner). I'm his fourth son. Attended the town's

National School to reach the Fourth Standard. Parents moved to Mawlamyine (on transfer) in 1930. Learned up to Sixth Standard there at the State High School. Parents were concerned of my growing age, lest I be strayed with growing number of friends and school mates. I had to move back to my native town, to my grandparents, to join again my old school. For me this showed me the correct path, because this school imparted in me love for the nation and country and the sacrificial spirit. The principal of that school then was one of the leaders of the first University Students' Strike. His name was U Ba Shin. While there in the 7th Standard I became fast friend of U Ba Swe who later became President of the AFPFL (Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League, which came into power after world War II). We have been very close and dearest comrades, despite our ideological difference and remained so to his last days.

**Question: If so, it seems that your political life took shape since you were a 7th Standard Student. Isn't it?**

**UTA:** Yes, you are right, I acted as cheroot and betel quid vender, holding the tray of those wares with neck-slings, on the national days (commemorating the victory of the afore-said Students' Strike) for the National School Fund. Also, I worked as a commission agent of popular progressive periodicals and magazines. Selling them on the streets. This kind of activity caused a sensation among the students and the townspeople. And then I stepped on the stage to raise my voice against the introduction of the Dyarchy system of government and also to oppose the formation Girl Guide corps.

Owing to these activities both of us (Ba Swe and myself) failed in the 7th Standard Examinations (held as a govt. exams at that time). Only next year we passed those examination.

When the school closed for summer vacation, Ba Swe accompanied me to go back to Mawlamyaing, to my parents. The town already had a branch of the Dobama Asiayone (the most popular nationalist political organization widely known as Thakin Asiayone). Dawei did not of have such a branch up to that time. So we made contact with leaders of Mawlamyaing branch, Thakin Than, Thakin Thin Hline and the like. We urged them to make Dawei town also have such a branch. Then the Youth Improvement Society branch for Mawlamyine town was formed with office at my house. Therefore, it may not be wrong to say that my political life started as a 7th Standard Student.

**Question: Did you pass the 10th Standard from the Dawei National School?**

**UTA :** No, I had to move to the town's Govt. High School, because National Schools no longer afford to remain as high schools and so had to down-grade as middle schools for lack of funds. Even so, teachers there did not get full pays. I passed the tenth (pre-university) exams from the govt school.

**Question: What did you go on to do then?**

**UTA :** When I became the 10th standard student in 1936, there occurred the all-Burma students' strike. I became my school's boycott leader, together with Ba Swe and Ba Maun (later he became managing director of Dawei Commercial Enterprise). Fortunately, I passed the 10th standard exams from the 'B' List. Ba Swe passed from the 'A' List. If I had passed like him, I would have to continue at the college and take the slavish education, which we don't want.

**Question: And after that?**

**UTA :** I did not go on with studies in accord with the slogans demanding "reform of the University education" and went on to open the National College on our own. At the same time I attended that college opened at the Myoma High School in Yangon. Thus I struggled at that College for about a year.

**Question: With whom did you struggle there?**

**UTA :** U Nu (Thakin Nu, ex-Prime Minister) and myself worked together as teachers, myself going on with my studies also. U Nu joined the University College to continue studies after working as a teacher at Pantanaw town (his wife's native). He joined hands with us after the 1936 Students' Strike. (He gave up law class after scraping the Bachelor of Arts pass Certificate) and becoming the top leader of the Strike.

I attended classes in the evenings and in the day I worked as an organizer full time. Our office was situated at the Myanmar-Alin (New Light of Burma) newspaper office. On the office staff were U Nu, U Tun On, myself and Ko Hula Pe (who became one of the thirty comrades that received military training from the Japanese in 1941 and founded the BIA, Burma Independence Army, during the British forces withdrawal from Burma) Ko Hla Pe became Bo Let-yar, a BIA colonel and a Brigadier-General in the Burma Army in 1945 after the Japanese were defeated. Ko Hula Pe, a close comrade of U Nu was also a member of the Thakin organization. The four of us struggled for

the National College for about one year, before the college sank into financial difficulties and it came to its ruin. I had to stop my studies.

**Question: May I know how the National College, that you all had tried to establish was formed. In what pattern was it?**

**UTA :** As I have told earlier we made the College Office at that newspaper HQ and the classes were opened at the Myoma (Central) High School Classes started at 5 pm lasting four hours up to 9 pm. President of the College was Sir U Thwin with Myoma Principal U Ba Lwin as Secretary. Teachers were exceptionally qualified persons from the Rangoon University such as Professor in Burmese U Aye Maung, Professor in English Dr. Htin Aung, Lecturer U Thet Tin taking Geography classes and other very senior female teachers like Daw Mya Sein.

**Question: By the way, let me know what kind of relation the popular novel entitled "Tet-phongyi" (The Modern Monk) that made such a ripple of mass protests in your days?**

**UTA :** Well, we three, I mean U Nu, Ko Thein Pe (a) Thein Pe Myint (who was the author of that novel) and myself worked together for the 1936 Students' Strike. After that strike, I stopped studying at the University and went to the National College as organizer in the days and student in the evenings. Ko Thein Pe (who later became a Communist leader) went out to Calcutta (India) University to attend the Master of Arts (MA) classes. He earned money for the university education working as a correspondent for the Myanma-Alin (New Light of Burma) newspaper while in India. He wrote that novel exposing clergy's immorality. (About a monk having an affair with a nun). He sent that novel to Myanma-Alin, which published it. The novel was meant to correct clergy's ways. In that novel, U Nu wrote an introductory note. When the novel hit the news stands, masses of monks was infuriated and staged strong protests.

**Question: How strong did this affair became and how big the ripple surged?**

**UTA:** Well, the violence of the protest grew into a siege of Myanma-Alin Office by monks. In addition, the Young Monks Association of Mandalay (ancient capital city) retaliated by publishing a novel named "Phongyi Yaukpha" (Monk's Brother-in-law). Clergy masses held a big meeting on the Shwedagon Pagoda Platform and demanded a religious apology by the authors, publisher and also by the introduction writer. They defined the book as sacrilegious. (Other religious organizations also issued protest statements)

**Question: What do you have to do with that "Tet-phone-gyi" novel. Is there any connection with the book to come-out?**

**UTA:** Although there was no direct connection with me, the introduction to that novel was the work of Ko Nu (Thakin Nu), so the connection spread to me as Ko Nu's comrade, so to say.

The problem has come about from that book. Thein Pe was already in India. He was the author. So, I told Nu that I would go to India. Nu agreed saying that we also would get the chance to visit the pagodas there to worship. We spent 16 kyats for each of us for the trip to India. When we got there we put up at the Buddhist Rest House, donated by Sir U Thwin, with Thein Pe. We stayed there for about one and a half months. Then we moved to a room, rented place. (Incidentally, we happened to get the chance to attend the funeral of King Thibaw's third daughter.)

**Question: What new experiences did you come across while you were staying in India after accidentally you had to sojourn there?**

**UTA:** Like I said before, the travel was meant to stay away a short while from the clamour and to pay homage to the pagodas there. But when I reached there, Thein Pe came to take me on a round. He was quite settled there. I was really young and green then. At first, I did not know what he meant to do. Anyway I went along. I became interested to watch young people talking and discussing in English language. So I gave my attention. Only afterwards, I came to learn they were holding a (communist) cell meeting. The subjects they were discussing were communism, etc. So we borrowed books to read I did not understand what were those in those books. After some time I bought from the book stall books easily understandable. (Even so, I could not make out all written there.)

But I found relish in such novels as Maxim Gorky's "Mother" and Mikhail Sholokou's "Virgin Soil Upturned". Reading such books, I came to learn the essence of Socialism. Do you know how much I liked those books? I could not drop them from my hands even on the way to pagodas. We take turns to read those books. Only later we came to have to read the books by Lenin and others put out by the Left Book Club of England. Those books were easier to read and we came to like them. For instance, we read ABC of Communism by R. Page Arnot. This book, Ko Nu translated giving it the name "Way out for the poor". In this way we stayed in India for five or six months. During the stay at the Buddhist Rest House for about two months reading books, going on a pilgrimage and attending discussions at the communist cells, an idea hit me. The idea was: it would be good to disseminate Socialism in our country with the help of these books bought in India. So, I consulted

Ko Nu. He readily agreed. And then and there we formed a book club (in our heads). This came accidentally and this represented a start of the path to a future plan that came from a turning point I did not expect to come. In a way this represented a foetus that came into being to be born as Nagani.

**Question: Kindly enlighten me in some detail how you have to struggle to bring the Nagani birth in Burma after it became a foetus in India.**

**UTA:** Before the Nagani Book Club was to be born, my idea was to convey the leftist literatures connected with Socialism to the masses of people. So, we must work to send to our country the books we collected in India. But, the trouble was these books were banned by Burma Govt. It was not possible to send the books. This was the first difficulty. How did we overcome that difficulty? The time was 1937 when the problem as to whether Burma remains in the Indian State or separate from it. Separation gave the Burma Govt led by Dr. Ba Maw powers to scrap the ban. Dr. Ba Maw himself was a member of the left Book Club. Ba Maw gave permission to import these books. At last the books arrived in Burma.

Then we need money to use in establishing a book club which would make the people get the books, would make translations and publish at cheap prices so that large numbers of readers could have the books.

We showed this and that reason to our parents to milk money from them.

At the time my father was working as a forest officer at Myeik (town).

My parents wanted me to continue education as the age was only 18-19, they desired me to be a student. Their wish was for me to go to a school in England if I do not want education in Burma. They were prepared to send me there.

They could arrange if I agreed to go, because Mr. Maurice Collis, the former Deputy Commissioner of Dawei and Myeik, was my father's great pal. Help was sought from Maurice Collis and obtained. I was to stay at his house and attend school from there to sit for London Matric Examinations. Mr. M. said he would help and called me. Under this arrangement, my father sent me 500 kyats for the trip to London. I got the money but I did not go to London. U Nu also got 500 kyats from his wife. With these two sums we formed the book club.

Although, the two sums made K 1,000 we could not use all that money because Sayagyi (Senior Master) Deedok U Ba Cho (editor and proprietor of Deedok Journal) took K 150 from Ko Nu, on

loan for buying newsprint which he found needing for his journal. So we could use only K 850 to start the Book Club.

**Question: What aim did you have in giving the name "Nagani" (Red Dragon) to the book club? What was the idea behind such name-giving?**

**UTA:** It was Sayagyi Deedok U Ba Cho [who later became Minister of Information losing his life along with Bogyoke (General) Aung San on 19th July 1947, killed by assassins. He became a national martyr like other assassinated ministers] Sayagyi U Ba Cho had learned astrology - fortune telling. He gave the name 'Nagani' according to his calculation by astrology. We regarded him as our own teacher and guide. U Ba Cho's interpretation:

Ko Nu was Saturday-born and Dragon represents Saturday. Myself is also the same. English (British) is also represented by same planet whose sign also is a 'naga'. So Sayagyi added 'ni' (red) to the 'Naga' (dragon). Naga is a mythical serpent or dragon and it stands as the Saturday planet. We accepted Sayagyi's word and the name 'Nagani' was acquired.

**Question: Who took what role in the book club and in what form was it organized?**

**UTA :** As we have agreed while in India, the main operators were Ko Nu, who was like my elder brother, and myself. I gave practical form to his idea. But the people who offered help and supported most were students and school teachers. They worked voluntarily, not as the club's paid employees, They did what jobs they could do. When the time came for distributing the books, they took the job of packing and enjoyed the work in the collective effort like a family enterprise. It was really enjoyable.

The organization that gave the main support was the 'Dobama A si-ayone' (the Thakin nationalist political party). Without expecting anything in the way of remuneration it gave the Nagani maximum help. And it was the party to which Thakin Soe, Thakin Than Tun, Thakin Nu and others belong. The students also followed. There was no editorial group then like these days. Some did the translation, some saw to printing and binding and some oversaw the distribution part. Mutual help and collective work in the nature of voluntary enterprise of like-minded people.

**Question: How did you try to make the people get the books? How did people get the books? How did you do the publicity and agitational work?**

**UTA:** That question is quite important. Because it has to do in a big way with the song popularly known as "The Nagani Song" which is still in the mouths of the masses of people, (Sung by young and old day and night.) Actually, that song answers your questions. It was an attempt, successful at that, to publicise the Book Club for the people to come to know what it is.

The time was 1938.

When the Club picked up momentum, it was arranged to have U Nu to translate the book 'ABC of Communism' giving it the name "Way Out for the Poor". The aim was for the books to reach the hands of the people as wide as possible. On the basis of that translated book an arrangement was made to write a song which would enlighten the policy of the Club for the public. We had to seek the help of the famous song writer 'Shwe Daing Nyunt' to have the song written. He was rather a stranger to such political themes. So, the song could not be written overnight. So we held several short political discussion sessions with him to make him grasp the theme. Several days passed and elements of the political outlook and objective were assimilated. His comprehension of our need and his artistic skill merged for us to own that extraordinary vision—providing and enduring gem of the song.

Now, we have the song. Using the song, our book by U Nu enjoyed a ceremonial advertising honour. The ceremony took place at the City Hall, with the famous film actor and popular vocalist Khin Maung Yin taking the central duty of rendering the song. (Not only that, the famous dancer actress Thida Khin Htway was made to sing together with Khin Maung Yin, taking turns to dance and sing in a somewhat duet-like). This ceremony aroused the interest of the public in a big way. Sayagyi Deedok U Ba Choe also took part in the ceremony, explaining the formation and objectives of the Nagani Book Club.

The song jumped into the public mouth at once. Interest in Nagani grew. Books from Nagani Book Club earned wide encouragement.

This formed one of the organizational parts out of the various Nagani's activities.

**Question: After the Nagani Book Club had come into existence, how many members had enrolled into the Club and how it tried to go on with its life? In what form did it run?**

**UTA:** At that time there were about 5,000 members. There was no rule for members to give admission fees. Members could get a monthly issue (of a book) at 10 annas (8 Kyat) and non-members had to buy at 2 1/2 kyats.

This price for members and non-members is fixed on the model of Left Book Club of England. That Club, established by one Mr. Victor Gollancz, sold a leatherbound book at 7 shilling and six pence, and paper back sold at 2 shilling and six pence in those days.

Our Nagani Book Club made business relations with Left Book Club and I acted as its agent and importer of its books as well as organizer to deal with it. Suitable books I imported were made to be translated. The person who had made translations of the largest titles of books was Myoma Saya Hein (a Senior Teacher at the Myoma High School). He translated quite a number of books about the Irish Revolution, myself doing the selection of those subjects.

At those times people took much interest in Nagani publications as they were available at a cheap price and also "Saturday Nagani News Letter" came as supplements.

Another point was the political tide also was on the ascent. The number of supporters grew and encouragement heightened. So Nagani came to take a leading role for the country. At that time profit could be seen if an ordinary novel reached 1000 mark in sales. As for Nagani even at the very start, the printing of a single book hit 2000 mark. This could be seen as proof of the strength of people's support. It was no small success.

It was because Nagani's main aim was to open the political vision of the masses and to impart revolutionary spirit in them. That was why difficulties came up. When the Saturday Nagani News weekly was planned to publish the then government demanded a security of 500 kyats against infringement of press laws. This government action created such a big crisis for us. As a last resort Nagani had to make a direct approach for help to the reading public and members through appeals in the daily newspapers. You would see that from the old newspapers of that time. The appeal made a majority of students to save from their tea fund and pocket money and send it to Nagani. That was a very heartening act which made us extremely glad. Such an act of help entitling great gratitude! This development freed Nagani from the crisis caused by government's repressive step. Nagani regained normal position.

This can be said to be one example of mutual understanding and assistance given between the people and their cherished Nagani Book Club.

**Question: What book was the first to come out from the Nagani?**

**UTA:** It was "The Biography of Saya Lun" (Saya Lun was the national poet - author, veteran politician, widely known as Thakin Kodaw Hmaing, head of the Dobama Asiayone, father of Burmese literature, fighter for world peace, winner of Stalin Peace Prize and the great patriot who saw Burma's last king and Queen being taken away to India and who had to shed tears from the heart rending sight, at the young age of ten while he was a pupil at one of the great monasteries in Mandalay, the Royal capital). The book was written by Ko Thein Pe (Thein Pe Myint). Printed at Lawkadan Press.

**Question: Please let us, the younger generation, know some situation regarding literature of your time, your contemporary world of books, the scenes of your time, so to say.**

**ETA :** Well, the time was around 1938. At that time, a newspaper that worked almost together with Nagani was "Sai-thann". Quite popular. There were some others, too. The "Sai-thann" was edited and published by U Aung Myin, a native of Myeik, not far from our town, Dawei. We were quite close friends. The paper's motto was "Form business firms for the country to advance and develop". It was an economic slogan. He advocated economic advance. His wish was Burmese nationals must take the lead in national economy. His writings were mostly based on the themes of books by Herbert Kesset. Other magazines "Kyipwayay" and "Toetetyay" (Improvement and Advancement) also gained popularity.

The "Aung-lan-daw" Book House founded by Thakin Ant Gyi (a member of the House of Representative, a colonial parliament) also put out books of leftist leanings, etc. In the world of literature, books (mostly original and translated novels) by Shwe-U-daun, Mahar-Swe and P. Monin held big names and a wide market. Our Nagani entered the scene not from the economic business line, We entered from the political corner. The time was of a mass upheaval - the oilfield workers' strike and other mass actions were on the move. Political tide was rising - students also met at the Nagani, on their way, and leaders of Dobama Asi-ayone such as Thakin Soe, Thakin Than Tun and Thakin Nu - also came in, drawing students and their activists under the Nagani influence.

What I mean is that the factor that enabled the Nagani stand was the active support and near-participation by the Dobama Asi-ayone and the student body.

**Question: How long your Nagani could survive? And up to what time you were with the Nagani?**

**UTA :** Nagani was founded in the early part of 1937. In early 1940, when the World War II came, it had to close. For my part I separated from the Nagani before the war broke out, that is to say, since round-about November 1938. I went on with my own enterprise named 'Tun Aye' Book Distribution. The war dropped the curtain on book business totally.

**Question: What were the causes that pushed you away from the Nagani?**

**UTA :** By late 1938 Nagani felt financial difficulties due to local agents' inability to settle the bills in time. (In some instances there were complete failures to settle.) So finances suffered.

On our part also, in some cases we practised for get and for give as we operated not in a business manner. So we were short of money. What made the situation worse was the subsidy of fifty thousand kyats that seemed due to come also failed to materialise. A mid this fix one good Samaritan appeared. That person was Sir U Thwin, (a great man, a Senator, one of the big property owners who had some attachment for us). He promised help with 5,000 kyats. Ko Nu and myself were invited to collect the aid.

Ko Nu and myself, with great happiness, went to the benefactor. But, misfortune stood on the way. U Thar Saing, an M.P. from Myeik town, met us for a short exchange of words. We went on to Sir U Thwin five minutes late. The would-be donor refused to see us because we had not been punctual. Sir U Thwin cancelled the meeting and the aid.

For my life, this loss due to my lack of respect for time was one of the most valuable lessons.

If I may continue, it was discovered that there were people among us who believe in finding enough fund first, so that we would be able to do what we want to do later. Such people have begun to arrange invitation for business shares to form Nagani Company Limited. As for me, I did not want to make an economic enterprise with a political facade, I wanted to go on along purely political line as we have done according to our original faith. So I could not accept the formation of a company. That was my mind. But Ko Nu, however, agreed to the plan. I had regarded Ko Nu as my big brother. So I did not oppose his position and after the work of forming the company came to fruition, I parted ways.

In the wake of separation, I went on to establish the "Tun Aye Distribution" on my own. I went on with publishing books that provide the people with political vision and imbue them with the spirit of revolution.

This, I must say, is the sequence of events that led to my separation from Nagani.

**Question: The last question. If you look back your activities now, as a founder of the Nagani Book Club, what would you say in the way of an analysis? Could you please give me your attitude?**

**UTA :** What I want to say is that I feel honoured to have acted as a "brick used in construction" and a "grain of sand in the building material" for the country, with some measure of self-sacrifice, in the advancement of anti-imperialist and socialist cause. Of course, there were some defects and weaknesses on our part.

That is we put out only books on politics as we were too eager to impart political knowledge and revolutionary zeal. It was a sort of impetuosity. We tried to give in lumps and chunks. We made concentration on theories for the masses of people. We did not see this then. That is what I can remember.

For instance, the text copy the novel by 'Dagon Taryar', named "May", reached my hands earlier. Three-four months elapsed considering whether it was fit for publishing, because it was a novel. What I mean is that as we wanted to propagate political ideologies neat and clean, we did not want to put out tender and soft literature. We did not want to give it priority. But on second thought, now I came to the view that greater effect could come by putting out books of light genre (such as novels) that will give enjoyment to the people, coupled with heavy subjects.

For me, I feel satisfied that I could get the chance to take part in the work what I believed to be my desired enterprise, both in the sphere of theory and practice.

I wish to say I will take this position now and in the futures And I thank you that I am given this opportunity to tell all this.

Confession: I made some references from Maung Lu Htwe's dissertation for his Master of Arts degree, entitled "National Liberation and the role of the Nagani Literature".



**U Tun Aye, February 1999**

### **3. The Song**

The interview was held 1991 (round about July). The story of Nagani Book Club touched up in 1994 (October 1). The editor came to know on that day how the song "Nagani" was born. The song is still popular and can be enjoyed at various places such as lottery ticket vending carts. First sung at City Hall by the famous vocalist (Film actor) Khin Maung Yin. He presented a dance also with famous stage actress Thidar Khin Htway. Song presentation was held at a special ceremony with the permission of Mayor U Kyaw Zan, well-known City Father. The song is sung by people to this day.

#### **Meaning of the Song**

1. Path of freedom from poverty will be shown. Our country is rich in seven kinds of precious stones (jewels). Poor people will be able to make charities, build monasteries and pagodas. It happens like assistance from Bo Bo Aung and Shin Iza Gauna has come.
2. Will give good health, sure prosperity and protection from dangers and calamity. Poor people will meet modern times and come into wealth. With the power of our Nagani poor will become free from dejection and languishness. Special benefits will come from building a modern age. Tranquillity and peace will prevail. With the power of Nagani we shall heighten glory of our nation.
3. Living conditions must be easy in no time. Our Nagani will seek ways and work for the happiness of the poor people. The light of religion and its teachings will shine and our country will become rich from good fortune.
4. All kinds of magical powers will be secured. Without practising alchemy day and night, extraordinary results will acquire. With the power of Nagani, Burma will make underground travels and fly in the air. We shall work with aim to show way of escape. So poor people do not sink into scarcity of money.

#### 4. Some of the Publications of Nagani

1. Published "Our Objective" in Nagani News Vol. 1, No. 1 (a monthly - distributed gratis)
2. Irish Revolution by Myoma Saya Hein.
3. "Karl Marx", Thakin Bo.
4. "Socialism" by Thakin Soe.
5. From time to time special editions published – Some time free distribution were made "Indian (Kalar)" – Burman (Bamar) Riots and "Our Immediate Task".
6. Biographies: "Saya Lun," Jan 1938, Thein Pe + Deedok U Ba Cho, Co-authored. "Dr. Jose Rizal" (Phillipino Freedom Leader) by Moegyo (U Ohn Khin, a veteran journalist and one of the founders of Nagani) 1938; "Turkish Dictator" by U Tun Kyine, 1939 (About Kemal Atatürk ); "Irish Hero" by Than-dwai-maung 1939). (About Sir Roger Casement); "Dan Breen: My Fight For Freedom" 1939 By Myoma Saya Hein; "My beloved Husband" (about Lenin), by Krupskaya, translated by "Shirt Ni" (Red Shirt) or Thakin Soe; "De Valera" by U Nyi Bu, about Irish Revolution, 1939.
7. "Doe Shan-pyi" (Our Shan Land) by U Ohn Myint aimed at consolidation of unity: "Saw Mon Hla" by the same author 1940.
8. "The national affairs" by Deedok U Ba Choe, 1938, (About Dr. Sun Yat Sen's concept on nationalities).
9. "People Power" by Thakin Ba Thaung (about Sun Yat Sen's three principles, 1938, with Introduction by Thein Pe dated July 25, 1938. This book has the title "People's Power and French Revolution; also referred to the French Revolution. Nagani's 8th Publication.
10. "Peoples Power" Second Volume, by Moegyo, 10th Nagani publication, (about American Revolution) 1938.
11. "Freedom Struggle" by Tekkatho Suu Myine, about India's struggle, 1939.
12. Inside the Chinese Revolution, by U Tun Pe, a veteran journalist who later became a cabinet minister in 1960 (in the Nu's Govt.) representing the Justice Party.
13. "Capitalism" by Ko Hla Shwe (very prominent leader of 1938 countrywide student strike) 1939.

14. "Theory and Practice of Socialism" Part I, by U Ba Tin, about the economic system (translation from John Strachey) 1940.
15. Two volumes of Ko Nu's "Way Out for the Poor Men". First volume came out in early 1938 and the second, some months later. These were translations from R. Page Arnot's "ABC of Communism".
16. "The Red Eagle" by Thakin Tin Maung, (a top leader of Dobama Asi-ayone) about the exploits of Soviet political and military leaders.
17. "Experiences of Soviet Democracy" by U Tun Pe.
18. "Japanese Spy" by U Ba Tin, (An exposure Japanese militarism and its ruthless arm the Kem-pei-tai (military police force like Nazi SS unit) - U Ba Tin was an advocate of Let-pa-dan town. When Japanese Army came into Burma, the Kempei-tai arrested him, tortured to death (released from torture chamber on the verge of death, he tried to go back home but on the way he fell down lifeless). Original book was written by a former Japanese Spy, an Italian, named M. Vaspa and U Ba Tin translated it. It was about atrocities and rapine committed against Chinese and Russians along Japanese troops' march into Manchuria.
19. "What Hitler Did" by Shwe U Daung, (the veteran writer, journalist, novelist). It is life story of Hitler and history of Nazism. The abolition of democratic institutions and political parties 1939.
20. The booklet (priced 1/32 of a kyat) by Thein Pe, explains the need to do away with colonialism and replace it with socialism. It came out when World War II began.
21. "History of Burma's Political Development" by U Ba Khine, 1937.
22. "The Burmese Year 1300 Upheaval" by Thakin Thein Maung.
23. "The Student Upheaval" by Ko Ba Hein. - The book relates the student movement from the 1920 University Students' strike up to the combined struggle of students, workers and peasants against capitalists and land-lords, against colonialism. Ko Ba Hein became top student leader, a top Thakin leader and a communist party leader during that time. He died early, in November 1946, was one of the closest comrades of General Aung San.

## **IV. BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON THAKIN HLA KUN**

### **1. Personal Life Sketch**

1. Born at Ye-nan-gyat (South of Myitchay, Pakokku District, Central Burma) on August 30, 1922.
2. Parents U Ba Aye (a motor mechanic) and Daw Kyi.
3. Educated at Yen-an-gyat Primary School, then LAN YWA Private School up to 1937, moved to Goot-Aided National High School at Ye-nan-gyaung (a big oil industry town), where General Aung San attended before joining the Yangon University.
4. Left school before passing the matriculation class in early 1939.
5. Became township branch secretary of Dobama Asi-ayone (organization) at Lanywa (also a thriving oil industry town, 12 miles south of Ye-nan-gyat) at the age of 17.
6. British colonial government arrested in August 1940 and sent to prison (1 year) for making seditious speeches and calling for non-cooperation with the British war effort.
7. Served term at Insein Annexa Jail. Had to live with Thakhin Nu, Thakhin Soe, Thakhin Than Tun, Thakhin Kyaw Sein and many other top leaders of both the wings of Dobama Asi-ayone, getting the golden opportunity of acquiring political knowledge and enhancing the formal education.
8. Character of war changed (on June 22, 1941) from that of imperialist war to peoples' war when Nazi Germany attacked Poland and then Soviet Union.
9. Many Thakhin leaders changed outlook and called for participation in the anti-Nazi-anti-Fascist war. He supported that outlook and joined the underground Communist Party as sympathizer, while in jail.
10. Worked as a communist since 1941.
11. British colonial government, again arrested in February 1942 to be detained for the duration of the war.

12. British and Chinese forces fled the country in mid-April-May 1942. Came out of the Mandalay jail and joined the Burma Independence Army (of Gen. Aung San ) at Amara-pura (near Mandalay).
13. Then became a cadre of Communist Party for 2 1/2 years (living with Thakhin Than Tun).
14. Slipped out of the country Dec. 20, 1944 leading a group of six anti-Japanese cadres, crossing the British front line. Reached Thakhin Thein Pe's camp in Calcutta, India.
15. Thein Pe, representative in India of the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League, arranged with Force 136 of the General Staff of the South-East Asia Command for (many of us) to undergo military training at Horana, Ceylon and parachute training at Jessore ( India) now in Bangladesh.
16. Jumped into Burma April 9, 1945, in a parachutist commando unit of five officers (2 British + 1 WT Operator + we 2 Burmese).
17. With 400 weapons, formed a guerrilla unit fought the Japs for 1 1/2 months.
18. Moved to Southern Sector (Toungoo-Nyaunglebin) June 3, 1945. Fought till the end of the war.



Hla Kun (left) and a comrade<sup>1</sup> on August 20, 1945.

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<sup>1</sup> The photo was taken just after the reoccupation of Rangoon by the British troops. The comrade, later Captain Soe Maung had come to Burma from India together with Thakin Hla Kun as a member of “Force 136”. He joined the Burmese army in 1946 and after independence the army of Than Tun’s communist party. He died in 1964 in the jungle.

19. Became a communist cadre again 1945 -1961.
20. Left the Party August 61 for disagreement with Party's political line.
21. Became a journalist in February 1962. Then Government newspapers: as editor (foreign news), 1963, Deputy Chief Editor 1968-73, then Chief Editor, "Kyemon" joined Czechoslovak Embassy staff, 1978-92.
22. After that, free lance writer and publisher, 1993-2000.
23. Visited Pakistan (1968), United Kingdom (1973) and Korea.
24. Recipient of State Awards: "Independence Star (First Grade)" and "Glory of the Nation (Second Grade)"

## 2. Extract from a diary covering a travel to Yangon in January, 2005

(Hans-Bernd Zöllner)

Sunday, January 16, 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Thakin Hla Kun lives in a house not far from Yangon's downtown. He is at home and lets us in. [A young man who was recommended to me by a German friend, has taken me here.] He is 83 years old and seems to be physically and mentally safe and sound. Nagani? Yes, he knows about that – and he gives a sketch of his life story.

When he was 17 years old, he read Maung Soe's – co-founder of Nagani and later leader of one of Burma's communist parties - book "Socialism" published by Nagani. Shortly after that he read the book of student leader Ba Hein "The World of Capitalists" published by Nagani's sister enterprise The Burma Publishing House. The reading made him a convinced communist. He became a member of the Thakin movement and was imprisoned. Because of his young age, he was pitied by the wardens of his first prison outside Rangoon. They put him into the prison library where he read and read and read .... Later he was transferred to the still famous-infamous Insein Prison and met there the crème de la crème of the Burmese fighters for independence. From them, he received a lot of lessons on revolution.

After the war, he went underground and joined Thakin Than Tun's – another of Nagani founders – communist party. Until 1961, he worked as a translator of the news from the

outside, mostly from the Chinese communists, in to Burmese for the information of the comrades. Then he left the party and the jungle. He had realized that the party not any more was like a fish swarm swimming in the sea of the people but had become a dogged sect. After that he became a journalist and later worked as chief editor of “The Mirror” until his retirement. Now he his doing translations from time to time and very often has to attend funerals. Three years ago U Tun Aye was buried and some years ago U Nu with whom he had shared some time in prison.



Thakin Hla Kun, October 2005

## V. INTERVIEW WITH DAGON TAYA

The interview was conducted in January, 2001 by Hans-Bernd Zöllner

Note: Dagon Taya who used to live in the Shan State for some years was interviewed at the house of a relative in Yangon. He had attended a reception honouring an old friend the day before.

He was born in 1919 – “I’m four years younger than Aung San” - as Tun Myint and grew up in a village of the Irrawaddy delta. There, he attended a National School and later graduated from a school run by Protestant missionaries.

Being 15 years of age, he wrote and published his first poem under a pen name. It was written in the classical style encompassing three stanzas and dealt with the *Dobama Asiayone* as its topic. This was a family theme. The father of the young man headed the local association's branch.

But, no, he was never a “political writer” let alone a politician. But his writing did not disown the political background of what was written about. And, above all, he was faithful to the political dreams of his young days. That brought him into trouble. In 1962, he spent three months in jail: “Into it without a process, out of it without a procedure”. A novel written in 1974 and published in a magazine that recalls the chorus of the *Dobama*-song, didn't pass the censor.

After school came the University, languages and the arts, and the work in the student movement as a member in the students' representation and editor of its publication. In 1938, he participated in the Great Strike. That was a year like 191 people went to the streets, students, the intelligentsia, workers, peasants.

In 1939, he went to the hills together with Ba Hein. He was the charismatic one within the students' movement, gifted and good looking. He spent a lot of time with him as well as with Ba Swe who later became minister for defence and Prime Minister for almost one year. But he knew all the other student leaders as well who should later form the political elite of Burma. Ba Hein and he wanted to meet the communist in China, but one of the Shan sawbwas foiled the attempt. The journey was published as a travelogue in the student union's *Oway*-magazine. - In some of his publications, Tun Myint used the title of “thakin”, but he never was a member of the movement, never a politician.

He was a leftist, though. The first books published by the Nagani Book Club that he read dealt with Marxist topics. Anyhow, it was a great time of reading. He liked Tchechow, Thomas Mann and Beverley Nichols' book “Self”. He revised it freely into the Burmese language giving it the title

“May”. That was 1939. He was 19 years of age and still a student. Ba Swe read the manuscript and was enthusiastic about it. He took it to Nagani but Tun Aye, then the manager of the enterprise, turned it down. Supposedly, it was not sufficiently “political”. Anyway – he was a Marxist by intellect and a bourgeois at heart, one of his friends told him one day, and he might have been not wrong with that.

The book finally was published in 1941 by Nagani after Tun Aye had left. Dagon Taya still remembers the signing of the contract. He had to pay for the paper for 2,000 copies. After the Suez Canal was closed, the paper prices had increased dramatically. 500 sheets cost 4 Kyats. Ad he never received any profit from the book sales. After the war, there were four more editions and even the last one contained the foreword written by Ba Hein – without mentioning his function in the student movement. Everything that could irritate the rulers' picture of the past is removed. The censorship of the past and the present is omnipresent.

Dagon Taya relates to a walk around the campus of the University. He stopped, intentionally, near the place where the building of the Student Union had been located until 1962. It was blown as a violent act of censorship of students' participation in the societal life as a whole. As soon as the author had stayed, the whistles of some nearby standing policemen rang out summoning him and his attendance to move on. Even the visiting of the results of censorship are censored.

All this puts the author who at the same is a political subject into a very embarrassing situation. The authorities have rewarded him two prizes acknowledging his literary merits. Its hardly possible to refuse these awards the more so as they reflect the wide public appreciation meted out to him. At the same time, the authorities do not only censor his writings but his life as well. Therefore, he has not refused the prizes, but he has not received them either.

Nagani, he says encouraging, has to be studied. Nagani became Burma. But the time of Burma's freedom has not come yet.



**Dagon Taya, January 2001**

## VI. NU'S BIOGRAPHICAL REMINISCENCES ON THE NAGANI BOOK CLUB<sup>1</sup>

### Outside the Ivory Tower

The 1936 University Strike<sup>2</sup> lasted four months. The authorities yielded to the extent of readmitting expellees Ko Nu and Ko Aung San, agreeing to form a University Inquiry Committee to look into the students' complaints, and incorporating suitable provisions in the University Act. The strike was then called off, but Ko Nu and some other students did not return to classes. They chose to leave the university.

With two of his friends, Ko Hla Pe<sup>3</sup> and Ko Tun Ohn,<sup>4</sup> Ko Nu began working on a project to set up a national university. He also apprenticed himself at the *Deedok Journal*, where he wrote a number of articles, and began to concentrate on play writing. Since his long plays were not popular with the reading public, their publication in the *Deedok* would have hurt its prestige. Consequently, Ko Nu produced one-act plays, all of which editor U Ba Choe, with unfailing good humor, published. After a year at the *Deedok Journal* Ko Nu founded the Nagani (Red Dragon) Book Club. A small room was found in the western wing of the Scott Market at a cheap rental, and the bookstall became a busy meeting ground for politicians with ill-digested views, students, and ordinary book buyers.

The Nagani was modeled on the Left Book Club of Victor Gollancz in England. It proved an immediate success. In addition to the monthly list of popular books, Ko Nu was able to add, once every two or three months, a supplementary list of special publications. Very soon the *Nagani Journal* made its appearance and the *Nagani Daily* (newspaper) was projected. But it never saw the light of day. The Second World War arrived instead in 1942, and Thakin Nu (he had become a thakin by then) and others were imprisoned on charges of sedition and obstructing the war effort.

[....]

At this time there occurred a series of riots involving Buddhists on one side and Moslems on the other. There was considerable knife play and many deaths and injuries resulted. One day Ko Nu, conversing with a friend on the upper floor of the Scott Market,<sup>5</sup> was distracted by shouts emanating from Twenty-fifth Street. A Buddhist monk, out begging, was being assaulted by a

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<sup>1</sup> Nu (1975), *U Nu, Saturday's Son*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press: 80-83. [The numbered footnotes are taken from Nu's text, the other are added by the editor.]

<sup>2</sup> See Vol. 4 of this series.

<sup>3</sup> U Hla Pe later served as a deputy minister and minister of defense in U Nu's Cabinet after independence.

<sup>4</sup> U Tun Ohn later served as commissioner of the Corporation of Rangoon after independence.

<sup>5</sup> The Nagani Book Club was located on Scott Market.

Moslem. It was only when Ko Nu and his group appeared on the scene that the assailant broke off his knife attack and escaped up a flight of stairs. The monk, suffering from severe head wounds, was placed on a rickshaw and Ko Nu himself accompanied him to the hospital.

Returning from the hospital, Ko Nu found the crowd excitedly discussing the attempt on the monk's life. The Nagani Book Club had become a hotbed of radical views. Upon one man stating that it was the Buddhists who were bearing the brunt of things, another joined in with the assertion that Dr. Ba Maw was in league with the sons of Missiri Khan of Tseekai Maung Taulay Street and was leaning to the side of the Moslems. This was a perfectly baseless charge. There was no reason why Dr. Ba Maw should lean in the manner alleged. But gullible Ko Nu accepted it completely. He did not wish the Buddhists to suffer at the hands of the Moslems, nor vice versa; all he wanted was a speedy end to the riots, with the government dispensing justice impartially. Therefore, once he had got it into his head that Prime Minister Dr. Ba Maw was aiding and abetting his Moslem friends, he could not rest for thinking of ways and means of ousting the Ba Maw government.

[....]

That evening Ko Aung San and a group of students appeared at the Nagani Book Club.

Ko Nu, your arrangements are poor. I have a better idea. What is it?

In a day or two, the Ba Maw government will be introducing the University Bill in the Legislative Council. We will say we don't want this bill and call on members to oppose it. If Dr. Ba Maw proceeds with the bill over our protests it is probable his government will fall. If he holds back, he will be denied the kudos which he expects through passage of the University Act. This act has been a source of great pride to him.

Yes, I agree. Yours is a better plan.

The very next day Ko Aung San and his executive committee invaded the Legislative Council and flooded it with pamphlets calling on members to oppose the University Bill.



**Reproduction of an invitation to a ceremony remembering the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Nu's death.**

## VII. THE NAGANI NEWSLETTER – AN OVERVIEW

*Editor's note:*

*The aim of this overview is to provide a first inside into the “daily business” of the Nagani Book Club during the year 1938 and – more importantly – to motivate readers to take a second look at the articles and write about the insight gained. **Copies of the contributions listed in this summary are available on request** (for details, please see the last page of this working paper). The basis for the work presented here is an incomplete collection of the နဂါးနိသတင်း (Nagani News) which was acquired from a Burmese antiquarian bookshop. Up to now, no complete copy could be detected. The following information on the material under review is incomplete, too, and in many cases arbitrarily. The same applies to the footnotes added by the editor.*

*The draft of this summary, written by Mo Mo Thant, was complemented by Frankie Tun and Hans-Bernd Zöllner.*

### **Vol. 1, No. 1, 42 pp. [Incomplete]**

2. p. 4: **Our belief.**
3. pp. 9-10: **Our goals.**
4. p. 10: **Just or unjust.**
5. pp. 11-13: **Nagani announcements:** 1. Monthly selected books: a) Ba Khaing, Political History of Burma; b) Nu, Plays; c) Maung Soe, Poor'ism; d) Student Strike; e) Than Tun, Modern Burma. – Call for discussions; – Comparison of Saya Lun, Tagore and G.B. Shaw; plans for play groups and classes (on political issues, Russia, the world situation, Indian political themes, Burma's politics, the future of workers without property, how to organize people, youth and students);
6. p. 13: **Reprint** of an article of the *Dobama* branch of Hanthawaddy.
7. pp. 14-17: **Basics of the British Dominion System**, by Deedok U Ba Choe.
8. pp. 18-22: **North Chinese Revolution**, by Maung Soe.
9. pp. 23-29: **Long term planning**, by U Ba Khaing.
10. pp. 30-31: **What kind of Independence?** by Maung Nu.
11. p. 31: **Creed of the students** (October 37).
12. pp. 32-38: **Thakin Kodaw Hmine and the Sagaing Ladies.**

13. pp. 38-40: **Nagani books** introduced.
14. pp. 40-41: **Book Review** of Edgar Snow<sup>1</sup>, Red Star over China
15. pp. 41-42: Editor's note.

**Vol. 1, No, 2, 36 pp.**

1. p. 2: **Trials in Burma.** A critical assessment on *Trials in Burma* by Maurice Collis written by U Kun (school teacher)
2. p. 3: **Books to be published by Nagani.** In June (a) Proletarian ideology (Ko Soe) (b) The Fight for Independence (U Chit Maung); (c) Modern Burma (Ko Than Tun).
3. pp. 3-5: **Nagani Books coming out soon.** d) The Skeleton of the Empire, by Leonard Barnes (Translated by Kyaw Win); e) History of the Empire (Translated by U Khin Maung); f) The Tree Principles, by Sun Yat Sen, Vol. 2 and 3; g) Students on Strike, Vol. 2, 3, by Tetphongyi Thein Pe; h) The Public Rest House, by George Orwell (translated by a member).

Special publication: The Students on Strike by Ko Thein Pe.

Reprints – These books had to be reprinted for the sake of distribution to the large number of members: Biography of Saya Lun; Political History of Burma, Booklets (for easy reading = 2 to 4 annas), “The Capitalists“ by Ko Hla Pe (Calcutta), The Burmese Students’ Crisis by Aung San:

4. pp. 6-9: **The six-months time.** Review and assessment of the Nagani Book Society; includes aims and objects, working policy, reassessment of tasks to be carried out: Nagani is just an ordinary Book Society and never a rival political association/party.
5. pp. 10-11: **Why Nagani succeeds.** The public is coming up with demands for the fight against colonialism.
6. p. 11: **Notifications by Nagani.** As a consequence of the readers’ reactions,
  - There were some readjustments in the selection of books for publication.
  - Ineffective growth in the number of membership in spite of the need to recruit new members shall be avoided;
  - for the sake of the majority of readers, books circulating should be written only in basic prose so they can be understood by the rural people;

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<sup>1</sup> 1905-1972; see [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edgar\\_Snow](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edgar_Snow).

- separate cells are to be formed which send the collections to Nagani for further publication.

Nagani Society acted in accordance with the wishes and desires of the members; the promotion of resistance to colonialism through plays.

7. pp. 13-16: **Only Workers and Peasants are the Lords of the Country**, by Thakin Lay Maung. Capitalism has to be abolished and a Proletariat world has to be created where the rights of the poor will be guaranteed.
8. pp. 17-20: **Yenaungyaung Crisis is the World's crisis**, by Ohn Myint. The oil workers' strike (at Yenangyaung) is not only for those people alone, but for all the exploited people all over the world. It is a fight for the interests of the proletariat. Contribute as much as possible for the cause, in person as well as in monetary assistance.
9. pp. 21-22: **Political History of Burma**. A book review on U Ba Khaing's book by "Saya" (The Teacher).
10. pp. 22-23: **Modern Plays**. A critical assessment by "Nagani" of U Nu's book.
11. pp. 24: **Nationalism**. A book review article by "Akyoosaung" (Advocat) on the book by Dr. Sun Yat Sen.
12. pp. 25-30: **Students on Strike**. Maung Nu's assessment on Thein Pe's story. The author of the story admitted that he had created too many characters of his liking.
13. pp. 31-32: **Biography of Dr. Jose Rizal**. Criticism by "Ye Ye Tank" (Very Brave) of the book translated by "Mogyoe" (Thunder). Well translated books into Burmese are emerging, and his book is a welcome one.
14. p. 32: **Information** (in English language). Books from England can be ordered. Sorry for the delay of books of the Red Book Club in London.
15. pp. 33-34: **Six poems by the Martyr Jose Rizal**. Burmese version of 6 poems by the Philippines martyr Jose Rizal written just before he faced the firing squad. (probably a continuation of 13 above). Translator is not mentioned.
16. pp. 34-36: **Editor's notes**. Seeking advice of how the goodwill of Kyats 150 by the public towards the Nagani society can be forwarded to the 60,000 oil workers; and other critical assessments.

**Vol. I, No. 3, 34 (+2) pp.**

1. p. b-1: **Coming Month's Selection.** The Burmese Problems and World Affairs; Ethics (Vol. 2); "The Skeleton of an Empire" translated into Burmese by barrister U Kyaw Win; "History of the British Empire" translated into Burmese by advocate U Khin Maung Gyi; "The fight for independence" by U Chit Maung.
2. p. 1: **Special issues.** "The Student on Strike" (Vol. 2 & 3) by Thein Pe.
3. p. 2: **Papers on disseminating knowledge.** (1) Guide to Science the emergence of physics, botany, chemistry, etc. „Similarities and differences between science and Buddhism. Differences between science, und alchemy and fortune telling; (2) Independent thinking; (3) The capitalists (reprint), Biography of Saya Lun (reprint).
4. pp. 2-4: **Books on "Revolution"** (Boycotts). There is the aim to publish books on Revolution: (1) How the Oil Field Strike occurred; the future measures; that book contained how Tetphongyi Thein Pe went to see Mr. Eden Dig, Ko Soe, Ko Nu; Ko Than Tun; (2) The Burmese Students Strike; how the education system wretched Burma. The 1920 Students' Strike; agitations at the University in 1930; the founding of the Burma Students Union (3) the Galon Rebellion; economic situation in Burma including the tax and revenue collection.
5. p. 4: **6<sup>th</sup> month anniversary of Nagani.** On this occasion, books are offered at reduced prices.
6. p. 5: **Peoples Daily Work.** Clarifications on Socialism/Communism; about capitalists exploiting the poor; World Workers Revolutions; published for the propaganda on workers.
7. p. 6: **The Leftist Book Club.** On the Left Book Club of Britain with the aim to get rid of fascism and to propagate proletarianism to the workers/labours. Applications for membership can be sent to Tun Aye at No. 151 Scott Market. Fees in Burmese currency (13 kyats for 1 £).
8. pp. 7-8: **Socialism and Burma** (Editorial). This month's selection is about Socialism by Nagani Member, Ko Soe, with the aim to propagate Socialism and Communism, to study Socialism thoroughly and to begin the war of independence for Burma.
9. pp. 8-9: **Discussion on Socialism.** Eleven points are given which help to discuss socialism.
10. pp. 10-12: **The Ruthless Fascist German Government**, by Ko Hla Pe (Calcutta). The down-trodden German people are cowering under the fascist movement not because they love and admire it, but because of fear for its ruthlessness which are described by facts and

figures; how Germany helped in the Spanish Civil War and pressured the formation of a fascist government in Spain.

11. pp. 12- 16: **The Oil Field Strike**. The article by Maung Soe is about how and why the workers and peasants and the lowest class of poor people came to exist. The atrocities committed by the capitalist owners of the oil company are depicted.
12. pp. 17-19: **The Proletarian Workers and Capitalism**, by Maung Kun.
13. pp. 19-22: **The Spanish Civil War and Burmese Independence**, by Ohn Myint. The Spanish cause and the Burmese cause are similar; both in Burma and Spain the British are exploiting the poor. The Spanish fight against the British must be supported by the Burmese people
14. pp. 23-25: **Notifications by “Nagani“**. Urge to purchase monthly issues; to form groups and write articles for the Nagani Journal so that Nagani funds could be raised; success in publishing discussed; propaganda necessary for much success.
15. pp. 25-27: **Socialism**. The book written by Ko Soe and assessed by “Akyosaung” in an article: Although the writing needs improvement, it is a controversial book religiously or politically.
16. **The People’s Front**. (G.D.H. Cole<sup>1</sup>) (p. 28) Critical assessment by Maung Soe. A must for those who desire unity among all fighting forces in the war against imperialism.
17. pp. 28-29: **The British Imperialism and India** by Jean Beauchamp, assessed by Ba Hein (in the Myo Nyint Magazine). British imperialism is depicted vividly; describes how the system has betrayed leaders such as Gandhi etc. and the poor people; the support of the British workers was necessary in this fight for independence. Suggests that this volume to be translated into Burmese promptly for the benefit of those Burmese readership that do not read English.
18. p. 31: **Is the world nearing destruction?** by U Chit Maung (Editor of the New Light of Burma newspaper) Critical assessment of a book: How capitalist nations are asking for each other’s help and some are invoking others is presented in consistent arrangements and references for the Burmese to come to know the situation; the destruction of the British Empire is predicted. The British should be prepared for hard times and the independence struggle by the Burmese people.

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<sup>1</sup> 1889-1959; siehe [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G.\\_D.\\_H.\\_Cole](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G._D._H._Cole).

19. pp. 32-34: **Editor’s Remarks.** a) The World Youth Convention; b) Shan State and the Frontiers Act; c) flood and fire disasters; d) Syriam and Section 144; e) special issue on Socialism. – The forthcoming issues are listed including the prices for members.

**Vol. I, No. 4, 38 (+2) pp.**

1. p. b: **Racism** by မဝ်နုဝ် တဝ်ဖိဝ်- [Magnus Hirschfeld<sup>1</sup>]. Critical assessment by one “Lumyomayway“ (no race discrimination). A book, published by the Left Book Club (London) pointing out the bad side of German nationalism/racism.
2. p. 1: **Chin Li-Tse and George F. Green’s “China - The Tiger’s Prey”**. Critical assessment by Akyosaung. About the Chinese-Japanese crisis - a review of the Chinese governments’ performances from the Nanking government to the present one. In Japan also capitalists are exploiting the people. The book suggests that Chinese peasants are to be armed to resist the Japanese.
3. p. 2: **About Co-operative Enterprises in Sweden.** Written by and assessed by Wathana (Enthusiast). The theme is that the Swedish co-operatives normally do not get involved in politics. The question is, should the Burmese co-operatives follow suit? Or should they cooperate with the Do-Bama Organization or another party? Gives food for thought.
4. pp. 3-4: **The Burmese Crisis** (Head topic). The views of different schools of belief are presented under 7 topics, e.g.: To do away with the retrogressive ideology in Thakhin Kodaw Hmaing’s (Saya Lun’s) speech; modernization policy by Tetphongyi Thein Pe; the emergence of a genuine policy by Ba Khaing and Deedok U Ba Choe. The fight for independence, whether or not to be reinforced by co-operatives enterprises.
5. p. 4: **Advantages for members.**
6. pp. 5-6: **The Nagani Education Society.** The Formation of such a society was approved by consensus and the draft constitution was passed. Responsible persons were elected. Urge other towns to follow suit.
7. pp. 6-8: **“The welfare for all policy”** (Maung Bo). A critical assessment on the book “Socialism” suggests socialism should not be translated as proletarian ideology. The appropriate term would be “common policy”. The choice of expression as equivalent to socialism would be “The Welfare for All Policy“.
8. p. 8: **Specially published books**

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<sup>1</sup> 1868-1936; siehe [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magnus\\_Hirschfeld](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magnus_Hirschfeld).

9. p. 9-11: **“The Common Policy and We, the Burmans”** (Ba Galay). Comments on the book “Socialism” that had been published by Nagani; it is time for the public to accept that policy in their fight for the nation’s independence. A new world built on the common policy will emerge when capitalism could be wiped out for good.
10. pp. 12-17: **The Burmans’ cause for independence is also a world problem.** (Than Tun) Observe the world situation in the struggle for Burma’s independence. Do not ignore world affairs, the author reminds his readers. He urges to (a) learn languages except English; (b) study abroad except in England; (c) write articles and news stories in foreign periodicals; (d) publish periodicals in English (e) form foreign departments; (f) keep representatives abroad; (g) keep trade representatives; (h) attend international meetings and occasions; (i) contact Burmese abroad (j) make study tours around the world with groups from the University (k) form Burmese associations in Burma.
11. pp. 18-21: **The Future of the World** (Tin Aye). It is for the benefit of the whole world to be able to investigate and discuss freely, and be able to apply human intelligence in good faith. Thus, the militarism, the political robbery of our times and other outdated concepts as religious domination would be wiped out and a new world without these evils would be created.
12. pp. 23-26: **Why Independence?** (Maung Nu) The article is written in the genre of a short story. It is about a Burman boxer who could have knocked down the British soldier who was relegated from the competition. The other party and the medical doctor collaborated to that end. Such kinds of bullying are one reason for wanting independence.
13. pp. 27-29: **Changing of the Era** (Thakin Kodaw Hmaing). With the great upheavals of the times, we need to preserve our language and literature, classic works, arts and skills. Everything beneficial to humanity should be preserved with great care.
14. pp. 30-32: **Discussions/Seminar on the Burmese Crisis.** Presentations on the crisis in Burma by Thein Pe, U Ba Naing, U Chit Maung, Ko Nu, Ko Than Tun, U Ba Cho, Hla Pe, and Thakin Kodaw Hmaing.
15. pp. 33-35: **The Burmese Cause** – by various writers with a critique by Anyatara (non-entity).
16. pp. 35-38: **Forthcoming publications.** Among others: A special on José Rizal; Human Addicts; is the world nearing destruction?

**Vol. I, No. 5 [missing]**

**Vol. I, No. 6, 40 pp. (The last three pages: advertisements)**

1. pp. 1-2: **Sayadaw U Wisara** by U Ba Choe. Advises the Burmese people to abide by the Sayadaws' admonition; catch phrase: "Behave yourselves".
2. p. 3: **Book Report on a book by Friedrich Engels** by Saya Kun. The books of "Das Kapital" by Karl Marx are difficult to understand. The same applies to an explanation given by his daughter Elena. Those who want to propagate socialism in Burma have to base their ideas on Friedrich Engels treatise on the great work, and to study it thoroughly.
3. pp. 5-7: **Suppression on Newspapers** (Editorial 1).
4. pp. 8-9: **The Clash between the People and the Police on July 26 around Theingyizay Market**<sup>1</sup> (Editorial 2).
5. p. 10: **The 9<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of U Wisara's Death** (Editorial 3).
6. pp. 11-12: **Suppression on newspapers** by Ba Toe. The history of press censorship and suppression on newspaper which came along with the British rule. The laws and bye-laws should be repealed in Burma or if not, the country should revolt against them.
7. pp. 13-16: **"Tug-of-war between the rich and the poor"** by Maung Kun. The rich man and the poor man, the haves and the have-nots are clearly defined. Their tug-of-wars should be seen from the national aspects.
8. pp. 17-19: **The Chinese Communist Army** by John Gunther. The Chinese government and the communists joined forces to fight the Japanese. John Gunther's book<sup>2</sup> refers to the unpredictable fate of the Chinese Communist Army.
9. p. 19: by U Chit Maung
10. pp. 21-23: **My Answer** by Ba Hein. About students' chances to work for independence under the amended University Act.
11. pp. 24-28: **Two Roads to Wealth** by Ba Galay. For improving wealth, the economic sector should be given priority. In struggling for independence economics are the stepping stone.
12. pp. 29-34: **Let us offer**. About a comprehensive biography of Rev. U Wisara.

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<sup>1</sup> A market close to Scotts Market where the Nagani Book Club was situated.

<sup>2</sup> Most probably "Inside Asia", published 1938 in New York. On John Gunther (1901-1970) see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Gunther](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Gunther)

13. pp. 35-37: **The Future of China** by Lenin. China's fate is in the hands of imperialists. All workers of the world should (1) hold a strike against Japanese traders (2) refuse to transport weapons meant for use in Japan. Thus, it is a request of assistance for China.

**Vol. 1. No. 7, (End of September 1938), 40 pp.**

1. pp. 1-4. **100,000** little books could raise the momentum for the Burmese fighting spirits turning a small flame into a great fire. The writer approached Thein Pe and talked about his book about the riots between the Burmese and the Indians.<sup>1</sup> The 7<sup>th</sup> edition raised the number of copies printed to 65,000.
2. pp. 5-6: **Editorial**. On the suppression of the Burmese people by laws and additional sections of byelaws. These are not meant for the stability of the nation, but to coerce the oppositional politicians.
3. pp. 7-10: **Is lack of money poverty?** By Maung Kun. Lack of money is not poverty. Whether commodities of food, shelter and clothing are accessible or not is the criterion for being rich or poor.
4. p. 11: **The Bhikkhuni Rebellion**. Ba Shin Adhivamsa. It is meant for those involved in Sasana affairs as some food for thought.
5. pp. 13-15: **Crying while Singing** by Thein Pe. The author was asked by his editor to write a pure literary essay. But he couldn't because of practical affairs in which he is bullied by capitalists. Then he meets two children, brother and sister, in Queens Park who are begging by singing songs and dancing. Some of the spectators try to exploit them by asking them to join an enterprise where the dancers are presently on strike. How can a pure literary story be written under such circumstances?
6. pp. 16-24: **Autocratic Era** by Ba Galay. About Italy where the dictatorship was abolished and democratic rule prevails. However, Mussolini revived the autocratic age. Presented in drama style.
7. pp. 24-27: **The Age of Wealth and Morality** by Ne Win. To improve morals, the current wealth dominated system must be got rid of and modified the five senses in the human environment.

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<sup>1</sup> The riots started on July 26, 1938. The book was published in September 1938. 10,000 copies were printed in the first edition.

8. pp. 29-36: **Socialism and History of Burma** by Than Tun. This particularly good article was taken from the Dagon Magazine. It depends on the Burmese peasants and workers whether the country will be a rich man's land or a poor man's native land after achieving independence.
9. pp. 37-39: **Monks and flimsy clothes**. Letter to the editor from Ah Kyawt. The monks prohibit Inya Hall (Rangoon University ladies hostel) residents wearing flimsy clothes. The girl retorted that (1) flimsy or thick wear is local made; (2) produce better fabrics for ladies wear!

**Vol. I, No. 8, 32 pp. (End of October 1938)**

1. pp. 1-2: **Do you want to become a saviour of the poor with 6 pennies?** The Nagani Journal committee requests for aid for its task in helping a million people to possess a decent life.
2. p. 3: **Nagani's cadres in the districts**. It is because of them that the Nagani Book Society is enjoying success.
3. pp. 5-7: **Nagani News** (Editorial). Review of Nagani's measures for further improvements of the Book Society.
4. pp. 8-10: **A Political Party That Shook the World** by Ba Hein. Article in praise of the Communist Party.
5. pp. 11-12: **Uncle, Nu Nu Yee, and Tha Goung** by Mogyo. Marx ideology presented in the form of lecture.

*[Pages 13-20 are missing; the pages 23-27 are apparently printed twice. This may be due to a mistake by the one who put the issues of the News together.]*

- (6) pp. 13-23: **Monks and flimsy clothes**. A rebuttal to the Inya Hall resident by Sein Hlaing.
- (7) pp. 24-28: **Stalin's Building Paradise on Earth** by Maung Ba Swe. Stalin is depicted as a hero, and also of Stalin's mentor, Lenin. Eulogies on the two communist leaders.
- (8) pp. 23-27: **The Urban Village** (Ahmar). The Plight of the Burmese peasants and workers is highlighted, urges the need for building a socialist state.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For articles (6) to (8), the order of pages seems not to be in order.

- (9) pp. 28-29: **How to get large income and many friends** by Mogyo. A comment on the translation of Dale Carnegie's "How to win friends and influence people". A good reading for those who do not know the English language.

**Vol. I, No. 9, 32 pp.**

1. pp. 1-3: **What is to be done?** By Oak Aw. The Pillar of Democracy got eaten by termites. Nazism and fascism are emerging. There are proponents for those ideologies. What will the Burmese do? It's time the Burmese people rack their brains.
2. pp. 5-6: **Wanted!** 10,000 members for the Nagani Book Club. Aims are presented and it is urged to support them.
3. pp. 7-9: **The Last Lesson** by Aung Din. Written in short story form about the order to teach English and stop Burmese lessons at school.
4. pp. 10-13: **Meaningful Life** (Tet Toe). With reference to Dale Carnegie's book the writer guides the reader to lead a meaningful life.
5. pp. 14-16: **The Crowning event, coming soon** by Ba Swe. An article predicting the inevitable world war in which capitalist countries like Britain and France will suffer a lot.
6. pp. 17-18: **What is this National Day?** By Po Sharshay [Mr. Talkative]. A satire about a school headmaster collecting one Anna from each student to celebrate National Day, and spending the money at gambling.
7. p. 19: **The Nagani Song** which was sung by Actor Kin Maung Yin of the British Burma Films and Vocalist Ma Khin Htwe on the occasion of the 23<sup>rd</sup> November.<sup>1</sup>
8. p. 20: **The Burma Crisis and School Teacher** by Mon Lone. Students' strength is important for the state. Therefore, the teachers' role is vital for the nation. They do not have just to teach their subjects, but use the breaks to spread nationalism.
9. pp. 21-22: **Don't miss the Opportunity** (by a journalist). Burma is full of unexpected events. So the public need to be united as one.
10. pp. 23-24: **Vital time for Burma** by Saturday born. Deals with the question if the China-Japan crisis is good for Burma's independence. Asks whether to accept Japan or not and urges to ignore the Chinese problem.
11. pp. 25-27: **The 15-point Manifesto of the "Do-Bama Organization"** led by Thakin Kodaw Hmaing is presented. The policy had been approved by the Whole Burma Executive

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<sup>1</sup> The date of the National Day of that year according to the Burmese calendar.

Committee meeting at Moulmern Zayat on the 15<sup>th</sup> waning day of Tazaunmon, in the year 1300 BE.



## **Translation of Leaflet Heralding Purposes and Activities of the Nagani Book Club**

(Translator: Frankie Tun, Hamburg)

*Nagani*, we're all together!<sup>1</sup>

*Nagani* is not like the kind of political groups mushrooming nowadays and not a rival acting like they do. It's just a book club; however, not like an ordinary book club. The difference is that *Nagani* not only distributes books, but also

1. spreads the spirit of freedom very swiftly to all of Myanmar.
2. makes the nation and its people see clearly that the spirit of freedom is spoiled by the different gifts presented by the rulers.
3. [aims] at not following their [the rulers] “independence”, but to strive for real independence, which will be for all people.
4. [is convinced] that only the poor or persons, who lost their property and thus came to the side of the poor, can help the poor. The people, who are rich at home and outside their home, pretend to be poor are welcome to join the poor for their own benefits. If the time for sacrificing their property comes, they will become betrayers of the poor. If not, they will send their followers in the wrong direction. *Nagani* wants to make the people know about this.
5. wants to help leaders rising from the workers.
6. [believes] that like “a floor without a rope will break apart”<sup>2</sup> the same applies to political work without a program. The people shall know how to set up a policy by discussions the way the leaders of the poor in the world did to make things better for the people here.
7. [holds] that if we want to win a war, we must be well equipped and well versed in military ability. So, too, if you want independence, you have to unite all the different spirits that are scattered. Like gathering good equipment (to be prepared to win a war), we need to lead those (scattered) mentalities to the right road, so people will be acquainted with the ways of the world leaders of the poor who brought them to the top.

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<sup>1</sup> The suffix attached to the word “Nagani” in the leaflet's heading is a colloquial “particle placed at the end of a sentence to convey one's feeling of camaraderie towards the second person” (Myanmar Language Commission (2001), *Myanmar-English Dictionary*. Yangon, Ministry of Education: 46).

<sup>2</sup> Burmese proverb.

These are the seven main objectives *Nagani* wanted to reach. This will be done by:

- choosing and producing good books every month.
- publishing newsletters from time to time.
- having small-group discussions about political issues at least two times a week.
- educating people through political classes.
- writing plays and giving theatrical performances, which incite independence spirit.
- making films to incite independence spirit.
- distributing national songs to the whole of the country to get more spirit of independence.
- choosing convenient days and places for campaigns of *Nagani* members.
- inviting experts who know about the issues of Burma and those of the world to teach and preach to the people.
- These are the nine ways of action to achieve the seven goals.

Through monthly Nagani News, the people will be informed about the future activities.

[signatures]: Than Tun, Maung Soe, Maung Nu

## The Dragon Book of Verse (Title Page)

NOTES ON  
HIGH SCHOOL SELECT  
POEMS (1940-41) From,

# Dragon Book of Verse.

Specially written for Burmese Students  
points of view.

### Special features:

1. Short Notes on Life of Author;
2. Summary of each piece ;
3. Exhaustive and accurate notes and Explanations in English;
4. BURMESE WORD--MEANINGS AND EXAMPLES;
5. Allusions & References fully & carefully given.

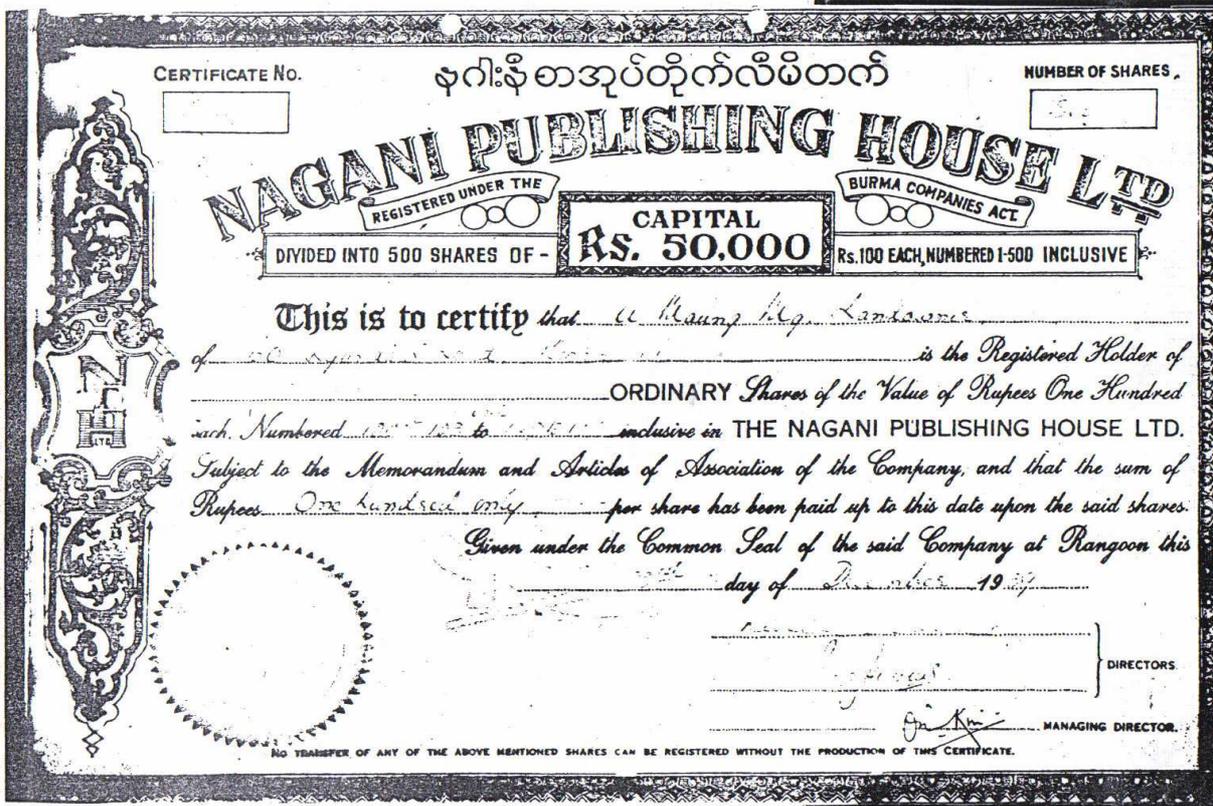


Re 1.

Toe Maung, B.A., M.R.S.T., (Lond.)  
B. Litt. B. Ped., (Missouri)  
Head Master, R. C. M. High School  
GYOBINGAUK.

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### Nagani Share



## IX. LIST OF BOOKS PUBLISHED BY NAGANI BOOK CLUB AND BURMA PUBLISHING HOUSE

This list – including the numeration - is based on a M.A. thesis written in Burmese in the department of librarian science of Yangon University by Kyaw Hoe in 1975. The data given there were checked with the original copies and the “Catalogue of Books” of the Judicial Department of the Government of Burma in accordance with section 19 of the provisions of the Press and Registration Act, 1867. Some books were not listed there and some that appeared in the catalogue are not mentioned in Kyaw Hoe's work. They are included here, too, and designated by letters added to the previous number in Kyaw Hoe's list.

The titles shown in the column “Models / Sources” give short information on those books that could be obtained up to June, 2009.

A date given in brackets indicates the assumed date of publication. In some cases, it is doubtful, whether Kyaw Hoe's list provides the sequence of books in the correct order. - Here, a thorough evaluation of the Nagani News Magazine and the information in the single books given can provide more reliable information.

More information about the bibliographical details will be contained in the following volumes.

### Nagani Book Club

No	Author	Title (Burmese)	Title (English)	Model / Source (First edition)	Date	Pages	Copies
1	Thein Pe	ဦးလွန်းအတ္ထုပ္ပတ္တိ	U Lun's Biography		01 38	228	2000
2	Nu	ခေတ်မှီပြုဇာတ်များ	Burmese Drama		(02) 38	292	2000
3	Ba Khine	မြန်မာနိုင်ငံရေးရာဇဝင်	Political History of Myanma		(03) 38	352	
4	Sun Yat Sen	လူမျိုးရေးတရား	Nationalism	Sun Yat Sen, <i>The Three Principles of the People</i> (1927)	(04) 38	260	
5	Thein Pe	သပိတ်မှောက် ကျောင်းသား	Students' Strike		(04) 38	322	
6	Mogyo	ဂျိုဆေရီဇော်	José Rizal	Russel/Rodriguez, <i>The Hero of the Filipinos</i> (1923)	05 38	288	3050

7	Soe	ဆိုရှယ်လစ်ဝါဒ	Socialism		(06) 38	222	
8	Maung Maung Myint	ဗမာ့အရေး	Burma Affairs		08 38		3000
9	Thein Pe	ပြည်သူ့အာဏာ(ပ)	People's Power I	Sun Yat Sen, <i>The Three Principles of the People</i> (1927)	08 38	215	3000
10	Nu	လူပေါ်လူဇော်လုပ်နည်း (ပ)	How to Produce One Upmanship	Dale Carnegie, <i>How to Win Friends and Influence People</i> (1936)	10 38	280	3050
11	Mogyo	ပည်သူ့အာဏာ(ဒု)	People's Power II	Sun Yat Sen, <i>The Three Principles of the People</i> (1927)	(09) 38	232	
12	Thein Pe	ကုလား-ဗမာတိုက်ပွဲ	Indo-Burmese Conflict		09 38	24	10000
13	Nu	လူမွဲတို့ထွက်ရပ်လမ်း (ပ)	Way out of Poverty I	R. Page Arnot, <i>A Short History of the Russian Revolution,</i> vol. I (1937)	11 38	224	4000
14	Nagani	လူမွဲတို့ထွက်ရပ်လမ်း (ဒု)	Way out of Poverty II	R. Page Arnot, <i>A Short History....vol II</i> (1937)	(12) 38	219	
15	Thein Pe	သပိတ်မှောက် ကျောင်းသား (ဒု)	Student's Strike II		01 39	312	5000
16	Tun Kyaing	တူရကီအာဏာရှင်	Turkish Dictator's Biography	H.C.Armstrong, <i>Grey Wolf. Mustafa Kemal. An Intimate Study of an Dictator</i> (1932)	(02) 39	171	
17	Vespa/Ba Tin	လှပန်သူလျှို့	Japanese Spy	Amleto Vespa, <i>Secret Agent of Japan</i> (1938)	03 39	204	5000
18	Ba Hein	ကျောင်းသားများအရေးတော်ပုံ	Students' Rebellion		03 39	55	50000
19	Nagani	လီနင်	Lenin	James Maxton, <i>Lenin</i> (1932)	04 39	224	5000
20	Hla Shwe	ခနရှင်ဝါဒ	Capitalism		(04) 39	44	5000
21	Hein	ကျွန်ုပ်နှင့်မိုက်ကယ်ကောလင်း	Me and Michael Collins	Batt O'Connor, <i>With Michael Collins in the fight for Irish Independence</i> (1929)	08 39		1000
22	Hein	ကျွန်ုပ်၏စွန့်စားခြင်း	My Fight for	Dan Breen, My	08 39		5000

			Irish Freedom	Fight for Irish Freedom (1926)			
23	Ba Tin	ဂျပန်သူလှို	Japanese Spy	See No. 17		271	2500
24	Kyaw Tint	ကမ္ဘာ့သေမင်း	World's God of Death			363	
25	Myo Shu	ဗမာ့ပြဿနာ	Burmese Problems		08 39	175	6000
26	Shwe U Daung	ဟစ်တလာလုပ်ခဲ့သမျှ	What Hitler Has Done		08 39	266	5000
27	Thandwe Maung	အသောကမင်းတရားကြီး	Asoka	Various sources; book contains bibliography.	08 39	208	5000
28	Nu	လူပေါ်လူဇော်လုပ်နည်း (ဒု)	Upmanship 2	See No. 10	09 39	319	5000
29	Nyi Pu	ဒီဗလားရား	De Valera	Dennis Gwynn, <i>De Valera</i> (1933)	(09) 39	120	
30	Ba Thoung	ပန်းသာမစာဥ (ပ)	Pantha-Ma-Sa-U	Thomas Hardy, <i>Tess of the d'Urbervilles</i> (1891)	09 39	329	5000
31	Ba Thoung	ပန်းသာမစာဥ (ဒု)	See 30	See 30	09 39	258	5000
32	Kyaw Tint	ကိုယ်ပျောက်စစ်သား	Invisible Soldiers		10 39	206	5000
33	Shwe U Daung	လင်းကွန်း	Lincoln		11 39	198	5000
34	Thein Pe	ဟစ်တလာနှင့်ချိန်ဘာလင်	Who is Wrong - Hitler or Chamberlain		10 39	93	4800
35	Khin Khin Lay	စစ်ရောင်ခြည်	Rays of War		11 39	47	5000
36	Van Loon	လူ	Man	H. van Loon, <i>The Story of Mankind</i> (1922)	11 39	242	5000
37	Hla Pe	ကမ္ဘာ့နိုင်ငံရေးမြေပုံ	Political Map of the World		12 39	180	5000
38	Tun Pe	တရုတ်အရေးတော်ပုံအတွင်းရေး	The Inner History of the Chinese Revolution	T'ang Leang-Li, <i>The Inner History of the Chinese Revolution</i> (1930)	01 40	212	5000
39	Hla Shwe	ဇနီးမောင်နှံရာသက် ပန်	Husband and Wife		01 40	340	5000
40	Ba Tin	ဆိုရှယ်လစ်ဝါဒနှင့်နိဿယ	Theory and Practise of Socialism I	John Strachey, <i>Theory and Practice of Socialism I</i> (1936)	02 40	228	5000
41	Mya Doung	အိုင်ယာလန်သူပုန် ဗုံးအဖွဲ့	Ireland's Secret	Edward M. Brady, <i>Ireland's Secret</i>	(02) 40	213	

	Nyo		Organisations	<i>Service in England</i> (1928)			
42	Khin Khin Lay	ကမ္ဘာ့ရန်သူ	World Enemy		03 40	152	50000
43	Mya Doung Nyo	ကမ္ဘာ့လျှို့ဝှက် အသင်းများ	The World's Secret Organisations		04 40	208	2000
44	Tun Pe	ဆိုဗီယက်ဒီမိုကရေစီနှင့်ကိုယ်တွေ့များ	Soviet Democracy and One's Experiences	Pat Sloan, <i>Soviet Democracy</i> (1937)	04 40	247	1000
45	Aung San and Others	ကမ္ဘာစစ်နှင့်ဗမာ	World War and Burma		04 40	27	4000
46	Kyaw Tint	ပင်သစ်အရေးတော်ပုံ	French Revolution	Leo Gershoy, <i>The French Revolution</i> (1932)	05 40	324	5000
46a	Nyana		Wuttaya Yokshin Zat Wuttu. A Novel		05 40	152	2000
47	Nu	ဂန္ဓာလရစ်	Gandalarit		05 40	307	4000
47a	Toe Maung		Dragon Book of Verse		06 40	160	1000
48	Myo Nyunt	ယနေ့ဗမာ	Burma Today		09 40	60	3000
49	Editor	အာရှအတွင်းရေး	Asia Today		07 40	152	4000
49a	Pyinnyathi ha		Legend of Footprint at Shin Thiwali Pagoda, Kyaukkyi		07 40	40	2000
50	Mya Doung Nyo	သင်းထိုက်နှင့်သင်းကံ	Your Fight and your Fate		(07) 40	207	
51	Tin Maung	လင်းယုန်နီ	Red Eagle		08 40	224	4000
52	Hein	အိုင်းရစ်အရေးတော်ပုံ	Irish Revolution		09 40	203	3500
53	Shwe U Doung	ဒေါက်တာသောင်းထိုက်	Doctor Thaug Htaik		10 40	166	3000
54	Byuha Khin	ဒေါက်တာသောင်းထိုက်၏ စုံထောက်များ ကြီးများ	Doctor Thaug Htaik's Cases		11 40	210	
55	Ohn Myint	စောမွန်လှ	Saw Mon Hla		11 40	166	3000

56	Kyaw Tint	ပဲရစ်အရေးတော်ပုံ	The Paris Revolt	Frank Jellinek, <i>The Paris Commune of 1871</i> (1937)	12 40	224	3000
57	Tun Aung Kyaw	စူးအတ်	Suez	Various sources listed	12 40	104	2000
58	Thein Pe	လက်ငင်းတို့တာဝန်	Our Duty			20	
59	Lorimer/A ye Kyaw	ဖေ့ချစ်သား	My Beloved Son	George H. Lorimer, <i>Letters of a Self-Made Merchant to his Son</i> (1902)		174	
60	Thandwe Maung	အိုင်းရစ်အာဇာနည်	Irish Martyr	Dennis Gwynn, <i>The Life and Death of Roger Casement</i> (1930)		158	3000
61	Dagon Taya	မေ	May	Beverley Nichols, <i>Self</i> (1938)		222	
62	Ohn Myint	တို့ရှမ်းပြည်	Our Shan State			232	
63	Ba Thoung	တိုက်သင်္ဘောပုလွေ	Warship Wolfe	Roy Alexander, <i>The Cruise of the Raider Wolf</i> (1939)		72	
64	Ko Lay	သူရဲကောင်း	Heroes			220	
65	Myoma Maung ...	ဟိုအရေးသည်အရေး	This and That			160	
66	Hsu Myaing	လွတ်လပ်ရေးတိုက်ပွဲ	Fight for Independence		01 41	195	3000
67	Bo	ကားလ်မတ်စ်ဝါဒ	Karl Marxism		02 41	181	3000
68	Byuha Khin	သူလျှို့မာယာ	Persuading Spies	E.7, <i>I am a Spy</i> (1938)		221	
69	Shap Ni	ကျွန်မချစ်လင်	My Beloved Husband	Krupskaya, <i>Memories of Lenin</i> (1930)		243	
70	Stevenson	ရတနာဒီပ	Treasure Island	Robert Stevenson, <i>Treasure Island</i> (1883)		232	
71	Mya Doung Nyo	အရေးတော်ပုံ	Revolution				

**Tun Aye's Burma Publishing House**

No	Author	Title (Burmese)	Title (English)	Model / Source (First edition)	Date	Pages	Copies
72	Ba Hein	ခနရှင်လောက	World of Capitalists	R.P. Dutt, <i>Fascism and Social Revolution</i> (1934)	06 39	269	2000
72a	Tun Aye		The Comrade		08 39		3000
73	Tha Tun	ဥရောပရှင်းတမ်း	Europe			205	3000
74	Tun Than	နိုင်ငံရေးရှင်းတမ်း	Exposition of Burmese Politics		08 39	249	3000
75	Soe	ဗမာ့တော်လှန်မှု	Resistance in Burma			262	
76	Saya Hein, Khin Myo Chit	စစ်သူလျှို့များ	Secret Agents of War		10 39	287	3000
77	Ba Hein	ကမ္ဘာ့စစ်နှင့်ဗမာ့နောင်ရေး	World War and Burma's Future			60	
78	Tha Tun	နဂါးနက်	Black Dragon		10 39	62	3000
79	Tha Tun	လွတ်လပ်ရေးတိုက်ပွဲ	The Great War		11 39		2500
80	Ba Gale	ဖက်ဆစ်မီးပြ	Fascist Dacoit		11 39	208	2500
81	Thein Thaik	ဂျပန်ခြေလမ်း	Japan's Step		01 40	88	2000
82	Tet Toe	မာတာဟာရီ	Mata Hari	Thomas Coulson, <i>Mata Hari. Courtesan and Spy</i> (1930)		114	
83	Ba Khine	ဂျာမနီအတွင်းရေး	Internal Affairs of Germany	Various sources; book contains bibliography.	01 40	200	3000
84	Soe	အလုပ်သမားလောက	Labour World		02 40	168	2500
85	Khin Myo Chit	စစ်နှောင်ကြိုး	Sit-Nyaung-Nyo		02 40	148	2500
86	Hla Pe, Ba	စစ်နှင့်ဘုံဝါဒ	War and Communism		03 40	160	2500

	Khine						
87	Kyaw Tint		Dr. Marden	Margaret Connolly, <i>The Life Story of Orison Swett Marden</i> (1925)	04 40	193	2500
87a	Mya Salwe, Kyaw Tint		A Treatise on Occult Science		04 40	96	2000
88	Tin Maung	ဘုံအာဏာရှင်	Socialist Dictator		05 40	144	2500
89	Tun Shein	တိုယ်တွေ့အိန္ဒိယ	India			159	
90	Thandwe Maung	တကယ့်ခေါင်းဆောင်	Real Leader		07 40	238	2000
91	Mya Doung Nyo	စစ်ပြန်	Sit Pyan		07 40	109	2000
92	Nu, Hla Pe	လိုတရနိုင်းငံရေးအဘိ ဓာန်	Political Dictionary		08 40	182	2000
93	Tha Tun	ဂျာမနီ	Germany		09 40	158	
94	Tet Toe	နပိုလီယံ	Napoleon		10 40	222	2000
95	Tha Tun, Khin Myo Chit	လူ့မုန်တိုင်း	Storm-People			201	
96	Hla Baw	ဆင်ဖိန်း	Sinn Fein		12 40	207	2000
97	Ba Thoung	ရေနံ	Oil	Upton Sinclair, <i>Oil!</i> (1926)	01 41	191	1500
98	Mya Sein	မိန်းမ	An Essay on Women		01 41	136	2000
99	Ba Thoung	တိုင်းပြည်ရန်သူ	An Enemy of the People	Henrik Ibsen, <i>An Enemy of the People</i> (1882)	02 41	256	
100	Thato	လေနတ်မောင်		André Maurois, <i>Ariel or the Life of Shelley</i> (1923)		214	
101	Thein Pe	မင်းတိုင်ပင်	The M.L.A.				

## X. APPENDICES

### Appendix 1

#### **Nagani Project – Call for Participants**

This project seeks to combine the efforts of ordinary persons and scholars both inside and outside Myanmar in an investigation into an enterprise, created by those at the vanguard of Burma's struggle for independence that was dedicated to importing international knowledge and literature into Burma. In so doing, the project aims to establish a network of people with an interest in Burma's/Myanmar's history as well as the country's future intellectual life and literary output.

#### **1.**

The **Nagani** (or 'Red Dragon') **Book Club** was founded in Rangoon in 1937 by a group of Burmans, of whom the most prominent was Thakin Nu, who later became the first Prime Minister of independent Burma. Taking Victor Gollancz' Left Book Club as its model, the purpose of the club was to print, at low-cost, a series of books in the Burmese language that contained the quintessence of contemporary international thought in the fields of literature, history, economics, politics, and science. Until its cessation in 1941, the club published more than 70 books; it also issued a newsletter and was even popularised by a song, sung by a film star, which is still widely known today. The club's membership comprised mostly of young Burmese nationalists - in particular members of the *Thakin* movement. The *Thakins* formed the core of the Burmese army and the political movement, which achieved Burma's independence in 1948.

The Nagani Book Club represented a real link between the various Burmese independence movements and the world at large. It was dedicated to the establishment of a cultural and political revolution in Burma that would benefit the Burmese population as a whole.

#### **2.**

Independent Burma – named Myanmar in 1989 – has been isolated from the rest of the world for a long period of time. This fact has had an adverse effect on all manner of research on Burma – nationally and internationally – including the study of the Nagani Book Club. Although most books dealing with modern Burma never fail to stress the Club's importance as the breeding ground that provided many Burmese revolutionaries with food for thought, the club has not yet been the subject

of any form of thorough research. Filling this gap may shed some light upon the beginnings of independent Burma's status in the family of nations.

The Nagani Book Club was founded at a crucial phase of Burma's struggle for independence. The club's creation followed on the heels of the introduction of a new constitution for Burma (now recognised as a distinct part of the British Empire separate from British India), which came into effect in April 1937 and flowered in the period preceding the outbreak of World War Two in Europe in September 1939. Moreover, the club was established at the intersection of two distinct traditions. On the one hand, the foundation of the club coincided with the need to cast off the "education of enslavement" of the country's British colonial masters (a need that had suffused all of Burma's independence movements since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century). On the other hand, by familiarising its readers with current international developments, knowledge and literature, the club not only succeeded in putting events in Burma into an international perspective, but it was also meeting the stipulation, set by the British administration, that Burma should first educate its population and modernise its country before being allowed to gain full independence.

A study of the Nagani Book Club - including its origins, its impact on the making of independent Burma, and the ways in which it conveyed international affairs and ideas to the Burmese public - will certainly contribute to a better understanding of Burma's political culture before and after regaining independence in 1948.

### 3.

To date, most investigations into the history of this club have been conducted in Myanmar; these studies were written predominantly in Burmese. One such study is contained in an unpublished diploma thesis in librarianship. Using this work and the British administration's records of books published in Burma up to the year 1941, the initiator of this project has identified some 100 titles of books published by Nagani and a similar enterprise that was an off-shoot from the original club. The list clearly shows that the book club did not only publish "leftist literature", as standard assessments of the club's activities would have us believe (see Robert Taylor, *The State in Burma*. London, 1987, Hurst: 208). In fact, it had a much broader scope. A detailed assessment requires a thorough study of the books published by the club. Given the fact that the club's activities were very much at the cutting edge between Burmese and international culture, it seems apposite to enlist the aid of scholars both inside and outside of Myanmar in order to conduct a proper investigation into the enterprise. It is believed that such a study of the Nagani Book Club could well be regarded as a

way of overcoming the stagnation of current research on Burma as well as the country's isolation with regard to intellectual and scientific exchange.

#### 4.

The **Nagani Project** is intended as a study of certain aspects of the history of the Nagani Book Club. It also hopes to investigate the club's significance on historical terms. In addition, the project aims to establish and encourage joint research efforts on the part of Burmese and non-Burmese scholars living inside and outside Myanmar.

Research into the Nagani Book Club can be done from a great variety of perspectives that reflect the range of topics dealt with in books published by the club. Such perspectives could include for example:

1. *History*: Antecedents of the club; impact of the books published on the political developments of Burma and individual readers (collecting oral traditions); enterprises of a similar kind in other Southeast Asian countries etc.
2. *Literary Studies*: Impact of different contemporary literary styles on Burmese writers; modes of translation from other languages etc.
3. *Economics*: The economic success of the Nagani Club (including antecedent and parallel enterprises); the conflict between notions of sacrifice for a good cause and 'selfish' economic interests; criticism of capitalism etc.
4. *Politics*: Interpretation of current ideologies (fascism, socialism, communism, democracy) by Burmese authors; perception and role of Burmese political traditions etc.

The list can be enlarged.

#### 5.

However, before these topics can be studied, it is necessary for some groundwork to be done:

- a) The project's first step will be to reconstruct the '**Nagani Library**'. To this end, the books published by the club and its "sister enterprise" as well as copies of some of the works that were translated into Burmese, have been identified. Most of the Burmese books are obtainable from Yangon's Universities' Central Library and the Universities' Historical Research Centre. Thanks to the financial support of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, a set of books will be available soon at the library at the University of Hamburg's Institute of

African and Asian Studies. Another set of books will be available in Yangon as well as the non-Burmese language books used by the Nagani-authors. The titles are listed in English in the attachment to this proposal. - The contributors will receive copies of the book(s) they chose to write about.

- b) In order to provide a survey of the contents of each publication, **book reports** of as many Nagani publications as possible are needed. This call for participants is addressed to any scholar or student, who might be interested in formulating such a book report. Each report should be written in English; it should be of 10 to 15 pages in length and take into account the following points:
- c) Biographical information about the author/translator and other contributors;
- d) Information about the non-Myanmar sources used in the book; (if the book is a translation, the original English version will be provided, too, if possible).
- e) Summary of the book's contents;
- f) Information about the special aim and intended impact of the book at the time of publication;
- g) How are foreign terms and concepts translated or transformed into the Myanmar language and the Myanmar context? (May be omitted!)
- h) Personal assessment by the reviewer of the book, its impact on later times and
- i) its meaning for today
- j) If any possible, the reports should be produced in teams of two, one person being responsible for drafting the text and the other for commenting upon and editing the draft.
- k) Once a certain number of reports (approx. 40) has been submitted to the project's initiator and coordinator, seminars will be held to discuss results and decide upon the foci of any further investigation and research.

**For more information, please contact:**

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University of Hamburg / Asian-Africa-Institute

email: [habezett@t-online.de](mailto:habezett@t-online.de)

Appendix 2

**SHORT INFORMATION on the MAKING of the BOOK REPORTS**

CHOSEN BOOKS from the bibliography will be provided on a lending basis by the manager [or for people in Myanmar through the Myanmar Book Centre in Yangon (55 Baho Road; telephone 221-271, 212-409)].

TWO REPORTS on each book by different persons are accepted.

LENGHT: 8,000 to 12,000 words (plus special space, if desired);

LANGUAGE of PUBLICATION: English; manuscripts in Myanmar language will be translated;

CRITERIA (must not slavishly be observed):

1. Biographical information about the author/translator, and other contributors;
2. Information about the non-Myanmar sources used in the book; (if the book is a translation, the original English version will be provided, too, if possible;)
3. Summary of the book's contents;
4. Information about the special aim and intended impact of the book at the time of publication;
5. How are foreign terms and concepts translated or transformed into the Myanmar language and the Myanmar context? (May be omitted!)
6. Personal assessment by the reviewer of the book, its impact on later times and its meaning for today

DEADLINE of DELIVERY of the REPORT: December 31, 2005 (the deadline can be extended);

DELIVERY of the REPORTS DRAFTED: Directly to the manager of the project by email or through the Myanmar Book Centre.

COMMENTS and EDITING: The reports will be commented upon by another person. The reviewer may react on the comments and answer the questions as he or she likes. The responsibility for the final editing of the reports is with the project manager.

REWARD: As a financial reward, each reviewer will receive 50 US \$ at the time of submitting the book report and 30 US \$ after the final editing.

OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS like recollections of elder people, who remember the impact of Nagani on their life, and essays on subjects related to the club (Nagani Song, Nagani Magazine, the role of literature in disseminating knowledge in Myanmar, etc.) are very much appreciated.

## MYANMAR LITERATURE PROJECT



Starting with an investigation into the NAGANI BOOK CLUB.

The project's

### **Working Papers**

are published by

the **Department of Southeast Asian Studies of Passau University**

Forthcoming:

No. 10:2, Thein Pe, *Biography of Saya Lun and Member of Parliament*

No. 10:3, Ba Hein, *The World of Capitalists*

No 10:4, Thein Pe, *Student Boycotters* (Two Volumes)

No. 10:5, Ba Khaing, *Political History of Burma*

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A number of Nagani Books  
were scanned and are available on CD.  
Details are available on request.

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All Working Papers published until now are available  
at  
<http://www.zoellner-online.org/mlp.htm>  
and at the Online Burma Library  
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/show.php?cat=2083>

## INVITATION

Readers are invited to participate in the project by

- writing **comments and criticisms** on the contents of this and other volumes of this series;
- contributing **essays** on Burmese/Myanmar literature as a medium between the international world and Burmese society;
- providing **material** that sheds more light on the Nagani Book Club, its context and impact on Burmese intellectual and literary life;
- offering **assistance** as translators and commentators of book reports.

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For contributions and questions, please contact:

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