

Emergence of the DoBamar Asiayone¹ and the Thakins² in the Myanmar Nationalist Movement

ZAW SOE MIN

Introduction

Under British colonial rule, Myanmar nationalist movement gradually developed in the 20th century. At first, it asked for socio-economic reforms in the 1900s. Then it began to claim for administrative betterment namely dyarchy system in the late 1910s. In 1920s, it gathered momentum and demanded the Home Rule within the Empire. But the movement lost its momentum in the late 1920s as the disintegration of nationalist elite. But in 1930s it became intense mainly based on the stimulation of the comparatively younger nationalists and aimed to gain complete independence outside the Empire. In this phase, the DoBamar Asiayone (DBA) served as the standard bearer of the Myanmar struggle for independence in the late 1930s.

The DBA emerged in mid 1930 while the Myanmar people were suffering the political and economic distresses as well as communal tension under the British colonial rule. In fact, the disintegration of old nationalist elite and the people's suffering gave birth to the DBA. Though it began as a small group of ardent youths who adopted Thakin prefix, the DBA became a major political party after half a decade. It not only played an important role in the independence struggle but also produced the profound effect on the destiny of the post-independence Myanmar. Hence the ones who want to be well aware of the modern Myanmar history should not skip the role of DBA in the Myanmar nationalist movement. To realize the role of DBA and its activities, it is necessitated to know its fountainhead and original ideals because these were important in shaping the DBA as a defiant political element distinguished from the disintegrated elder nationalist elements.

Some scholars who made valuable works on the modern Myanmar history did not neglect the role of DBA in the late colonial politics. But they laid stress on the latter part of DBA especially in the late 1930s and just made brief and cosmetic accounts on its origin and early norms and notions. In his authentic work, *A History of Modern Burma*, Professor John F. Cady made a cursory account on the emergence of DBA and its ideals with a few lines. By using the *recorded lecture by Professor U Kyaw Thet* as reference, he wrote that "*the Dobama Asiayone* (We Burmans Society) ... was formed in 1935 by the amalgamation of the All Burma Youth League (1931) and the *Dobama Society* (1930). ... Thakin was

the word for “lord” or “master” customarily used in Upper Burma for addressing Englishmen”³.

Albert D. Moscotti also made superficial account on the role of DBA though he acknowledged its “final surge leading to Burma’s independence”. He wrote very briefly on the emergence of DBA and ridiculed the Thakin prefix that “the members of the Dobama society ironically took the title of thakin, or “master” which had heretofore been a respectful term of address for Europeans” in his *British Policy and the Nationalist Movement in Burma, 1917-1937*⁴. He used the *Report on the Administration of Burma, 1929-30* and the *Interim Report of the Riots Inquiry Committee* as references. Both scholars did not give enough stress on the basic ideals of DBA which drove the early phase of its development.

In comparison with the former two, Dr. Robert H. Taylor made adequate accounts on the early phase of DBA and Thakins in his valuable study, *The State in Burma*. By referring Maung Maung’s *From Sangha to Laity* and Cady’s *Modern Burma*, he made more detailed explanation the meaning of DoBamar Asiayone and the term Thakin. He wrote that “the name ‘Do Bama Asiayon’ means ‘We Burmans’ or, more literally, ‘Our Burma Association’, has its parallel in the *Sinn Fein* of Irish nationalism. ... The name *Thakin* ... is an old Burmese word meaning ‘master’, and ... was the title by which Europeans were addressed by subordinates during the colonial period.”⁵ His explanation was comparatively adequate but there has something to add it from the Myanmar nationalistic point of view.

Professor Kei Nemoto is the one who laid enough stress on the DBA’s early norms and notions. In his articles “*Biruma no Nashonarizumu*” (*Myanmar Nationalism*) and “*1930 nendai biruma nashonarizumu ni okeru shakaishuugi jiyuyou no tokushitsu*” (*The acceptance of Socialism by Burmese Nationalists during the 1930s*), he made thorough account on the original ideals of the DBA which drove it into political prominence. By using the Myanmar sources such *the Reform Series (Naingganpyu Sasu) No. I, II* and *DoBamar Song* by the DBA (1930), *Myanmarpyi Naingganpyay Yarzawin* by U Ba Khine (1937)⁶, *DoBamar Asiayone Thamine-Akyingyoke* (1976)⁷, Interview with Thakin Wa Tin (1986), *Meedok Thakin Thein Maung Gyi ei Bawahmint Naingganpyay Hloksarmhumyar* ed. by Khin Maung Latt (1987)⁸, etc, as references, he revealed the distinguish features of DBA in details. But in judging the disintegration of old nationalist elite or the pre-DBA situation, he looked on their differences of opinion on the dyarchy reform as the major cause⁹. In fact, there existed more complicated causes for the disintegration of Myanmar nationalist organization. Moreover, based on *the Reform Series No. I* published by DBA in its inception, he wrote that there was no wording of appealing the gaining independence or self-government. And thus the earliest Thakins might think the cultural movement as the basic of reforming the country and it showed the origin of the earliest Thakins’ Minzoku Shuugi Shisou (idea on nationalism)¹⁰. But there would be deeper and wider ideas and feelings which contained in the

Reform Series No. 1 if the one study thoroughly this pamphlet and related factors.

Daw Khin Yi, a dependable Myanmar scholar, made detailed account concerning the DBA in her *The Dobama Movement in Burma (1930 – 1938)*. She tried her best to reveal the emergence and development of the DBA throughout the late colonial politics. But she failed to describe the background situation which paved the way for its emergence and made mis-description about the fountainhead of the Thakin prefix by referring the interview with Thakin Kodaw Hmaing who joined the Thakin camp five years after its emergence¹¹.

This paper is an attempt to reveal the situations gave birth to the DBA and its original ideals which shaped it in its early phase by using Myanmar sources such as *Reform Series No. 1* by the DBA (1930), *The DoBamar news bulletin*, Vol. I, No. 2 dated 28th Jan. 1933, *The Presidential Speech of Thakin Lay Maung* delivered at the Myingyan conference (1936), *The DoBamar creed and constitution* (1937?), *The History of DoBamar Aisayone* (1976), *The Thakins' struggle for Myanmar Independence* by Thakin Ba Sein (1943)¹², *Life and Political Movements of Meedok Thakin Thein Maung Gyi* ed. by Khin Maung Latt (1987), etc. This paper would help to realize basically the Myanmar nationalist struggle in the decade prior to the Second World War.

Serial Splits of the Leading Nationalist Organization

The Myanmar nationalist movement faced with the serial splits of the leading nationalist organization, the GCBA (General Council of All Burmese Associations) in the 1920s and it paved the way for the emergence of new political elements in the Myanmar political arena.

The first serious split of the GCBA occurred in July 1922. Though this split allegedly based on the differences of opinion on the forthcoming dyarchy system¹³, it in fact stemmed from the personal conflicts between some of the important GCBA elite. At a preparatory meeting for 1921 annual conference of the GCBA, some elite led by U Ba Pe proposed some suggestions for reforming the association. It included the following proposals; 1. to elect new president annually, 2. to reduce the number of eligible representatives of local branches for attending at the monthly GCBA meetings and 3. to withdraw the association's funds (60,000 rupees) from U Tun Aung Kyaw (one of the GCBA elite)-owned bank in order to buy a building as HQ of the association. U Ba Pe and associates explained that the proposal No.1 aimed to get chance for able persons to become president and to get training for leadership. They also said proposal No. 2 aimed to prevent the leaking out of important and secret news of the association and No. 3 intended to get a building appropriate with the dignity of the GCBA. On this occasion, U Chit Hlaing, Tharrawaddy U Pu and U Tun Aung Kyaw bitterly rejected these

proposals as the No.1 directly challenged the long-life presidency of U Chit Hlaing, No. 2 affected the position of U Pu as he was not a representative of any branch and No. 3 hit seriously U Tun Aung Kyaw as his bank totally depended on the GCBA funds as its major deposits. All of them however rejected the proposals without giving their actual reasons¹⁴.

This personal conflict among the GCBA elite manifested as the differences of opinion on dyarchy reform at the leadership meetings of the GCBA on 17th, 18th June and 15th, 16th July 1922. At these meetings the elite basically agreed to protest against the dyarchy system but strongly argued on the question that should they stand for dyarchy elections and enter its legislative council (as a means to wreck it from within) or not. Finally the leadership broke into two factions. Twenty one leading members led by U Ba Pe pursued the line of standing for the elections and entering the legislative council to destroy the dyarchy from within. They became the 21 GCBA. U Chit Hlaing, U Pu and U Tun Aung Kyaw backed by U Ottama who was recently released from prison, strongly protested against the Ba Pe's ideas and they (Hlaing-Pu-Kyaw = HPK) became the HPK GCBA¹⁵.

At first the HPK GCBA gained the majority support including the GCSS (General Council of Sangha [monks] Samaggi; the most influential element in Myanmar politics in the 1920s) but it faced the first split of its own in June 1925. Some leading GCSS monks who disaffected to the spending of party funds by U Chit Hlaing, appointed U Soe Thein as President and convened a conference at Shwebo on 16th, 17th and 18th June 1925. The conference denounced U Chit Hlaing and U Pu as undesirables for the association. Almost simultaneously the HPK faction also held a rival conference at Magwe on 24th, 25th and 26th June 1925 with the support of some other venerable monks and declared not to acknowledge the Soe Thein faction. Though they denounced each other, the decisions of both conferences such as to abolish the capitation and thatthameda taxes, were almost the same. Thus the considerable support to the former HPK GCBA split into two and both factions (new HPK and Soe Thein¹⁶) gained the share of former support almost equally¹⁷.

A few years later the Soe Thein faction also faced its own split. It originated the strong incitement of U Soe Thein to defy the colonial government. It made some venerable monks who had supported him anxious that his faction would be suppressed by the authorities very soon. They defected from the Soe Thein faction in March 1929 and founded another GCBA at which U Su was appointed as President. The support for former Soe Thein faction also divided again for the new splinter groups¹⁸. Thus the former HPK GCBA split into three factions (new HPK, Soe Thein and Su¹⁹) and during ensuing years not only these factions but also the 21 GCBA faced with one split after another within their own factions. Most of the splits mainly depended on personal reasons rather than political causes.

By seeing these splits, there found some causes which made the sole nationalist organization of

1920s disintegrated. The first cause would be the ill-characteristic of the Myanmar nationalist elite. They proved that they were easily prone to split rather than settling down the disputes whenever they faced with personal or political differences among them. The second would be the excessive interference of political monks in the organizational affairs. Their manipulations could also be seen obviously at the formal names of the Soe Thein and Su factions. The last would be the lack of positive policy of the HPK camp. It had no constructive policy to achieve political and economic reforms other than boycotting of dyarchy elections, anti-tax campaign, etc. It gave birth to the radical elements and led to the split between the radicals and moderates.

Nevertheless these splits and the factional conflicts among the nationalist elite made the enthusiasm of the grassroots in the nationalist causes declined as well as the reliability of the political elite decreased in the public sense. It also created the leadership vacuum in the mass movement. Under such circumstances, comparatively younger nationalists attempted to fill this vacuum on one hand. The people also faced with the economic hardship and communal tension in late 1920s on the other.

Economic deterioration and Communal tension

The Great Depression which began in the United States in 1929 spread rapidly worldwide. British Empire including Myanmar was no exception of the crisis. As a rice export country, Myanmar agricultural economy was seriously affected by the depression. The prices of shipped paddy at Yangon jetty gradually declined from 200 rupees per hundred baskets in 1924 down to 140 rupees in 1930. But the real selling price at the paddy fields was just about 50 rupees around 1930. This sharp fall of the prices of rice made the already had agrarian distress more intense. Much of the indigenous owner-cultivators lost their lands to the usurers mostly the Chettyars and reduced to the tenants and landless laborers. The figure of landless laborers increased from 1,027,597 in 1921 up to 1,512,290 in 1931. In this situation, though much of them stuck their birthplace, some moved to the cities particularly to the capital to find hard labors for their survival²⁰. But they faced with more difficulties at the capital as much of the works were monopolized by the Indian immigrants.

In fact, many Indian natives namely Chettyars, Oriyas, Chaulias, Pahtans, Punjabis, Sikhs, Madrassies, Bengalis, Chittagonians, Coringhis, etc, migrated to Myanmar since the early colonial days. Their migration increased rapidly during the early decades of 20th century and about 20 percent of them settled down at Yangon. Thus in 1930, their proportion at the capital reached almost double of the natives; 212,000 vs. 128,000. They could monopolize much of the professions and hard labors such as professor, lawyer, school teachers, accountant, medical practitioner, postman, engine driver, soldier,

dairy man, mali, cooly, dhoby, etc. In reality, the native grassroots already had less positive attitude to the Indian immigrants because of the high-handed manners of moneylender Chettyars and the thrust of cheaper Indian land coolies in the agricultural sector in late 1920s²¹. It made the negative feeling of the natives to the immigrants intense. Now the shifting natives were facing again with the Indian monopoly in every aspect at the Myanmar capital.

The Racial Riot

Under such circumstances, an outburst of communal tension occurred in May 1930. It stemmed from the boycott of Indian Coringhi²² stevedores from the Scindia Steam Navigation Co. Ltd. The Indian stevedores demanded the company to raise their daily wages from Rs 1.50 to Rs 2. The former went on strike on 10th May 1930 when their demand was neglected by the latter. At once the company used some 2,000 natives, mostly shifting landless, as strikebreakers. But the strikers soon negotiated with the company and reached an agreement to accept company's offer for Rs 1.75 per day. Thus the Coringhis ended the strike. When the native laborers came to their work on 26th May without knowing this situation, they only faced with the ridicules and insults of the reinstated Coringhis. It finally led to the clashes and assaults between the two gangs of laborers and rapidly spread as the racial conflict to the capital and other cities very soon. The riot which lasted four days caused the deaths of some natives and about 250 Indians. Though the riot died down on 29th May with the efforts of the elders from both communities, the infuriating feeling of the natives being insulted by the alien counterparts did not easily die down²³.

The Reform Series No. 1 : the appearance of DBA

On this occasion, some politically strong-minded youths utilized the communal tension for their political aims. At the very evening of the riot started, Ko Hla Baw²⁴ and some friends held a mass meeting at Botataung playground (eastern Yangon) with the aim of instigating the patriotic sentiments of the fellow people who were facing with the alien attack. Under the auspices of activists, those who attended the meeting shouted heartily and repeatedly the word "*DoBamar*"²⁵ and hoisted the peacock²⁶ flag to raise the anti-alien feeling and nationalist sentiments²⁷. This was the first appearance of the word "*DoBamar*" as a slogan in the public agitation. It might be think just a cry of fanatics who filled with the feeling of racial antipathy and soon would be died down. But the spirited youths made it clear that this word meant more than the hot-blooded cry of some Myanmar youths.

Soon after the riot, Ko Ba Thaug²⁸, published a pamphlet named '*Naingganpyu Sarzu Ahmat Tit*' (Reform Series No. I)²⁹. 10,000 copies of it were distributed to commemorate the Myanmar who were killed and wounded by the Indians in the recent riot³⁰. Ba Thaug wrote it with the help of like-minded youths such as Hla Baw, Thein Maung³¹, etc³². He gave it the subtitle that the '*DoBamar Sardan*' (The We Burmans Treatise). The motto of it was described on the front page as follows:

Bamarpyithi Dopyi (Burma is our country),

Bamarsarathi Dosar (The Burmese literature is our literature),

Bamarsagarathi Dosagar (The Burmese language is our language)³³.

The first line was the outright claim of the younger activists that this is our land. According to the context of the time, its hidden meaning would be this land is ours, neither Indians' nor Britishers' even though it is ruled and manipulated by them. The second line would be the reminder for the fellow people (particularly the bilingual elite) who overestimated the world-imperial language and literature not to forget their owns³⁴. The third line would be the alarm for the fellow people (especially the commoners) not to forget the inferior status of their language and of themselves in comparison even with Indians and Indian languages. In those days, the natives of Yangon necessitated to understand and speak some Hindustani, Urdu and other Indian regional words for their daily survival³⁵ because much of the skilled and unskilled works, as already described, were monopolized by the Indians. Thus, it can be assumed that, the motto not only claimed the ownership of the country but also reminded the fellow people about their inferior status through the conspicuous channels. Then the motto continued:

Dopyiko Chitpar (Love our country),

Dosarko Chihmyintpar (Cherish our literature) and

Dosagarko Laysarpar (Respect our language)³⁶.

It can be seen clearly that the first line was the direct instigation to uplift the patriotic sentiments of the fellow people. The rest lines were urgings to promote the inferior vernacular language and literature. Thus the latter three lines supported the former three. The whole motto would be an effort to promote the patriotic sentiments by reminding the inferior status of the country, language and literature. In other words, it can be said that Ba Thaug, an ex-national school teacher, attempted to revive and politicize the old mission of the erstwhile national schools movement (to promote the vernacular language)³⁷. Nevertheless, the tone of this six lines motto in Myanmar language was strong, persuasive and very easy to memorize for the fellow people and it became the slogan of DBA movement during the ensuing years.

At the top of the second page of pamphlet, there described the phrase that "*DoBamar Asiayone ei Taiktunchek*" (The urging of the DoBamar Asiayone) as the title of the main text. The serious stress of

the main text was the *"Bamar Nainggan thi Bamar Hpo"* (Burma for Burmans). Another exhortation of it was to promote economic welfare of the natives. It urged that *"Bamar Saingmyar Tekyakonlaw, Bamar Sainghnite Welkyakonlaw"* (Set up the Myanmar-own shops and buy at those shops)³⁸ as a means to promote the economic status of the fellow people. It also said that the alien counterparts were prone to insult the natives mainly based on the inferior economic status of the latter. However it was cautious not to incite another racial riot and ironically remarked that *'we should even thank the Indians instead of anger because their insult reminded the inferiority status of us'*. The pamphlet also urged the fellow people to relinquish the selfishness and narrow regionalism and to consider and protect *'the whole country from Myitkyinar to Dawe'*³⁹ *as our country, our land and our home'*. To stress this urging, it exhorted the people again *'to consider and cherish the whole country as our own hearth and home'*. It also urged the half-castes to feel likewise the natives as some of their ancestors were certainly Myanmar people and thus to love the country as their own. It said that if they continued to pretend like aliens, they would lose the privileges which would be enjoyed by the natives *'when the Myanmar people could control totally the country'*. Hence it urged the half-castes to unite immediately with the natives and to endeavor together for the country's and nationalities' betterment. The pamphlet credited *'the monks and bus drivers'* who defended the fellow people against the assault of Indians during the riot. It urged the people to commemorate the ones who were killed and wounded by the Indians in this event as they faced with such destiny in defending the fellow nationalities⁴⁰.

In short, the conspicuous messages of this pamphlet were to promote the economic status of the fellow people as a means of escaping from the inferiority status, to consider and protect the whole country as their own home and to unite the fellow people of the whole country including even the half-castes. It should be noted that some of the basic ideas of the pamphlet was not totally new. Part of the main theme of six line motto; *'to promote the vernacular language and literature'* was the unfinished mission of the national schools movement of early 1920s. One of the exhortations of the main text; *to set up the Myanmar-own shops and buy at those shops*, was also an old idea of erstwhile GCBA. However it should also be noted that the elder nationalist elites wrote the above aims only in the form of long sentences and it is questionable that such kind of writing would persuade the public attention. Now Ba Thaug and colleagues resurrected and politicized such old ideas as the clear, strong and synchronized exhortations in the form of short and persuasive mottos. It can be assumed that the younger activists, by utilizing such exhortations, attempted to uplift the nationalist consciousness of the fellow people who suffered the political and economic distress and communal tension under colonial rule.

Moreover, though there could not find the direct expression of 'independence' in the pamphlet, the sense of it could be felt in the phrase like *'Burma for Burmans'* and the clause like *'when the Myanmar*

people could control totally the country'. By seeing such indirect expressions, it can be assumed that Ba Thaug and colleagues attempted to incite the desire for independence of the fellow people since the inception⁴¹.

At the end of the pamphlet, the name '*DoBamar Asiayon*' was described again as the publisher of the pamphlet⁴². Thus the new association which would try to fill the leadership vacuum began to appear in the Myanmar nationalist movement. The members of it attempted to distinguish them from the elder nationalist elites in the public sense though they still could not set free from the influence of the old ideas of the latter. Their desire to differentiate them from the elder nationalists could be seen at the name of their newly emerging association.

The name DoBamar Asiayone

The name of the association, *DoBamar Asiayone*, itself was the indication of the nationalist sentiment of its members as well as of their desire to differentiate themselves from the disintegrated old nationalist organizations or to establish their own political identity in the public sense. The name *DoBamar Asiayone* could be divided into two parts; *DoBamar* and *Asiayone*. Both were the new coinages of its members.

The term *DoBamar* was divided again into two; *Do* and *Bamar*. The Myanmar word '*Do*' directly means '*We*' and besides in the sense of Myanmar people, it also has the repercussions of original meaning as *unity* and *collectiveness* among the fellow people. Ba Thaug and colleagues said that they used this word intentionally in order to get rid of the narrow-mindedness of fellow people and to cultivate the like-mindedness among them⁴³.

The latter part *Bamar* is not the formal term in mentioning the Myanmar people. In fact the formal one is *Myanmar* and it was used by the GCBA in its name '*the Myanmar Athin Choke Kyi*'. However Ba Thaug and friends did not like this term as they thought it was feeble in tone. Hence they coined the term *Bamar* in order to have stout tone⁴⁴. Soon after the emergence of the DBA, U Seinn, the chief editor of Myanmar Ahlin newspaper and the staunch supporter of the elder nationalists as well, condemned that the term *Bamar* totally perverted from the traditional Myanmar orthography and urged the people via his paper not to join such association with improper name⁴⁵. Thuriya newspaper headed by U Ba Pe, one prominent elder nationalist, used the term '*DoMyanmar*' instead of '*DoBamar*' in mentioning the DoBamar Asiayone until mid 1930s⁴⁶. But the younger nationalists did not relinquish their new coinage as they persistently believed it could reveal their enthusiasm. Moreover they later defined that the term *Bamar* represented all of Myanmar people including all minorities such as Mon,

Rahine, Shan, Karen, Kachin, Chin, who lived within the nation of Myanmar⁴⁷.

Moreover Thien Maung, one pioneer of the DBA said that the term *Myanmar* was used traditionally in the Myanmar chronicles in mentioning the major ethnic group of the country which defeated the minorities in the domestic power struggles. So they thought the term *Myanmar* has the repercussions of meaning as the racial differences and conflicts among the nationalities. Hence, he said, they chose the word *Bamar* for their association⁴⁸. According to their interpretation, the term *DoBamar* directly means the *We Burmans* and also has the indirect meaning as the *united fellow people who live in Myanmar*.

Besides they coined the term *Asiyone* for their association. In reality, the term *Athin* (society) was formerly used by the old nationalist elite for their organizations such as *the Myanmar Athin Choke Kyi*, *Wunthamu Athin* (patriotic society), *Bu Athin* (no society), etc. But the younger nationalists considered that the term *Athin* or *Ahpwe* (organization) has narrow meaning and its sense tended to include just a group of people or only some people. Hence they invented the term *Asiyone*. The new term directly means the *association*. Moreover they believed that it also has the indirect meaning of *widespread gathering and uniting of all fellow people*. Based on these considerations, they named their association as the "*DoBamar Asiyone*"⁴⁹. It directly means the "*We Burmans Association*" and indirectly means the *association of united fellow people who live in Myanmar*.

It can be said that the younger nationalists revealed their desire for unity among the fellow people via the name DoBamar Asiyone. Moreover, it is noteworthy that they chose carefully every word they used to distinguish their newly emerging association from the disintegrated GCBA or "*Myanmar Athin Choke Kyi*" of the elder nationalists. For example,

Do or *unity* vs. *disintegration*;

Bamar vs. *Myanmar*;

Asiyone vs. *Athin*.

Thus they attempted to establish their own political identity in the public sense by utilizing such kind of newly coinage terms.

The Prefix 'Thakin'

Moreover, the most conspicuous expression of younger activists' strong nationalist sentiment and desire to differentiate from the elder nationalist elite would be the '*Thakin*' prefix. They added this prefix to their original names instead of the Myanmar traditional prefix; Maung, Ko, U, etc. In fact the term *Thakin* was very familiar to Myanmar people as it was a long-lived usage of the Myanmar

monarchic order since the Bagan period. It meant Master or Lord and was used in mentioning to the members of the royal court and higher officials of the dynastic order by the commoners as a respectful expression.

After the collapse of the old order, the British made the natives to call them as Thakin (Master or Lord) or Thakingyi (Great Master or Great Lord). This might be the automatically unknowing manner of the new rulers to their newly subjected natives. Seen from the Myanmar nationalistic point of view, however, it might have another hidden meaning. By maintaining this usage, the former might aim to remind the latter that we are conquerors or superiors and you are losers or inferiors. Or the rulers might intend to inculcate the sense of being servitude in the mind of natives. Nonetheless this habitual usage was not a matter of criticism or of agitation throughout the days of GCBA.

Now the younger nationalists began to think with the feelings of hostility towards the habit of addressing the Thakin term to the alien rulers. They believed that it made the inferiority complex of the natives persistent. As a consequence it also made the natives automatically inclined to bow to the alien rulers and such state of mind produced the unconscious contentment of the natives under the alien domination. The younger activists termed this contentment of the fellow people as '*Kyun Seit*' (the spirit of slave). They believed the first priority of the nationalist movement was to eliminate this spirit of slave and to cultivate '*Thakin Seit*' (the spirit of master) among the Myanmar people⁵⁰.

In order to eradicate the inferiority complex of the natives, they made a simple process of logical deduction. They claimed that "in fact we paid taxes to the government and it made the administrative mechanism able to run. The officials (from the governor down to the lesser officials) received their salaries for their livings from these taxes. They admitted the fact that they depend on the public revenue for their living by naming themselves as Public Servant". Based on this ground, the Thakins deduced that "hence they (British rulers) are not Thakins (Masters) but just the servants. We (Myanmar people) only are the real Thakins". Besides they interpreted the usage 'Public Servant' as *pyi asaygan*⁵¹. *Pyi* means the country and *asaygan* means slave. Thus the word Public Servant means the slave of the country according to the interpretation of younger activists.

This logical deduction became their conviction and it made the inference that *the real Thakins (Masters) of our country are us (Myanmar), not them (British)*. Based on this conclusion, they decided to adopt the Thakin prefix to their names instead the formal affix U, Ko, Maung, etc. as a means to eradicate "the spirit of slave" and to inculcate "the spirit of master" in the minds of fellow people. Among them, Ko Ba Thaug initially changed his name as Thakin Ba Thaug. His friends Ko Hla Baw and Ko Thein Maung also soon followed his example. Thus they became Thakin Ba Thaug, Thakin Hla Baw and Thakin Thein Maung⁵². Henceforth anyone who wanted to become the member of DBA

obliged the rule to take off their formal affix U, Ko, Maung, etc, and to add Thakin (for man) and Thakinma (for woman) in front of their original names.

Thakin Ba Sein, one of the earliest Thakins, later said that the Thakin idea was not the brainchild of Ba Thaug and colleagues. He confessed that it was the amalgamation of Myanmar traditional pride based on the past glory⁵³ and the concept of master-morality and slave-morality of German Philosopher Frederick Nietzsche (15th October 1844 – 25th August 1900)⁵⁴. Nonetheless it can be said that the Thakin prefix could distinguish the younger activists from the old nationalist elite at the external appearance. Moreover it can be assumed that such prefix revealed the strong nationalist sentiment, defiant feeling to the alien rulers and even the desire of regaining sovereignty or independence of the younger activists.

Conclusion

Thus a small group of younger nationalists utilized the post-riot condition to stimulate the nationalist consciousness of the fellow people who suffered the political and economic distress plus communal tensions under colonial rule. By seeing thoroughly the Reform Series No. I and related factors, it can be said that they attempted

1. to resurrect and politicize some of the old ideas of elder elite in persuasive style on one hand and
2. to distinguish themselves from the disintegrated and becoming less reliable elder ones in the public sense on the other.

On this occasion, it is noteworthy that they tended since its inception

- a. to persuade all of the fellow nationalities including even the half-castes and
- b. to regain independence.

Mainly based on such norms and notions, a new political association which named the *DoBamar Asiayone* and a group of younger activists who adopted *Thakin* appellation began to emerge in the Myanmar political arena and attempted to fill the leadership vacuum of the nationalist movement of 1930s.

At the beginning, they faced with the ridicules and contemptuous reactions of the elder elite. When the newly adopted Thakins; Ba Thaug, Thein Maung and Hla Baw, discussed with Dr. Thein Maung, one of the executive of the People's Party (former 21 GCBA), about their new interpretation of the term Thakin, they faced with the ridicule of the latter. U Thant, later the Secretary General of the United Nations, also laughed at the Thakin appellation⁵⁵. Thuriya newspaper, the voice of a group of elder elite, mostly used the term "*so-called Thakins*" in describing the Thakins' news till the mid

1930s⁵⁶. In fact, not only the elite but also the commoners also censured the Thakin appellation as the idiotic expression at first. While Thakin Ba Tin, one of the earliest local Thakin of Yenangyaung, was attempting to propagate the Thakin creed at the oilfields in the early 1930s, he was ridiculed by the local laborers as an idiot who adopted such prefix too royal to the commoners⁵⁷.

However the Thakin pioneers did not relinquish their ideals and made persistent efforts to propagate it. Their endeavor began to bear fruit in mid 1930s. At the Tharrawaddy district, once the stronghold of GCBA movement, the erstwhile GCBA sponsored wunthanu athins (patriotic societies) converted as the local branches of DBA in 1934⁵⁸. Then the DBA became more active and gained popular support in the latter half of 1930s on one hand. There were some important contributions to the original creed by the leftist ideology and also claimed overtly for independence on the other⁵⁹.

Though the association split into two factions mainly based on the personal conflicts in 1938, the DBA (the faction of majority) could play in 1938-39 a leading role in the Htaung Thoneyarpyay Ayaydawbon (Myanmar Era 1300 Strife) which seriously challenged the colonial rule. According to the official report of this faction published in 1939, it could mobilize about 15,000 – 20,000 Thakin members and establish its district branches at thirty one districts out of thirty nine in the Myanmar proper. In other words, the DBA could aggrandize throughout most part of the country from the northern most to the southern tip including the western frontier area⁶⁰. Thus the DBA which started as a small group of ardent youths matured as a major political party within a decade and ready for more intensive struggle for independence when the Second World War approached the country.

Notes

1. DoBamar means We Burmans or We Myanmar people and Asiayone means Association. Thus the DoBamar Asiayone means the We Burmans Association or We Myanmar people Association.
2. Thakin means Master or Lord and it was used in addressing the members of royal court and higher officials by the commoners since the time of dynastic order.
3. Cady, John F., *A History of Modern Burma* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1958), pp. 375-6.
4. Moscotti, Albert D., *British Policy and the Nationalist Movement in Burma, 1917-1937* (Honolulu: Asian Studies at Hawaii, no. 11, Hawaii University Press, 1974), p. 56.
5. Robert H. Taylor, *The State in Burma* (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1987), p. 207.
6. The author was a prominent politician-cum-journalist of the 1930s and he wrote this book as the outline history of Myanmar politics during colonial period based on his experience.

7. This book is the collective work of over 300 Thakin members.
8. This book is the memoir of one of the earliest Thakins.
9. Kei Nemoto, 'Biruma no Nashinnarizumu' (Myanmar Nationalism), *Toonan Ajia shi 7; shokuminti teikou unndou to nashonarizumu no tennkai* (Jan, 2002), pp. 220, 225-9.
10. Kei Nemoto, '1930 nendai biruma nashonarizumu niokeru shakaishuugi juyouno tokushitsu' (The Acceptance of Socialism by Burmese Nationalists during the 1930s), *Toonan Ajia kenkyuu* Vol. 17, No. 4; Kyouto Daigaku Toonan Ajia kenkyuu senta-, 1990, pp. 431-3.
11. Khin Yi, *The Dobama Movement in Burma (1930 -1938)* ((New York: Cornell University, Southeast Asia Program, 1988), p. 3.
12. This book was the outline history of DBA including the memoir and comment of Ba Sein.
13. Though the Myanmar nationalist elite asked for the dyarchy system in the late 1910s, their demand altered to the Home Rule in 1920-21 under the influence of the leading political monk, U Ottama's anti-dyarchy agitation and the Indian National Congress's boycott campaign to the administrative reforms mainly based on the India Act of 1919. See Maung Maung, *From Sangha to Laity, Nationalist Movements of Burma, 1920-1940* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1980), pp. 15, 18. See also Sagaing Han Tin, *Myanmar Nainggandaw Hmattan Hnit (The Record of Myanmar State II)* (Yangon: Pyithu Arnar, 1967), pp. 27-8, extract from Thuriya, dated 27.8.21. See also Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, pp. 215-6.
14. Sagaing Han Tin, *The Record II*, pp. 80-3.
15. Ba Maung, Thakin, *Wunthanu Ayaydawbon Thamine (History of the Patriotic Movement)* (Yangon: Tathettar, 1975), pp. 197-207, 226-9.
16. The formal name of the Soe Thein GCBA was "Bayme Sayadaw ei Myanmarpyi Thanmar Thanbuddha Sangha Apwechokeyi Kyihmuthaw GCBA" (the GCBA sponsored by the venerable monk, Bayme's Myanmar Thanmar Thanbuddha Sangha League). See Sagaing Han Tin, *The Record II*, p. 504.
17. Ba Maung, *the Patriotic Movement*, pp. 269-78.
18. Thein Pe Myint, *Htaungkoeyar Thoneze Tawite Myanmarpyi Naingganyay Thamine (History of Myanmar politics around 1930)* (Yangon: Nantthar, 1970), pp. 53-5.
19. The formal name of the U Su GCBA was "Ye-Oo Sayadaw Kyihmuthaw U Su GCBA" (the U Su GCBA sponsored by the venerable monk, Ye-Oo) and popularly known as the "Ye-Oo-U Su GCBA". See Maung Maung, *From Sangha to Laity*, p. 60.
20. (a)Thein Pe Myint, *Myanmar politics around 1930*, pp. 77-8.
(b)DoBamar Asiayone Thamine Pyusuyay Ahpwe (ed.), *DoBamar Asiayone Thamine (Akyinchoke)*

pahtamatwe, (DoBamar Asiayone History Compiling Group (ed.) *History of the DoBamar Asiayone [Abridged]Vol. I*)(Yangon:Sarpay Baikman,1976) pp. 116-7.

21. (a)*Ibid*, pp. 122-3.
 (b)Than Tun, Dr., *A goodwill trip to India* (Yangon: Monyway, 2002), pp. 3-4.
 (c)Taylor, *The State in Burma*, pp. 197-8, 200.
22. Corringhis or Coringhees were the natives of Coringa town, a seaport in Godavari district, Madras province; on the eastern coast of India. See Yule, Henry, Col. and Burnell, A.C., *Hobson—Jobson; A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian words and phrases* (First published 1903, new ed. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1994), p. 256.
23. (a)Thein Pe Myint, *Myanmar politics around 1930*, pp. 79-84.
 (b)Sagaing Han Tin, *Myanmar Nainggandaw Hmattan Thone (The Record of Myanmar State III)* (Yangon: Pyithu Arnar, 1969), pp. 300-1.
24. Though little is known of his early life, Ko Hla Baw was born in Shwebo. After finishing high school education, he served as a chemist at the Indo-Burma Petroleum (IBP) Co., Thanlyin. He was an ardent nationalist and used to say “Like Alaungmintaya building the Third Myanmar Kingdom, I will build the Fourth.” See Kyaw Sein, Thakin, ‘Thakin Hla Baw Gyi’, *Moeway Magazine*, No. 108 (Jan. 1977), p. 68. He became the president of the DBA in 1939.
25. It can be assumed that the word DoBamar (We Myanmar people) was cried by the activists with the aim of raising the spirit of unity and courage among the fellow people while facing with the aliens’ assault. See Maung Maung, *From Sangha to Laity*, p. 80.
26. According to the Myanmar traditional beliefs, peacock represented the Sun and was assumed as the symbol of the growth of power and sovereignty by the kings. Hence the peacock figure was curved at the left wing of the thrones throughout dynastic time. See Than Tun, Dr., *Myanmar Htiimu Nanyar (Myanmar Court Etiquette)* (Yangon: Kuntharyar, 2003), p. 88. During colonial days, the GCBA used the peacock figure as the trademark of the association. See Than Tun, Dr., *Myanmar Htwayhtway Yaryar Thamine (Myanmar general history)* (Yangon: Kuntharyar, 2005), p. 181. The peacock flag and trademark were also utilized at the first student strike of 1920 and subsequent National Day celebrations. See Burma Socialist Program Party, Central Committee Headquarters, *A brief history of the National Day and the National Education Movement* (Yangon: Sarpay Baikman, 1970), photos. No. 5 and No. 9, between pp. 208-9. Hence it can be assumed that the Myanmar nationalists used the peacock figure as the symbol of nationalist sentiments and pride.
27. *Thuriya*, dated 20. 6. 1938, memoir of Thakin Hla Baw concerning the inception of the DBA.

28. Ko Ba Thaug, son of U Myit; ex-courtier of King Thibaw and then township officer of new order, and Daw Lay Khin, was born in Gwaycho-Hponkon village of Natmauk on 7th February 1902. Ba Thaug joined the Government Middle School of Taungdwingyi and then the BTN School of Mandalay. He became the protégé of U Tun Shein (a prominent nationalist) after his father death. He participated actively in the first student strike, anti-Whyte Committee and anti-Prince of Wales' visit campaigns. In 1922-23, he served as teacher at the Mandalay, Shwebo and Pathein national schools. In 1928, he became the editor of the *World of Books or Ganda Lawka* magazine and in 1930, the translation tutor of the Yangon University. See Maung Zayyar, *Myanmar Lukyaw Tayar Pahtamatwe (Hundred famous persons in Myanmar Vol. I)* (Yangon: Hnitchot-wine, 2002), pp. 117-8.
29. Though the official history of the DBA described that the date of issue of the Reform Series No. I was 30th May 1930 (*The DBAT I*, p. 127), Professor Kei Nemoto made a different judgment concerning it. According to the context of the leaflet, he said, it was written after the riot (26th – 29th May) and it would also be needed some time to print it. Hence he made a reasonable judgment that the date of issue of it would be within the first ten days of June. See Nemoto, 'The Acceptance of Socialism', *Toonan Ajia Kenkyuu*, Vol. 17, No. 4, pp. 429-30, f.n. 5.
30. Nyo Mya, 'Thakin Ba Thaug Nidann' (Introduction about Thakin Ba Thaug), *Oo Way ei Shweyatuthabin Letywayzin*, (Yangon: Oo Way, 1971), p. 55.
31. Ko Thein Maung, son of U Maung Gyi, ex-jailor and lawyer, and Daw Thwal, was born in Taungoo on 7th August 1903. He matriculated at the Ahlone Cushing School of Yangon and joined the Yangon University in 1922. In 1925 he served as the bursar at the Burma Book Club of J.S. Furnivall and became acquainted with Ba Thaug via Furnivall. Then he resigned from the university mainly based on his quarrel with the university bursar U Nay Dun. See Maung Zayyar, 'Thakin Thein Maung Gyi', *Ywetnuway Magazine*, No. 38 (March 2008), p. 42. He was elected as the president of the DBA in 1938.
32. Khin Maung Latt (ed.), *Meedok Thakin Thein Maung Gyi ei Bawa hnint Naingganyay Hloksharhmumyar (Life and Political Movements of Meedok Thakin Thein Maung Gyi)* (Yangon: Sarpay Baikman, 1987), p. 52.
33. DoBamar Asiayone, *Naingganpyu Sarzu Ahmat tit (Reform Series No. I)* (Yangon: Pyigy Mandai, [1930]), p. 1.
34. Even the most famous leader of GCBA, U Chit Hlaing publicly said at the Thanatchaung (Insein) conference of 1928 that he wrote his speeches in English and then asked his own translator to interpret them into Myanmar language. The reason was, he continued, he was poor at Myanmar

language. See Sagaing Han Tin, *The Record III*, p. 189, reproduced the record of Thanatchaung conference from Thuriya, dated 9. 4. 1928.

35. Zawana, *Zawana ei Zawana (Zawana's Zawana)* (First published 1983, repr. Yangon: Saroak-zay, 2002), pp. 101.
36. *Naingganpyu I*, p. 1.
37. One of the important objectives of the national schools movement of 1920s was to promote the inferiority status of vernacular language. See BSPP, *the National Day*, p. 351.
38. In fact, such kind of exhortation was not a totally new one. Since 1922, the GCBA urged the fellow people 'not to buy the foreign goods and to buy only at the natives own shops'. See Than Tun, *Myanmar general history*, p. 183, extract from the GCBA's pamphlet entitled 'Home Rule yayan Chaukpar Thila' (The six precepts to gain Home Rule) published in 1922.
39. In the sense of natives, the phrase 'from Myitkyinar to Dawe' means the whole country from northern tip to southern most. In other words, a native can feel the whole country including the regions of minority groups when he heard above phrase.
40. *Naingganpyu I*, pp. 2-8.
41. In the Reform Series No. II which contained eight articles and was published in mid August 1930, the fifth article entitled ME (Myanmar Era) 1390 revealed the dream of independence of Ba Thaug. In fact the article above mentioned was written by Ba Thaug in the previous year and firstly printed as the editorial of the Myanmar section of the Ganda Lawka magazine (March 1929 issue) which Ba Thaug served as editor. See *the Ganda Lawka magazine*, Vol. IX, No. 50, (March 1929), pp. 75-6. Hence it can be said that Ba Thaug had already considered about the independence of the country since 1929 or before the publishing of the Reform Series No. I.
42. *Naingganpyu I*, p. 8.
43. (a)The editorial of the *DoBamar Thadinzin hmattan (The DoBamar news bulletin)*, Vol. I, No. 2 dated 28th Jan. 1933, p. 2. It was the official bulletin of DBA published weekly since 21st January 1933. After publishing its thirteenth issue, however, it ceased mainly based on the DBA's financial stringency.
(b)Ba Sein, Thakin, *Thakin myarei Bamar Lyutlutyay Kyoepanhmu (The Thakins' struggle for Myanmar independence)* (Yangon: Taipyu Pyipyu, 1943), pp. 17-8.
44. *The DoBamar bulletin*, Vol. I, No. 2, p. 2.
45. *Ibid*, p. 3.
46. *Thuriya*, dated 24. 7. 36, pp. 11-2, 27. 7. 36, p. 50, 31. 7. 36, pp. 13-4.
47. (a)*The Presidential Speech of Thakin Lay Maung delivered at the second annual conference of the DBA*

- and *All Burma Youth League held at Myingyan in 1936* (Yangon: 1936), p. 10.
- (b) DoBamar Asiayone, *DoBamar Warda hnint Sūmyin Upaday (The DoBamar creed and constitution)* (First published 1937?, repr. Yangon: Myanmar Yokeshin, 1939), p. 11-2.
48. Khin Maung Latt (ed.), *Meedok Thein Maung Gyi*, p. 54.
49. (a) *Ibid*
- (b) *DBAT I*, p. 133.
50. (a) Hmaing, Kodaw, Thakin, *Thakin Dikar (Detailed and explanatory writing about Thakin)* (First published 1938, repr. Yangon, Sarpaylawka, 1965), pp. 162-3, extract from DoBamar Asiayone ei Komin Kochin Tihtaunhmu Sarsu Ahmat Tit (The pamphlet No. I on the establishment of Komin Kochin organization by the DBA) published in 1936.
- (b) Khin Maung Latt (ed.), *Meedok Thein Maung Gyi*, pp. 42-3.
51. (a) Hmaing, *Thakin Dikar*, pp. 164-5, extract from the pamphlet I on Komin Kochin.
- (b) Ba Sein, *The Thakins' struggle*, pp. 13-4.
52. Khin Maung Latt (ed.), *Meedok Thein Maung Gyi*, p. 43.
53. According to the basic consideration of Thakins, Myanmar was an independent country since its inception and the fellow people were the real masters or Thakins of this country throughout its long-lived past. Hence they believed that every fellow people deserved to adopt the Thakin appellation though they were subjected by the aliens temporarily. See Hmaing, *Thakin Dikar*, pp. 162-3, extract from the pamphlet I on Komin Kochin.
54. Ba Sein, *The Thakins' struggle*, pp. 11-5. Khin Yi said that the Thakin idea might stem from Wetkathay village near Taungwingyi. The village abbot, she wrote, made his villagers to adopt Thakin appellation to raise the patriotism. She continued that "Perhaps impressed by this practice during a visit to Wetkathay village, Thakin Ba Thaug on his return to Rangoon suggested to his close friends that they should also adopt the Thakin appellation. This they did, although reluctantly". See Khin Yi, *The Dobama Movement in Burma (1930-1938)* (New York: Cornell University, Southeast Asia Program, 1988), p. 3. She wrote it based on her interview with Thakin Kodaw Hmaing who joined the Thakin camp five years after its emergence. But Thakin Thein Maung, one of the three pioneer Thakins, firmly argued that their Thakin idea did not stem from the Wetkathay village. He said, Ba Thaug, Hla Baw and himself, never visited that village. See Khin Maung Latt (ed.), *Meedok Thein Maung Gyi*, p. 42. Moreover the Thakin prefix of the Wetkathay villagers was not an expression of patriotism. They used such prefix just to ridicule a family of the village which members called their son-in-law, a British, as Thakin. See Tin Tun Aung, *Myanmar Naingganyay hnit Thakin Ba Thaug (Myanmar politics and Thakin Ba Thaug)*

- (Yangon: Sabei-u, 1980), pp. 143-4.
55. Nyo Mya, 'Thakin Ba Thaug', *Oo Way*, pp. 55-6.
56. *Thuriya*, dated 8, 9, 16, 29, 30 June and 13, 15, 18, 24 July 1936.
57. Ba Tin, Thakin, *1300 pyay Ayaydawpone Hmattan (the Record of M.E. 1300 Strife)* (Yangon: Myawaddy, 1964), p. 21-2.
58. Widura Thakin Chit Maung, *Kyunbawa Bamarpyi (Myanmar under the servitude)* (Yangon: Hla Maw, 1968), pp. 11-25. See also Widura Thakin Chit Maung's foreword in Takkatho Sein Tin, *Myanmar Lyuilutyay Taikpwe hnt Thakin Ba Sein (Myanmar struggle for independence and Thakin Ba Sein)* (First published 1988, repr. Yangon, Arrmanthit, 2001) pp. 22-4.
59. (a) *The Presidential Speech of Thakin Lay Maung*, pp. 1-13.
(b) *The DoBamar creed and constitution*, pp. 1-8.
60. DoBamar Asiayone, *Mawlamyaing Nyilargan Thabin Hmattan* (Yangon: 1939), pp. 53-4, 108-21.