



What U Saw Saw in Japan

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solution. The disunity of the people themselves and their lack of native leadership are things which must be borne in mind.

In whatever temporary success Japan may gain in the struggle for mastery of east Asia, Formosa will have played a part. But its greatest usefulness may have been, not so much as a military base but rather as a sociological laboratory for the "master-race" technique.

What U Saw Saw in Japan

As the Pacific war engulfs Burma, that country's domestic problems tend to disappear behind the news of the fighting. Burma, to the rest of the world, means principally the Burma Road, vital supply line to China. Burma to her own people means their country with its own peculiar social, political and economic problems.

In recent decades, Burmese nationalism has been an important factor in the country's political life. With more than one-third of Burma's population non-Burman, such nationalism produced a feeling of animosity towards alien Asiatic residents. The Burman nationalists' desire for greater political independence led to a steadily growing resentment towards the British who consistently refused to meet their demands.

How far the Japanese had endeavored to take advantage of the psychological situation in Burma is not clear. Some of the known facts, however, do suggest that Burma's premier, U Saw, had not been deaf to Japanese propaganda before the outbreak of war in the Pacific. It was not entirely a surprise, therefore, when on January 18, 1942, British authorities detained U Saw, charging him with having been in contact with Japanese authorities after December 7. Although details have not been made known beyond this, certain things in the record indicate how the Japanese might have hoped to win U Saw's support.

Burma's centuries-old isolation and the preoccupation of her leaders with internal economic problems have not helped their understanding of world affairs and of Burma's place therein. Although the country enjoys a higher literacy rate than many other Oriental countries, it is largely uninformed and uninterested in international affairs. Until U Saw visited the United States and England in the fall of 1941, he had never been out of the Far East. His only earlier contacts outside of Burma had been, as a young man, in India, and more recently in Japan.

Owing to this peculiarly provincial outlook, there has been a tendency in Burma for personal issues to dominate in political matters. Although Burma's 22 political parties all desired to see their country attain

its freedom, they did not see eye to eye on how to accomplish this objective. Every government Burma has had to date has been a coalition government dependent for survival on a precarious unity among the principal party leaders and also on the support of the non-Burmese representatives in the legislature.

At the time of the outbreak of war in Europe, there probably was greater political unity in Burma than at any previous time. Through Ba Maw, the country's first Premier, a demand was made that the British cease hindering Burma from achieving freedom—a demand that had the support of several parties, the students' associations and the vernacular press. The remaining major opposition party, under the leadership of U Saw, came forward a few weeks later with a similar war resolution, with the additional request that Great Britain invite Burma to attend the Empire Council of War to which the Dominions and India were sending representatives.

To the indignation of opposition parties, the Governor replied only to the Premier, U Pu, and took no notice of any political opinion in the country other than the ministerial. He emphasized how lucky Burma was to be safe under the British aegis and repeated a previous statement that, while the natural issue of Burmese constitutional progress was the attainment of dominion status, the essential condition thereto was the maintenance of good government.

From the British point of view, while Burma was theoretically treated as an entity separate from India after 1937, in actuality the political side of their problems was identified to a certain extent. Great Britain was obviously afraid, if she made any commitment regarding Burma's future status, that India would feel entitled to a compensatory concession—and vice versa.

In a letter to the *London Times* in the autumn of 1941, U Saw stated: "Public opinion in Burma is unanimous that my country should fight on the side of the democracies, but naturally many of us are anxious to know what status Burma is to be given in the British Commonwealth when the war ends. What Burma wants to know is whether in fighting with many countries for the freedom of the world she is also fighting for her own freedom. Does victory by the democracies mean full self-government for Burma? The demand for full self-government is the unanimous demand of the Burmese people and was made long before the Atlantic charter."

U Saw made no secret of his disappointment on this score when his London visit failed to produce any more favorable response. This was doubtless one of the factors leading to his alleged flirtations with the Japanese.

British propaganda efforts were negative, directed towards reviving Burma's martial past and telling the Burmans they would have no freedom if the Axis won. Burmans were little affected by this. In fact, the

country as a whole was not convinced that it was in any danger from enemy aggression.

A more positive statement from Great Britain probably would have given greater unity to the various political groups within Burma, and might also have disposed the Burmans more favorably toward the general war effort. No prominent Burmese politician had come out unconditionally in favor of supporting the British war effort, not only because it was fashionable to oppose everything bearing the British stamp but because of Britain's failure to offer any definite political bait.

After separation from India, Burma was responsible financially for her own defense and, unlike Malaya, was never asked to contribute to the imperial military setup. The Burmese were willing to accept this financial responsibility provided their defense affairs were Burmanized. While this development was given a fillip by the European war, the process did not move fast enough to suit them.

This cannot be blamed exclusively on Great Britain, for the Burmans themselves showed no great enthusiasm to volunteer. U Saw was willing to support increased defense expenditures because they gave the Burmans, for the first time in their history as British subjects, the opportunity for military training which would be useful before and after the attainment of independence. It is doubtful, however, whether even the promise of more complete self-government would have enlisted the active support of more than the nationalist leaders, as the bulk of the population had no cognizance of the war issues.

It was U Saw's contention that Burma's contribution to the war effort was made freely, without any attempt to use the war as a lever for political concessions. This may have been formally true. But Burmese effort was very small. Burmans were encouraged to volunteer for technical services such as transportation and medical work, but they were not urged to enter military service and responded only slowly to such appeals as were made. Their country's chief role, like Malaya's, was that of economic producer, and as all major industries are in foreign hands this affected the Burmese solely as farmers, laborers and to a minor extent as middlemen. This was true especially of the new shipbuilding industry, of oil, and of the teak export.

Beyond the whole matter of Burma's relationship with Great Britain is the even more complicated internal situation, particularly as it concerns Indian and Chinese immigration. In a total population of about 16 million, there are about 1½ million Indians and probably 300,000 Chinese. Although steps had been considered to limit the entrance of these two groups of alien Asiatics, no actual measures had been put into effect. Great Britain held up the final authorization of the agreement reached between the governments of Burma

and India. Old resentments were heightened by the influx of thousands of Chinese in 1940 and 1941 to facilitate transport over the Burma Road. This undesired addition to Burma's population and to her communications system with China drew Burma obviously against her will into the arena of war.

Perhaps even more important, however, is the economic problem which Burma has been facing. For years India had been taking more than half of Burma's rice. The imposition of an export duty on Burmese rice in the spring of 1941 and the institution of rice control in September made rice more expensive for the Indians and tended to eliminate Indian rice dealers from the market. Therefore a move was revived in India to increase the acreage under paddy in order to lessen the country's dependence upon Burma for food.

In the meantime, Japan and Japanese-occupied China had become virtually the only market for Burmese raw cotton, and since December 1939 they had been taking a large and increasing quantity of Burmese rice. The order of July 1941 freezing Axis funds shut off these important outlets for two of Burma's most important products (see "The Burma Behind The Road," *Far Eastern Survey*, Dec. 27, 1940, p. 291).

These, too, were among the matters which U Saw took up with authorities in London, on the ground that since both measures derived from the war the British Government should assume responsibility for the disposal of these two crops. Significantly, U Saw had remarked some time before, in speaking of the war, that the nation that could guarantee food and shelter to the Burmese people was the country's friend. How much he had been led to expect from Japan in this respect is not known, but the whole matter of exports gave Japan a good talking point.

It may be said, then, that Burma did not at most desire to see Great Britain lose the war. At their lowest pro-British ebb, however, the Burmans saw in the Japanese fellow Asiatics who they thought would probably give them as much political freedom as Britain and would promise a much better economic outlook.

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