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State Formation in the Shadow of the Raj: Violence, Warfare and Politics in Colonial Burma*

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Normally, society is organized for life; the object of Leviathan was to organise it for production.
J.S. Furnivall [1939: 124]

Abstract

This article examines the construction of the colonial security apparatus in Burma, within the broader British colonial project in eastern Asia. During the colonial period, the state in Burma was built by default, as no one in London or India ever mapped out a strategy for establishing governance in this outpost. Instead of sending in legal, commercial or police experts to establish law and order—the preconditions of the all-important commerce—Britain sent the Indian Army, which faced an intensity and landscape of guerilla resistance never anticipated. Early forays into the establishment of law and order increasingly became based on conceptions of the population as enemies to be pacified, rather than subjects to be incorporated into or even ignored by the newly defined political entity. The character of armed administration in colonial Burma had a disproportionate impact on how that population came to be regarded, treated, legalized and made into subjects of the Raj. Administrative simplifications along territorial and racial lines resulted in political, economic, and social boundaries that continue to divide the country today. Bureaucratic and security mechanisms politicized violence along territorial and racial lines, creating "two Burmas" in the administrative and security arms of the state. Despite the "*laissez-faire*" proclamations of colonial state officials in Burma, this geographically and functionally limited state nonetheless established durable administrative structures that precluded any significant integration throughout the territory for a century to come.

This article explores the relationship among violence, warfare and politics in the colonial outpost of Burma, located geographically, administratively and politically deep in the shadow of Britain's flagship colony, India. I argue that the process by which Britain built a modern state in Burma enshrined violence as the currency of politics. As in other societies, war and crisis in colonial Burma created institutions with staying power, and in this case

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created relations between state and society that have been and continue to be what Charles Tilly [1990] calls, “coercion-intensive.” Hardly the product of any colonial plot or intention, the coercion-intensive institutions that have dominated governance throughout the twentieth century were, as Florencia Mallon [1994: 69] suggests, “the products of previous conflicts and confrontations,” and were imbedded with “the sediments of earlier struggles.”

The exigencies of colonial warfare in Burma deposited the sediments of a coercion-intensive political relationship between state and society. In this article, I show how ad hoc colonial political arrangements hardened into durable institutions and practices. The process of adding Burma to colonial India in the nineteenth century was far from smooth, and engaged first the East India Company and then a succession of unimaginative governors-general in a particular variant of state-building that never paid for itself, never accommodated any local interests, and never hesitated to call in firepower when the profits of European firms were threatened. From the nineteenth century on, Burma was a territorial and administrative appendage to India, serving as a buffer zone between French Indo-China and India. As such, Burma was never a priority in British imperial policy. At best, the British built a “skinny” or minimalist state, aimed at letting commerce flourish (which it did) and paying for itself (which it never did) by taxation of land and some commerce. Paying for itself required pacifying the Burmese population following the three Anglo-Burmese wars. The pacifiers—Indian Army soldiers—had no way to communicate with locals and little information about the terrain or the unexpectedly dangerous enemy, and soon came to see little distinction between new subjects of the Crown and new enemies of the Crown. To a large degree, pacification was never entirely accomplished, and the skinny state was filled out with the coercive muscles of British and Indian army units. The power and modernity of this unprecedentedly organized force was not lost on individuals and groups resisting the skinny state. Resisters created anti-state martial organizations that became the core of every major political movement and party in the waning years of colonialism and the early years after independence.

This coercion-intensive state relationship with Burmese society did not remain static throughout the colonial period. However, changes in the missions, character and make-up of the colonial armed forces—as well as reforms of every other aspect of colonial governance—came out of negotiations and compromises between colonial officials and Indian nationalists in India proper, and not out of any attempts to create channels of input from significant social forces in the colonial province of Burma. In fact, colonial officials increasingly identified most political and social forces in Burma as criminal, even as the same colonial officials began to recognize the difficulty and futility of ruling the province in such a singlemindedly coercive manner. As state-society relations in post World War I India became more inclusive and more open to conflict and compromise, the colonial regime began a 15-year process of severing Burma administratively from India because this was the one part of the colony where political reforms were unthinkable. The separation

process led to a reorganization of the security forces, which politicized violence along ethnic lines.

At no point in the colonial era did the British state-building enterprise in Burma carry out any of the negotiation and bargaining with social constituencies that proved crucial to the development of responsive, representative governing institutions in Europe, India and other parts of the world. When local populations threatened the order necessary for successful colonial commerce and authority, the state's response rarely entailed any attempt to win the support of political allies or resource-providers within the populace. Instead, the British repressed, coerced, arrested, exiled and executed murderers and nationalists, robbers and monks, and cattle thieves and student strikers. The formation of modern, bureaucratic states in Burma, as in much of the colonial world, thus established what Crawford Young [1988: 5] calls "a command relationship [between state and] civil society, reflected in its laws, its routine, its mentalities, even its imagery."

Transplanting the British-Indian Colonial State

In the nineteenth century, diplomatic tensions and commercial competition between France and Britain over the natural resources available in Southeast Asia and over the security of Britain's flagship colony in India led to Britain's three-stage, gradual takeover of all territory now considered part of "Burma." In the three Anglo-Burmese wars of 1825–26, 1852, and 1885–86, British-Indian troops despatched from Madras and Bengal defeated the armies of the increasingly weak Burmese kings of the Konbaung dynasty. None of these wars were waged with a coherent, expansionist vision of a future "British Burma," and the state that was established by default in post-1886 Burma was simply an appendage to the colonial regime in India. The Government of India paid the bills for the expensive battles in Burma, and its model of administration and the bureaucrats to run it were assembled in India and transported to Burma following the proclaimed victory of the Indian Army in 1886. The colonial state was never "built" per se; it was transported from India.

Unlike British colonies in Africa, state-building was never explicitly a military enterprise in Burma. There was never a Military Governor. Colonial administrators sailed over from the other three provinces of India, bringing along English-speaking, mostly civilian, Indian clerks to staff the state. Unlike in Africa, there were no significant armed European competitors for control over Burmese territory; the British and Indian Army garrisons established after the final annexation were strictly instruments of internal security, rather than of foreign policy. In a sense, the British-Indian state hit Burmese territory running. It was comprised of a relatively professional, modern, tested bureaucracy, developed over a century of experience in India and well-suited to the needs of the Bombay-Burma Trading Corporation and other powerful commercial interests seeking a

rapid establishment of law and order and an expansion of business opportunities in resource-rich Burma.

After 1886, colonial rule brought to Burmese society unprecedented changes, most of which benefited British and other foreign commercial interests at the expense of the majority of indigenous peoples. Many historians point to Chief Commissioner Charles Crosthwaite's implantation of the Indian system of local administration in Burma as one of the most important causes of the destruction of the social and cultural fabric of late-nineteenth century Burma [Crosthwaite 1968 [1912]; Cady 1958; Furnivall 1956 [1948]; Hall 1968; Mya Sein 1938]. Crosthwaite's Village Act was passed as an instrument of martial law during the pacification campaign (1886–90) in villages throughout Upper and Lower Burma. The Act broke up traditional local-level administrative organizations, which Crosthwaite saw as giving rise to banditry and organized resistance to British rule. The traditional, non-territorial ties of the indigenous social unit (called the *myo*) of central Burma were replaced by the Indian administrative and territorial unit of the village. The new village system led to a gradual but steady increase in centralization and government involvement in the daily lives of the indigenous people. As Furnivall [1956 [1948]: 40] wrote,

> Even up to 1900 the people saw little of any Government officials, and very few ever caught more than a passing glimpse of a European official. By 1923 the Government was no longer remote from the people but, through various departmental subordinates, touched on almost every aspect of private life.

If Furnivall is right, by the 1920s, the British had constructed a modern bureaucratic state in Burma. Along the way, a whole class of traditional local officials were eliminated, destroying centuries-old social ties at the *myo* level. In the process, state-building via the Village Act actually paved the way for a longer-term trend of lawlessness and disorder. From the turn of the century onward, Burma became the most dangerous place in the empire, with Rangoon boasting the highest murder rates for any colonial city [Harvey 1946: 40]. While the destruction of local authority did not *cause* these increases in violent crime—which more probably resulted from the dislocations experienced with the intrusions of the modern capitalist economy in precapitalist, agrarian Burma—it nonetheless eliminated traditional social controls and curbs on lawlessness, which was the absolute opposite of Crosthwaite's intention.

Coercion and the State in British Burma

Reorganizing Burmese society "for production," in Furnivall's words, required from 1885 (and arguably, from 1826) all the way through to 1942 a form of governance that one histo-

rian likens to "martial law" [Trocki 1992: 120]. The political and combat roles played by units of the British Indian Army in the early years after the 1885–86 war institutionalized an unequal relationship between military and civil authorities—in favor of military authority—that would greatly influence the development of future military and civil institutions in Burma.

Resistance and Rebellion

This military-dominated set-up did not come out of any coherent British or British-Indian plans to build a state around coercion. In fact, the post-conquest role of British-Indian troops was never much considered by the civilian or military authorities plotting the conquest from India. While British-Indian forces faced little effective resistance from the Burmese king's army in the final annexation, the British occupation of Upper Burma in late 1885 sparked disturbances throughout the region and triggered a new round of resistance, dacoity, brigandage and rebellion in Lower Burma. By mid-1886, "a truly formidable rebellion had enveloped the country," and the Government of India deployed upwards of 16,000 reinforcement troops to back up the original expeditionary force [Cady 1958: 129–130; see also Hailes 1967; Ni Ni Myint 1983; Woodman 1962; Wylly 1927]. Ten military outposts were set up throughout Upper Burma to attempt to control local resistance. Although the resistance lacked any centralized leadership and was comprised largely of small rebel groups and a handful of locally-popular "pretender-kings" hoping to re-establish indigenous rule, the violence nonetheless spread through every district of Upper Burma and most of Lower Burma. Historian Cady [1958: 133] notes, "In many plains villages of Burma practically every household had some male member fighting with a rebel gang." A regimental history of the Third Gurkha Rifles, which served in the campaign, blamed the expedition commander's "error of judgment" in allowing "the disbandment of King Thebaw's [sic] army. . . . [H]undreds of Burmese soldiery were allowed to disperse, *with their arms,* all over the country" [Woodyatt n.d.: 50, italics mine].

At the outbreak of violence in December 1885, British-Indian troops shot anyone caught possessing arms or engaging in pillage; they also burned villages where they encountered any resistance and conducted public floggings of alleged rebels. Another Indian Army regimental history [Hennell 1985: 134] defended these harsh tactics, given the Indian Army's lack of expertise in guerrilla warfare:

> In practically all engagements with the enemy we had to fight an invisible foe. The dacoits waylaid our troops as they came up the river in boats or by road marches, poured forth a heavy fire upon the advancing forces as they got within range. Not only was it difficult to locate the enemy in their hidden lairs, but our men laboured under the vast disadvantage of having to force their way through the close undergrowth of an unknown forest, whilst the enemy knew all the ins and outs of their tangled labyrinths and were able to keep concealed. . . . Our only means of punishment was to burn these villages.

These ruthless tactics backfired on the British. Villagers responded to the repressive measures by banding together to attack military posts. Eventually, Gen. Prendergrast, commander of the British-Indian expeditionary force ordered an end to summary executions and village burning. Later, the 10 military posts were expanded to 25; detachments patrolled actively between posts, breaking up larger bands of rebels into smaller units. By February 1887, 40,500 British and Indian troops were fighting in Burma, and in some areas of Upper Burma, armed garrisons were established every 10 to 15 miles [Cady 1958: 125–137].[1)]

By 1890, British-Indian troops had extinguished much of the rebellion, breaking up most large bands of rebels and forcing pretender-kings into hiding. In Upper Burma, order was maintained by 30,000 troops and Indian police; another 5,300 were assigned to Lower Burma. The cost of the annexation and subsequent pacification campaign increased from the original estimate of £300,000 to £635,000 in 1885–86, to more than twice that amount in 1888 [*ibid*.: 135–137].

As order was restored to most of Burma, the majority of Indian Army troops were sent back to India, martial law was lifted and a civilian administration took over in local and national affairs. However, both British and Indian Army troops were garrisoned in Burma throughout the first half of the twentieth century. In 1938, there were 10,365 army troops in Burma; of these 4,713 were British (led by 358 British officers), in addition to roughly 3,000 Indians and nearly 3,000 indigenous Karens, Chins and Kachins [Notes on the Land Forces].

Pacification and Internal Security

What did these soldiers do in Burma? Beginning with the pacification campaigns described above and continuing throughout the colonial period with the armed forces' deployment to put down threats to commerce and order, the function of Indian and British army units was primarily internal security. As in other British colonies where early interaction between the populace and the military was coercive and repressive in nature, colonial security policies "left a deep rift in army-society interaction" [Frazer 1994: 59]. From the very beginning of the pacification campaigns, the first contact much of the population of rural central Burma had with the colonial state was with the 40,000 British-Indian Army troops in Burma. In those first years following annexation, Indian Army units also pressed Burmese villagers into service for public works projects, including building roads and railways.

Following the third pacification period in the 1890s, the reduced, peacetime contingent of the armed forces served in two roles: first, as territorial forces, defending the fron-

1）The official history of the *tatmadaw* [Sitthamàin pyádaik (War History Museum) 1994: 44] has somewhat higher numbers: "In the fighting against Burmese rebels, the British used its infantry, cavalry, navy, artillery and other forces, bringing their strength to 50,000." However, no primary sources are cited.

tier areas which were considered the major strategic threat in the territory; and second, as a back-up to civil and military police charged with maintaining law and order in both the frontier and the central regions.

In terms of territorial defense of the frontier areas of Burma, the British Indian Army arrived in these regions as a pacification force, just as it had in the central regions. After the third Anglo-Burmese war, some Shan *sawbwas* (traditional leaders) acquiesced to British plans to establish indirect rule in the hilly northeastern regions. In exchange for retaining their local authority over law and order within their domains, the cooperating *sawbwas* granted British concerns free trade and commerce in their regions. However, local leaders in the Chin and Kachin hills organized fairly extensive resistance to British overtures in the aftermath of the 1885–86 war. Most local leaders in these regions had been nearly autonomous under the Konbaung state, aside from occasional demands for tribute; hence British intrusions were not appreciated. Eventually, the British were able to convince most Chin and Kachin leaders to accept British authority in return for a promise not to interfere with local politics and customs and not to undermine the local chiefs' taxation powers with their subjects. When a few local leaders refused to grant British demands, the British Indian Army conducted punitive raids on those areas.

The army's ongoing role in the internal affairs of the frontier regions was fairly minimal from the conclusion of the pacification period through the 1930s. As Taylor [1987: 160] argued:

> During much of the British period, the central state's authority in more remote areas amounted to little more than periodic "flag marches" in which the symbol of state supremacy was displayed and the promise of punishment for unruly behavior was made.

Occasionally, the British representative in a Shan state called upon British-Indian troops to put down a popular rebellion sparked by a tax increase or other repressive measure undertaken by one of the *sawbwas.* However, most of the colonial period was characterized by relative peace in the hill regions, and whatever conflicts arose between villages and tribes usually were resolved peacefully, given the threat of punishment by British-Indian troops. With the approach of World War II, the Shan states, in particular, emerged as a region of strategic threat in the colony. For centuries, these regions had been vulnerable to or even been the bases of invading armies that attacked the Irrawaddy basin. In the build-up of forces preceding the war, Britain developed a more extensive territorial defence of the hill regions, allowing Shan *sawbwas* to recruit their own military forces and deploying more than 10,000 other Frontier Force troops in the frontier areas.

Nonetheless, the significance of this expansion should not be overstated. It is important to note that throughout the colonial period and right up until the Japanese invasion, British officials did not perceive any imminent threat to the borders of Burma. Hence, according to a 1938 Colonial Office assessment of the armed forces in Burma, "the primary

role of the Army in Burma" throughout the colonial era was not border defense but instead "Internal Security" [Notes on the Land Forces]. As far as the British-Indian Army was concerned, Burma was never a strategic concern, and as such received little consideration in army policy reviews even after World War II had begun in Europe.

Responsibility for internal security in the central plains region was the main occupation of the military. Formally this responsibility was divided between police and military units, but the British were never able to establish a functional police force in Burma. During the pacification campaign that followed the second Anglo-Burmese war, the British raised indigenous local police forces to maintain law and order in the villages and towns. At first, British officials tried to identify a traditional village leader who could take over police duties and chose the *kyedangyi,* the largest taxpayer who traditionally assisted the *thu-gyi* (headman) with revenue collection and police responsibilities. In a typical British colonial practice, the *kyedangyi* was appointed as an unarmed and initially unpaid constable. By the 1880s, the anti-British rebellions had undermined the legitimacy and authority that the *kyedangyis* had long held, and the British had great difficulties recruiting local police officers, despite their offers of attractive salaries. Nonetheless, the British managed to reorganize local administrative units under Crosthwaite's Village Act, and from about 1890 on, made the new state-appointed headmen of the amalgamated village units responsible for maintaining order. In fact, the annual reports of the colonial provincial government in Burma placed the summary of "village affairs" in the section headed, "police administration" [Furnivall 1956 [1948]: 75].

Later, the British gave up this police conscription system at the local level and tried to centralize law enforcement administration. The Deputy Commissioner of each district was assigned a District Superintendent of Police (DSP), about half of whom were British or Indian, while the other half were mostly Anglo-Burmans and Karens from Lower Burma. Under the DSP were locally-recruited town and village constables, most of whom were unarmed until the late 1930s when the administration authorized each village to hold two or three firearms to ward off bandits.

The Village Act and the increasing destruction of the rural agrarian economy created the conditions that led to Burma being "consistently the most criminal province in the empire" throughout the twentieth century colonial period [Christian 1942: 152].[2)] The British-Indian Government responded to this problem by authorizing frequent enlargements and reorganizations of the more centralized civilian police force. As Donnison [1953: 42] noted: "The accepted treatment was to strengthen that part of the administration whose task it was to combat the criminal, but this cure proved to be no cure for the disease—it was scarcely a palliative." Observed another former civil servant:

2）According to Harvey [1946: 38], "England and Wales, with 40 million people, have 140 murders a year; Burma, with only 15 million, had 900.

> The population was growing rapidly, but crime grew more rapidly. Between 1900 and the outbreak of war in 1914 the population increased by about 15 percent, the number of police rose from one for every 789 people to one for every 744, but crime increased by 26 percent. [Furnivall 1956 [1948]: 139][3)]

In areas with higher-than-average crime rates, the civilian police were reinforced by "punitive police." Under the Police Act, collective penalties were imposed over localities by quartering a unit of this Indian-dominated, armed police force, paid for by fees added to the land taxes of the local community. Still, crime rates continued to increase. From 1911 to 1921, the population increased by about 9 percent, but the increase of major crimes "ranged from 31 percent in the case of murder to 109 percent in the case of robbery and dacoity" [Government of India 1920–21, quoted in Furnivall 1956 [1948]: 139].

The corruption of the "ill-educated, ill-paid policemen" became a favorite target for Burmese nationalist politicians in the early 1920s, in part because of the sorry state of the civilian police forces, but also because "of the political control exercised by the police" [Moscotti 1974: 37]. One of the first acts of the Legislative Council established under the new 1923 constitution was an attempt to clean up the civilian police force by increasing pay to qualified officers and terminating the contracts of corrupt, unqualified ones. However, the attempt failed miserably when a subsequent increase in robbery and dacoity forced the reinstatement of the fired officers and the re-lowering of standards.

These failures to establish any kind of effective local policing established the pattern of order maintenance that exists to today: when local affairs get unruly, the state sends in the military. The ineffectiveness of the civilian police led to the deployment of units of the Indian and British army and the expansion of the Military Police in times of trouble. The Military Police were established in 1886 for use in the final pacification campaign and grew to nine battalions by 1935 [Prasad 1963: 42]. Unlike the civilian police with its indigenous recruits, the Military Police consisted of almost entirely of Indians, with British officers in command positions usually on secondment from the British or Indian armies. They were the only police force to carry firearms regularly in Burma. Christian [1942: 161] describes these units as constituting something of a strike force, "serving as mobile, well-armed police for duty in case of racial disturbances, riots, disasters, and similar emergencies that cannot be dealt with by local authorities." From about 1920 onward, every year there was at least one instance in which the armed forces and the military police were called out to put down communal, nationalist or labor uprisings. The most prominent of these disturbances—the Hsaya San peasant rebellion of 1930–32—led to the immediate deployment of military, supported by administrative units operated by civilian police. Reinforcement troops came from India, and by June 1931, the British governor had sent in roughly 8,100 Indian and British army troops to fight the small, dispersed groups

3）Furnivall derived his statistics from Government of India [1877–78; 1910–11; 1914–15].

of unarmed peasants. Three months later, six more Indian battalions and one more British battalion arrived from India, bringing British military strength to more than 10,000. Additionally, levies of Karens were raised and armed to fight against Burman rebel bands in the Delta [Cady 1958: 316].

Hence, beginning with the pacification campaign of 1885–90 onward, the coercive organizations of the colonial state played a significant role in reorganizing Burmese society for production for the world market. British colonial definitions of "crime" and "internal security" brought charged murderers, cattle thieves, robbers, rebels, Buddhist monks, labor organizers and starving, scavenging peasants into a legal system that treated them all similarly, and for the first time ever as enemies of the state. Facing these enemies, the colonial state relied extensively on the armed forces and police to control nearly all forms of criminal and political behavior throughout the colonial period. Even though widespread nationalist-oriented political mobilization did not occur until the 1920s, the population of Burma had had extensive experience with the military arm of the colonial state beginning in 1886, with the frequent deployment of armed force in combating colonially-defined crime. One of the "residues of the colonial state" [Young 1988: 28] which shaped postcolonial state-society relations is this prominent role of the military—vis-a-vis other state institutions—in controlling individual and social behavior.

Clearly, armed force played a significant role in the governance of colonial Burma. The British state, which has long been characterized as "*laissez-faire*" in its organization of Burmese society for production, did not hesitate to employ coercion when there was any perception of a threat to British commerce and authority.[4)] The "*laissez-faire*" response of the colonial state to the enormous social and economic dislocations that came with the intrusion of the world economy and the commercialization of agriculture in Burma was to attempt to arrest and coerce the victims of these processes. This was undoubtedly a skinny state, barely capable of keeping the trains running and collecting enough land revenue to pay its police. Beyond the main lines of communication in the central region, this state barely existed. But where it did, it had big muscles. The slightest challenge to tenuous colonial order provoked automatic deployments of armed force, establishing a coercion-intensive relationship between armed force and the state, and between the state and society, that carried over into the postcolonial period.

4）Furnivall's [1956 [1948]] characterization of the "*laissez-faire*" nature of the British colonial state in Burma has never really been challenged. It is beyond the scope of this article to analyze the full nature of state-society relations in the colonial era, but simply looking at the state's lack of welfare policy—as Furnivall does—misses the more "hands-on" approach taken to issues of social and crime control. It is hard to understand how a state that destroys a centuries-old traditional social system, imports more than 300,000 coolies from India to serve as laborers, and maintains law and order by resort to armed force in most situations can be characterized as "*laissez-faire*."

The Armed Forces in British Burma: Indigenous Participation

There were variations in the nature of this command relationship between the state and the population over time and territory, most notably in the regions where the British accommodated some of the demands of traditional rulers in the frontier regions. State-building in colonial Burma, however, never followed the European-style state-building pattern of contestation, negotiation, accommodation and compromise between state officials and social forces. Nonetheless, the most enduring changes in state-building and the deployment of coercion in Burma came as a result of contestation and accommodation carried out by colonial officials and nationalists in India. The colonial organization of Burmese society for production, extraction and trade underwent two major institutional modifications under British rule that were outcomes of changes in governance in India. From 1885 until 1923, Burma was designated a province of India, added to the existing three provinces, Madras, Bengal and Bombay. Notably, prior to the arrival of the British, most of the territory of modern Burma had never come under the rule of any sovereign based in India. After the three Anglo-Burmese wars, all major decisions about the new province were made or had to be approved by the Governor-General of India [Taylor 1974: 94].

The first change in this administrative set-up came after World War I, when Britain began planning for India's eventual transition to self-government. London's shift in policy came at least partially out of wartime pledges for greater political autonomy by British officials eager to entice India to provide more troops for the British war effort. However, the impossibility of Burma's membership in a future independent Indian federation loomed large in the minds of colonial officials and Indian nationalists. Britain began formulating plans to treat Burma differently from the more "advanced" India.

Accordingly, on January 1, 1923, Burma became a full Governor's Province under a new dyarchy constitution. The Governor of Burma was given a Legislative Council with a majority of seats to be filled by election; additionally, local administrative bodies were to be partially democratized. Most importantly, as Robert Taylor [*ibid.*: 90] points out, Burma became a distinct entity in British policy from this time forward:

> All of the major decisions regarding Burma from the 1820's to 1920 were made in Calcutta or New Delhi, not London. It was the decision in 1918 [implemented in 1923] not to extend . . . reforms [granted India] to the province of Burma that first caused His Majesty's Government in London to take an active part in shaping Burma. After this event it is possible to write about "British policy" toward Burma.[5)]

5) The separation of Burma from India was aimed at freeing up India from the "Burma problem" British interests tried to do whatever it took to move their flagship colony, India, toward Dominion status within the Commonwealth [Taylor 1974: 90–94].

The separation of Burma from India was completed in 1935, when another new constitution was enacted (effective in 1937) providing for a distinct, separate colony of Burma for the first time ever. It survived only four years.

What was significant about the two sets of reforms emanating from India was that the character of the armed forces gradually became a political issue in Burma just as Burma emerged as a distinct juridical and administrative entity in British policy. As Burma was extricated and eventually separated from India, British officials and Burmese nationalist politicians realized that the government would not be able to depend forever on the troops of the Indian Army to keep order. By the early 1920s, leaders of the Indian National Congress were agitating to bring all overseas units of the Indian Army back to India proper, where they would be used only for defense of Indian territory rather than in the service of the British Empire.

It is important to note that the availability of the Indian Army for internal and external security purposes in Burma first came into question at the same time Burmese nationalists began criticizing British policies that excluded ethnic majority Burmans from the Indian Army. Although some piecemeal reforms were put into place to modify this exclusion at the time of the 1923 constitutional changes, colonial officials never seriously addressed the issue until separation was declared in 1935. According to former civil servant, F.S.V. Donnison [1953: 96–97]:

> It was not until after the separation of Burma from India [in 1937] had actually taken place that serious consideration was given to the problems of building up a separate Burmese army. . . . A self governing Burma would be overwhelmingly Burman, with 12 million true Burmans as against 4 million minority peoples. The majority race would be unrepresented in the military forces of the new state.

This issue of non-enrollment of indigenous Burmese in the armed forces in Burma actually needs to be broken down into two considerations. First, relative to British practices in the other administrative units of India—which was the reference point for indigenous peoples in Burma—participation by *all* indigenous groups in the armed forces in Burma was extremely low. Second, an examination of the development of British policy on non-recruitment of ethnic-majority Burmans throughout the colonial period will show that this practice was something of a historical accident—rather than a coherently thought-out policy—resulting from the timing of the annexation of Burma and the particular stage of development of the Indian armed forces. In existing historical analyses, the practice of excluding ethnic majority Burmans has long been characterized as a classic example of British *divide et impera*.[6] It is true that most of the British-recruited indigenous levies

6）This is basically the argument of all postcolonial “official histories.” See Sitthamàin pyádaik (War History Museum) [1994] and Myanmà thamain (Myanmar Historical Commission) [1990]; and Ba Than [1962: 2].

were members of ethnic minorities with some basis for hostility toward the ethnic-majority Burman race, and in fact they dominated the armed forces on the eve of World War II. However, the recruitment of ethnic minorities did not begin in earnest until World War I, and the absence of any significant numbers of indigenous troops of any ethnicity before 1914 is at least as important in the development of military institutions as the absence of ethnic-majority Burman troops from 1914–42.

At various points in the nineteenth century, British Army and civilian officials considered recruiting indigenous peoples to fight alongside the Indian troops. In 1824, the Government of India authorized British-Indian troops to raise a levy of Arakanese to fight the Burmese king's forces in the first Anglo-Burmese War. As early as 1833, Mons were recruited as soldiers to defend Tenasserim, although the British policy that the Mons be paid less than members of Indian units posted there made recruitment nearly impossible, and the unit languished, being formally disbanded in 1849. When the second Anglo-Burmese War broke out in 1852, the question of recruiting local troops was reopened. Commissioner Arthur Phayre was authorized to raise a light infantry regiment in Pegu comprised at least in part of Burmans; but in 1861, when the threat of war with the Burmese king had diminished, the Pegu Light Infantry and the Arakan Levy were converted into unarmed civilian police [Sitthamàin pyádaik (War History Museum) 1994: 20–22; Furnivall 1956 [1948]: 178–184]. Over the next three decades, further attempts were made to enlist Karens, perhaps because of the increasing success of the American Baptist missionaries in converting Karens to Christianity and teaching them English. By 1880, the Karen contingent of the levies had grown, accounting for about three-quarters of the two indigenous companies. At the outbreak of widespread violence throughout Upper and Lower Burma after the third Anglo-Burmese War, the American Baptist missionaries successfully lobbied British officials to recruit more Karens as auxiliaries to put down the rebellion; they were disbanded at the end of martial law. In 1891, a Karen Military Police battalion was formed, but problems of discipline led to the dissolution of the unit. The few Karens who were allowed to continue service were distributed among the remaining battalions, which were predominantly Indian [Furnivall 1956 [1948]: 180–181].

By the outbreak of World War I, the number of indigenous members of the army and military police in Burma was probably no more than 300; the indigenous population in 1911 was 12 million [Government of India 1911]. While most observers looked back on the early exclusion of ethnic majority Burmans as the source of great political tensions in the later colonial period, these data suggest that what is more significant about colonial army recruitment is the absence of any appreciable indigenous representation whatsoever in the armed forces. Recruitment policy and practices were not functioning on the basis of a divide-and-rule principle; instead there was no recruitment of indigenous Burmese of any ethnicity.

Because this non-recruitment of any indigenous peoples was especially stark in comparison with the British recruitment of local men into the army in India, one must look for

an explanation of why the British did not consider this to be an important issue until the World War I era. The explanation is rather obvious when one considers the make-up of the forces garrisoned in Burma. After more than a century of development from the earliest guards of the East India Company to battalions "of sepoys, drilled, disciplined and clothed on western lines," the Indian Army was "accustomed to European officers, under European officers accustomed to Indian ways" [Furnivall 1956 [1948]: 178–181]. Each time the Government of India decided to raise indigenous forces in Burma, it was because a Burma-based British official had made an appeal to do so based on the projected cost savings of not having to send Indian troops to Burma once indigenous troops could be trained to take over external and internal security functions. In most of the cases, the units were disbanded due to higher-than-expected costs vis-a-vis the availability of cheaper, English-speaking, already-trained Indian forces.

The Armed Forces in British Burma: Divide-and-Rule

Recruiting for the new, World-War-I-era units followed the 20-year-old Indian Army practice of establishing single-race or single-"class" units.[7] When the end of the war came, the Government of India reduced its armed forces throughout all its provinces to a peacetime skeleton. Hence, in Burma, as in the rest of India, recruitment was halted for all army and military police units and many of the units formed during the war were disbanded. In Burma, top on the list of units to go were the various Burman-only companies and battalions, easily identifiable given the practice of establishing "class"-specific units.

Furnivall argues that this policy to exclude Burmans came out of British concerns about arming and training Burmans who someday might be swept up in the growing anti-colonial nationalist movement [*ibid*.: 178–184]. The Indian Army policy of raising class-specific battalions and companies had been established in the wake of the devastating mutiny in 1857, and was similarly designed to contain political and racial tensions; in India, this recruiting policy enabled the British to keep the "politically conscious classes" out of the army [Prasad 1956: 84]. The British had been surprised by the nationwide show of strength in the 1920 Students' Strike in Burma, and there is no doubt that concerns about Burman nationalism led to the policy of formally banning Burmans from the armed forces.

By the time of the 1931 census, the impact of the non-recruitment policy was clear (Table 1).

7）Cohen [1990: 35–45] details the policy debate that went on in the aftermath of the 1857 Mutiny over the shift from territorially-based recruitment to the new system based on race and caste, adopted in 1892. The British used the term "class" to refer to one particular ethnic group or caste recruited into the army; hence this system came to be known as "class" recruitment, and the resulting units were called "class" regiments and "class" battalions.

Table 1 Ethnic Composition of the Armed Forces in Burma, 1931

Ethnic Group	No. in Army	Proportion of Army	Proportion of Population
Burman[#]	472	12.30	75.11
Karen	1,448	37.74	9.34
Chin	868	22.62	2.38
Kachin	881	22.96	1.05
Others[##]	168	4.38	12.12
Total	3,837	100	100

Source: [Government of India 1931, quoted in Furnivall 1956 [1948]: 184]

[#] The census category, "Burman," includes Shans and Mons, in addition to Burmans.

[##] Includes other indigenous minorities as well as foreigners.

Representing roughly 13 percent of the population, the Karen, Kachin and Chin ethnic groups accounted for 83 percent of the indigenous portion of the armed forces in Burma in 1931. Clearly the policy to exclude Burmans—who comprised 75 percent of the population, but only about 12 percent of the indigenous armed forces—was successful. The indigenous contingent of the armed forces in Burma was 10 times larger than it was on the eve of World War I, but the 3,000 new spaces created in the interim provided little access to the ethnic-majority Burmans.

The 1920s policy to dismiss and effectively to ban Burmans from the army came along just as the second generation of the nationalist movement was coming of age. Although nationalist politicians were more concerned with expanding higher education opportunities and indigenous (and especially ethnic Burman) representation on the Legislative Council, "[t]he belief was in the minds of Burmans that British policy to dismiss Burmans from the armed forces [deliberately] segregated the races" [Myanmà thamàin 1990: 46]. Ethnic tensions had been on the rise since the early part of the century, and increasing Burman resentment of Indian moneylenders, landlords, tenants and laborers led to bloody explosions of anti-Indian emotion during the 1920 strike, as well as later in 1924 and 1931. Although various factions of the nationalist movement competed with each other for popular support and disagreed over a number of contentious issues, all were united in their opposition to the occupation of Burmese territory by foreign "mercenary" (i.e., Indian) troops.

Additionally, the Dobama Asiayone (usually translated "Our Burma Association" or "Our Burmese Association"),[8] founded in 1930 in the aftermath of four days of Indo-Burman rioting in Rangoon and moving gradually to the forefront of the nationalist campaign, developed a new target of anti-colonial, nationalist fervor: the indigenous (non-Indian and non-Chinese) ethnic groups that collaborated with the British imperialists. The *dobama*'s early successes in popular mobilization came in its campaign aimed at repudiat-

8) "Do" can be translated as either "our" or "we." "Bama" refers either to the collective identity of all persons in the territory of Burma, or more narrowly to the ethnic majority group. "Asiayone" is translated as "union," "association," "organization" or "league."

ing foreign influences in language, clothing and literature and at affirming the traditions of indigenous Burmese language and clothing.[9] This campaign was not aimed against the British colonial officials or Indian mercenaries, but instead targeted the indigenous people who collaborated with the British, took English names, wore English clothes, ate English food, and served the interests of the British. Kei Nemoto argues that the Dobama Asiayone began defining "Our Burma" in opposition to *thudo-bama* (their Burma) and the *thudo* were these collaborators who did not love their own country, cherish their own literature or respect their own language [Nemoto 2000]. *Dobama* writers criticized Karen troops for their participation in putting down the Hsaya San peasant rebellion of 1930–32, the 1936 student strike and the 1938 general strike. These deployments were considered evidence of collaboration on the part of Karen and other minority troops and of British attempts to divide and rule Burma.

Political Pocket Armies

With no opportunity to obtain military training in the armed forces, the Burman-majority nationalist political organizations began considering how to prepare for the possible use of armed force in their efforts to attain independence from Britain. By the mid-1930s, every major nationalist or religious organization had established its own *tat* or "army."[10] According to U Maung Maung, the idea for this kind of organization was initially discussed in the Young Men's Buddhist Association (one of the early nationalist organizations) a decade earlier, "but usually the promoters became ambitious and made requests to the government to open Burman military units to serve in the defence of Burma" [Maung Maung 1980: 76]. The first "*tat*" was founded in 1930 by U Maung Gyee, a conservative politician who was a former Legislative Council member for education and later (1940)

9）The *dobama*'s song became—in slightly different versions—the national anthem during the Japanese Occupation and at independence in 1948. The following are the original lyrics of the song:

Burma is our country,
Burmese literature is our literature,
Burmese language is our language,
Love our country,
Award [or praise] our literature,
Respect our language.

From Daw Khin Kyi [1988b: 1]. The above is my translation of the song.

10）"*Tat*" is translated as "armed forces," "troops," "military," or "group of people assembled for collective action." These groups are often referred to in English-language histories as "volunteer corps," which was the translation proffered by some of the 1930s politicians in order to camouflage their activities. I prefer to use "*tat*" throughout because none of the concepts in English translation carry the same range of ambiguity between "a group assembled for collective action" (with no connotation of violence) and "armed forces."

became the first indigenous Defence Councillor. U Maung Gyee's "Ye-tat" ("Brave" or "Daring" *tat*) was established to organize and give youths basic military and physical training for the nationalist movement, and units were formed both in major urban areas and in small towns upcountry. In 1935 and 1936, two prominent groups of young, university-affiliated nationalists also formed cadet corps to provide paramilitary training: first, the Dobama Asiayone established the Burma Letyone (Strength) Tat, and then the university students' union established the Thanmani (Steel) Tat. Additionally, older politicians like U Saw and Dr. Ba Maw established their own armies, called the Galon[11] Tat and the Dahma (hewing knife) Tat, respectively. Religious organizations also established *tats*. Prominent Hindus in Rangoon founded the Aryan Veer Dal to coordinate efforts of Hindu Volunteer Corps. In Mandalay, the Thathana Alingyaung (Light of Religion) Tat was formed in June 1940 by followers of Premier U Pu [Taylor 1974: 188–189].

What is strange about the *tats* is that the British allowed them to exist at all. The British colonial government not only allowed these *tats* to function, but the Governor of Burma actually reviewed Ye-Tat parades on two different occasions. According to British law, none of these *tats* could carry firearms, but they nonetheless carried out extensive military drills and war exercises with bamboo staffs. Often wearing uniforms and strutting publicly in formation, these *tats* provided "protection" at nationalist political demonstrations, workers' and peasant strikes and elections. Some modeled themselves explicitly and proudly after Hitler's Brown Shirts, and while their numbers as a proportion of the general population were probably not very large, they nonetheless became a prominent feature of public life.[12] They were particularly visible at National Day celebrations (held on the anniversary of the 1920 students' strike), leading parades in Rangoon and Mandalay, as well as in towns like Pakkoku, Shwebo, Myingyan, and Yenangyaung. Although they carried no firearms in public, their military nature should not have been difficult for the British to discern.[13] Nonetheless, at no point in the prewar period were Burmese nationalists ever arrested for their participation in these *tats* even though the

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11) The *galon* is a mythical bird; the "Galons" was the name of Hsaya San's forces during the peasant uprising of 1931–32. U Saw was one of the attorneys who defended Hsaya San, and was trying to remind the Burmese population of his association with the martyred hero.

12) Robert Taylor's [1974: 189] analyses of British "Monthly Intelligence Summaries" on Burma in 1940–41 reveals that there were 743 "total live units" of "volunteer corps" operating in Burma in June 1941. Taylor notes that some of these "never got beyond the 'paper' stage" and many units were not active.

It is important to note that the fascination with the Hitler's fascist ideology and practice was based on a fairly superficial understanding of it. These nationalists were trying to figure out how to fight an extremely powerful imperial apparatus, and the idea of mobilizing the masses in the cause of independence—as Hitler had done in the cause of national socialism—was quite appealing.

13) Maung Maung [1980: 256] reports that the Galon Tat of U Saw was particularly inflammatory. He cites an article in U Saw's newspaper, *The Sun*, on 28 May 1938, in which U Saw proclaimed he would build his army to a strength of 100,000, and it would be made available to ↗

British Defence of Burma law and public order laws would have authorized such arrests. In the immediate postwar period, Aung San defended the absorption of his anti-Japanese guerrillas into a political army called the People's Volunteer Organization (PVO) against British criticisms by pointing out that "volunteer corps [like the PVO] existed in this country before the war and they had been allowed to exist without being a danger to established government or law and order" [Aung San 1993 [1972]: 121].

One possible explanation is that British tolerance of these *tats* probably arose from the characteristically imperial optimism that the *tats* would never turn against the British. To wit, British civil servant Leslie Glass discussed the formation of these *tats* in his memoirs. Even with the benefit of 40 postcolonial years of hindsight, Glass still maintains the *tats* were no real threat: "anti-British feeling was not widespread," he writes [Glass 1985: 131]. More significantly, the timing of the organization of the *tats* came during a window of opportunity for such anti-state forces to emerge under an otherwise repressive regime. After the Hsaya San rebellion, British policy makers began exploring in earnest the necessity for a full separation of Burma from India, and as Donnison [1953: 99] noted, this was the point at which it became clear that Burmans eventually would have to be recruited for the armed forces of a separated Burma. Additionally, growing concerns about the threat of coming war in Europe were accompanied by concerns about the practical issues of how to recruit soldiers from throughout the empire for the war effort, as in World War I. Perhaps this was a time when the Burman-dominated nationalist *tats* could be tolerated, with the objective that they might be incorporated into the war effort in the long run. Taylor [1974: 188] argues that the British saw the *tats* "as a means of developing Burma's capacity of self-defense at a time when the British felt that Burmans were not fit for military service." The incorporation of U Maung Gyee's Ye-Tat into the British-organized Rangoon Defence Volunteer Force supports this proposition.

Regardless of the reasons the colonial state tolerated the *tats*, what is clear is that the organization of non- or anti-state *tats*—armed to varying degrees—had at least three important implications for the development of state institutions in Burma. First, these party-affiliated *tats* found a space to operate under the powerful colonial regime. The space afforded to these nationalist party *tats* did not disappear in the early postcolonial era. The proclivity of party politicians throughout the twentieth century to form "private," "pocket" or "party" armies are a direct result of the lessons learned by the *tats* of the 1930s. In fact, 1930s *tats* were active in the anti-Japanese underground in 1944–45 and in early postwar politics, since surviving intact well into the postwar era and led by the same

↘ Britain in the coming war in return for a promise of independence. He also published a column in *The Sun* throughout the month of July 1938 listing the names of youths who had joined the Galons in different towns throughout Burma. Taylor [1974: 189–191] reports that U Saw called himself "commander-in-chief" and publicly announced his plans in 1938 to establish a Cadet Officers' Training Institution; he tried unsuccessfully to purchase an airplane and seaplane for instructional purposes.

prewar politicians.

Second, the *tats* further institutionalized the ethnically-demarcated boundaries between "collaborators" and "nationalists." The colonial state had itself rejected most *tat* members for enrollment in any state armed force on ethnic grounds. By the late 1930s, after more than a decade of outright rejection of Burman recruitment and several years of operation of non-state armies (the *tats*), the identification of membership in the government's armed forces with "collaboration" or *thudo-bama* yielded little chance that these *tats* could be persuaded to cooperate with anyone comprising *thudo-bama* in the increasingly threatened security environment of Southeast Asia.

Third, it was in the organization of these *tats* that military terminology, institutions and symbols were Burmanized. Ranks, words of command, and marching songs were all translated into Burmese by leaders of the Ye-Tat and Letyone Tat. The 1936 constitution of the Letyone Tat—called "The Constitution of the Most Dependable Army of Burma"—included the first extensive consideration of military affairs written in Burmese during the colonial period. One-hundred-fifty items spelled out regulations in Burmese regarding membership in the Letyone Tat, as well as discipline, ranks, officers' perquisites, training, communication, and the relationship between the *tat* and the Dobama Asiayone [Khin Kyi 1988b: 113–147].

Too Little, Too Late

When the British finally implemented the full separation from India in 1937 and established for the first time ever the "Burma Command," it was too late to try to build any kind of numerically significant, integrated army. By the time the ban against enrollment of Burmans was lifted in 1935, there were few Burmans who could view military service as anything but "collaboration." And the existence of the various *tats* which provided military training for a possible anti-colonial revolution meant that the Burmese and Burman nationalists—unlike their counterparts in India in the same years—did not seriously entertain schemes for infiltrating existing units of the British armed forces in Burma for later subversion or simply for the development of tactical and technical skills.

Hence, the creation of the British Burma Army on April 1, 1937, was anti-climactic. Units of the Indian Army serving in Burma (including the four battalions of the 20th Burma Rifles and detachments of Administrative Corps and Departments) and the Military Police were renamed and placed under the command of the Governor of Burma, who served as Commander-in-Chief. The latter authorized a Burma Army strength of about 6,000 soldiers to serve under 500 officers, but most of the soldiers and officers came from renamed Indian Army units and few were recruited from the Burmese population. If we break down this authorization and look at what Taylor [1974: 31] calls the "core" of the army—the regular forces—we see a minimal role for ethnic Burmans in the all-important infantry forces, which became the dominant service in the postwar army. Of the 22 officers and 715 indigenous other ranks in the Burma Rifles infantry battalion, 50 percent were

Table 2 Regulars of the Burma Army, 1938

	British Officers	British Other Ranks	Burma Army[#] Officers	Burma Army[#] Other Ranks
Burma Company Sappers and Miners	6	3	6	380
Battalion of the Burma Rifles	13	0	22	715
Animal Transport Company, BASC	1	0	2	123[##]

Source: [Taylor 1974: 31–32]

[#] Indigenous members of the Burma Army.

[##] Tentative only.

Karen, 25 percent Chin and 25 percent Kachin; only 4 officers were Burmans (Table 2). There was a plan to add a fifth company of Burma Rifles that would be all Burman, but the British never got around to raising it. Nearly all of the Sappers and Miners were Burman. In addition to this "core," irregular units included an Auxiliary Force with a total of 81 officers and 1,784 other ranks active, and 1,353 other ranks in reserve; auxiliaries were all volunteers of European descent, including British, Anglo-Burmans or Anglo-Indians. There was also a Territorial Battalion with 4 British grade officers and 694 other ranks; personnel consisted of indigenous volunteers, mostly Karens, though some Burmans were admitted [Maung Maung 1954: 90; Taylor 1987: 100–101]. The only anti-aircraft battalion in prewar Burma was comprised mainly of Anglo-Burmans.

At separation in 1937, the Military Police was divided into two forces. One was deployed primarily in central Burma and the other—renamed the Burma Frontier Force—was for use mainly in the excluded areas. The former group, still called the Military Police, consisted of 4,294 men in 1941. Nearly all were Indians, and command was exercised by British and Indian officers seconded from the Indian Army. The strength of the Frontier Force was 10,073, including 7,376 Indians with the remainder coming from the hill regions of Burma [Taylor 1987: 101].

Therefore, although the creation of the Burma Army in 1937 opened up the possibility of access for indigenous people, there was still no serious attempt to involve ethnic Burmans in what British officials considered the core of an army of a future independent Burma. This probably can be attributed to the colonial regime's preoccupation with internal security, which narrowed the vision of army reformers so that considerations of how to establish a "national army"—in which indigenous minorities and the majority-Burmans could cooperate in defense matters—were never really entertained. Scholar-bureaucrat Furnivall [1956 [1948]: 183] summed up the British position:

> If the problem of responsible [colonial] government had been conceived in terms of creating a united people to which the Government might [eventually] be made responsible, the question of building up an army would have been recognized as a matter of primary importance, but it was

Table 3 Ethnic Composition of the Armed Forces in Burma, 1941

Ethnic Group	No. in Army	Proportion of Army	Proportion of Population[#]
Burman	1,893	23.71	75.11
Karen	2,797	35.03	9.34
Chin	1,258	15.76	2.38
Kachin	852	10.61	1.05
Yunnanese	32	0.04	n/a
Chinese	330	4.13	*
Indians	2,578	32.29	*
Others	168	2.10	*
Total	7,984	100	100

[#] Population statistics for 1941 are from the 1931 census because the data from the 1941 census was lost in World War II.

> conceived in terms of . . . constructing machinery that, if it could not do much good, could do no serious damage; the military aspect of the problem was disregarded. . . .

Furnivall noted that the outbreak of war in 1939 led to a new emphasis by the British to recruit any and all potential troops, regardless of ethnicity. Although some progress was made toward including larger numbers of Burmans, the numbers in no way reflected the proportion of Burmans in the colony. Taylor [1987: 100–101] reports the breakdown of troops in Burma in 1941 (Table 3). Referring back to Table 1, "Ethnic Composition of the Armed Forces in Burma, 1931," we can see that the number of troops designated "Burmans" rose from 472 in 1931 to 1,893 in 1941, increasing their numbers by a factor of 2.5. At the same time, the number of Karens nearly doubled, rising from 1,448 in 1931 to 2,797 in 1941. The continued higher recruitment of Karens per head of Karen population (vis-a-vis Burman recruitment per head of Burman population) suggests that the colonial regime had not made any significant changes in recruiting priorities and practices.

Conclusion

The transportation of British-Indian rule to nineteenth-century Burma produced a matrix of state institutions that gave primacy to order, coercion and armed force. In sharp contrast to the earlier mercantilist age of imperialism—during which India was brought into the British Empire—the imperialism of the late nineteenth century produced colonial states throughout Asia and Africa that were able to reorder society for production and commerce at unprecedented speed. In this process, the transportation of a two-century-old colonial system of governance from India to Burma wreaked havoc with traditional, non-state forms of social control and created the need for internal security forces which would come to control many aspects of indigenous people's lives.

The imposition of Indian administrators and administrative practices in Burma

destroyed any indigenous social mechanisms that could have cushioned the impact of the rapid insertion into the world economy. The resulting increase in landlessness, tenancy, and indebtedness was responsible for the highest crime rates in the empire, and the Government of India's response to this rising lawlessness—which was to send in more armed soldiers and police officers—was in part responsible for institutionalizing the primacy of armed coercion in Burmese political affairs.

It should not be surprising that the British-Indian state relied on its relatively modern, professional Indian and British Armies to combat threats to colonial interests in Burma. The British officials who occupied top administrative positions in the colonial state were nearly all appointed from India never having previously set foot on Burmese territory [Piness 1983].[14] Their visions and plans about Asian colonies were probably derived from their Indian experiences, which included communal riots in which armed troops were deployed to restore order. These officials never really considered arming substantial numbers of indigenous Burmese. The imperatives of turning a profit in Burma gave these short-term civil servants no incentive to screen, equip and train the locals, especially when the Indian Army was ready, and—most importantly—cheap to deploy.

Throughout the colonial period, the range of activities that placed indigenous Burmese in the line of fire underwent a series of expansions. During the three conquests and the subsequent pacification campaigns, colonial conceptions of "internal security" required British and Indian troops, along with a tiny handful of indigenous minority levies, to eliminate resistance to British-Indian rule. By the early twentieth century, "internal security" gradually became equated with crime control as rising rates of violent property crimes, in particular, threatened the interests of British capital. "Internal security" again was maintained by foreigners. The only significant numbers of indigenous people in uniform were unarmed local civilian police, and stories of their ineptitude reached legendary status even before World War I. With the emergence of the second wave of the nationalist movement after World War I came a new state conception of "internal security," which gave the armed forces responsibility for fighting crime, quashing criticism and preventing potentially seditious acts. The threats to the colonial state were rarely from outside the British-drawn boundaries. More commonly the threats came from local populations in the form of such wide-ranging activities as cattle-thievery, highway banditry, trade unionization, peasant rebellions, student protests and hunger strikes. This meant that murderers and nationalists, dacoits and the Buddhist *sangha*, and petty thieves and student strikers, all met the state at the barrels of foreigner-held rifles. Hence, from the first arrival of a prefabricated, relatively rationalized bureaucracy in Burma in the late nineteenth century, the state has been continuously at war with the population mapped into its territorial claims.

14) Eleven of the first 14 chief commissioners or lieutenant governors of Burma were appointed from India no prior experience of the province.

That the struggles of colonial politics and governance played out this way did not necessarily overdetermine the rise of a militaristic postcolonial state. However, the indigenous elites who took over the national state at independence in 1948 started not with a *tabula rasa* but with the rickety yet repressive architecture of colonial states that was at odds with their anti-colonial ideological programs. With the immediate eruption of anti-state civil warfare, Burmese Military and civilian leaders had few choices but to reinvigorate and redeploy the colonial security apparatus to hold together a disintegrating country during the formative period of postcolonial state transformation. For more than five decades now, intra-elite struggles—whether in the legal, political arena or in the arena of insurgent warfare—continued to be framed by and settled by violence or the threat of violence.

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