

မြန်မာရေးရာ

အမှတ် (၁)

အောက်တိုဘာ ၂၀၁၆

အယ်ဒီတာ

အေးမောင်ကျော်

မောင်ဇေယျာ

ညွန့်ဟန်



မြန်မာရေးရာ

အမှတ် - ၂၂၈၊ သိမ်ဖြူလမ်း

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မြန်မာရေးရာ လေ့လာရေးအဖွဲ့က ထုတ်ဝေသည်။

တန်ဖိုး	- ၃၀၀၀ ကျပ်
အုပ်ရေ	- ၂၀၀၀
လိုဂိုနှင့် အဖုံးဒီဇိုင်း	- မိုးဇင်
ဓာတ်ပုံ	- စည်သူမြင့်ဆွေ
ထုတ်ဝေသူ	- ဦးမြင့်ကျော် (၀၁၈၆၉)
ပုံနှိပ်သူ	- ဦးမျိုးညွန့် (၀၀၄၃၀)၊ စာပေလောကပုံနှိပ်တိုက် ၁၇၃၊ ၃၃ လမ်း၊ ကျောက်တံတားမြို့နယ်၊ ရန်ကုန်မြို့။
ဖြန့်ချိရေး	- ဓူဝံစာပေ အမှတ် - ၂၁၂၊ ၃၁ လမ်း၊ အထက်ဘလောက်၊ ပန်းဘဲတန်းမြို့နယ်၊ ရန်ကုန်မြို့။ ဖုန်း - ၀၁ - ၃၈၅၅၉၇၊ ၀၉ - ၇၃၂၀၃၀၃၂

“Kabar Ma Kyei”: Imagining the Nation through Songs¹

Min Zin

If it were possible to sum up Burmese music in two words they would be “Freedom” and “Gusto.”

K. (U Khin Zaw), *Burmese Culture: General and Particular*, p.70. This paper will investigate three Burmese songs and explain how they offer answers (at least partially) to questions of what is the “history” of Burma and how its national identity and nationalism are imagined. The paper has two overarching analytical concerns. The first is to look at how the historical context, text/language (such as choice of words and metaphors), intertextuality and the musical forms of these three songs are experienced through hearing, singing, feeling and acting, and provide a referent for nationalism or a political community. The second part will examine the means of public expression and transmission, by which these three songs attempt not only to represent but also to organize and construct/reconstruct a national community. In sum, this paper will analyze the mutually interactive process of making the songs national and of imagining the nation² through the songs.

The three songs under consideration are 1. “*Dobama Thachin*” - meaning “We Burmese Song”, 2. “*Kabar Ma Kyei*,” the Burmese national anthem, and 3. “*Kabar Ma Kyei Bu*,” a protest song meaning “Till the End of The World.” The first song was composed in 1930 when Burma was under British colonial rule, and the second was adopted as the national

anthem in 1947, and the third song became popular during the Four Eights (8-8-88) Democracy Movement in 1988. These songs provide insights into three different historic periods of political activity: the anticolonial-nationalist movement, the foundational values of Burma at Independence and the democracy movement's struggle against military dictatorship respectively, and the transmission of the songs function as constant sources of social/political imagination. With these songs, "the metaphorical 'voice of the people' can be heard as a real, embodied voice."³ However, the questions about whose social/political imagination or "voice" are being performed, who composed them, and with whom they resonate remain to be discussed.

Dobama Song

The *Dobama* (We Burmese) *Song* was a trademark of the *Dobama Asiayone* (We Burmese Association),⁴ a nationalist organization founded by Thakin Ba Thaung and a group of young patriots in 1930. An earlier split in the ranks of General Council of Burmese Associations (GCBA) - at that time the only nationalist political movement, the effects of world economic depression on Burma (1930), the peasant's rebellion and Indo-Burmese riots (1930) created a leadership vacuum in Burma's struggle for Independence. Ba Thaung, who was inspired by the Irish Sinn Fein movement and influenced by Nietzsche's discussion of superman, organized the *Dobama Asiayone*. He drew on militant patriotism and skillful approaches to rouse public's participation. The organization's demand for Independence and its innovative approach to mobilizing people were a clear departure from earlier nationalist political movement and parties.

Ba Thaung and his associates were outraged that Burmese living in their homeland had to address British colonial officials and merchants as *thakin* (master), akin to the practice of Indians addressing British as *sahib* in Hindi. They began to style their name by adding the honorific title of *thakin* - for example, Thakin Ba Thaung - to denote that the Burmese, too, were a race of masters, not slaves. Members of the *Dobama Asiayone* became known as the thakin. In the wake of the Indo-

Burmese dockyard workers' riots in 1930, Thakin Ba Thaung issued the *Dobama Asiayone*'s first manifesto. The rousing statement emphasized the following catchwords (translated from Burmese):

Burma is our country
 The Burmese literature is our literature
 The Burmese language is our language
 Love our country
 Promote our literature
 Cherish our language

The organization called upon the Burmese nationals to be united, open their own shops and purchase only indigenous Burmese products.⁵ The association carried its slogan as "race, language, and religion." Members of *Dobama Asiayone*, later known as the Thakin party, also shouted: "Master race we are, we Burmese."⁶

Their stance — especially their self-style Thakin prefix initially made them laughingstocks among even fellow Burmese and sympathetic foreigners. U Thant, a young journalist with moderate political views, who later became the first United Nations secretary-general from Asia, then laughed at his friend Ba Thaung, when the former visited the latter's house and saw a Pocket Oxford Dictionary with the name Thakin Ba Thaung had written on its cover. J.S. Furnivall, an Indian Civil Service employee and benefactor of Ba Thaung and other young educated Burmese, also responded to Ba Thaung's request to be addresses as Thakin Ba Thaung with laughter.⁷ As Aung San Suu Kyi noted, "there were those who looked down on them (Thakins) as brash young upstarts or feckless trouble-makers and found their use of prefix Thakin affected and objectionable."⁸ Although the group's militant stance triggered controversies, the *Dobama Asiayone* was in its formative phase and did not even have a systematic organization structure when Thakin Ba Thaung issued the first manifesto in May 30, 1930.

It was the *Dobama* song and its widespread popularity that marked a watershed in the association's development in terms of expanding its membership base from among the younger generation and boosting its support from the general public. Thant Myint-U, a

historian and also grandson of U Thant, notes, “One of their (Thakin leaders’) big attractions was their rousing and fairly belligerent song.”¹ Nationalist historian Maung Htin Aung also observed that the young Thakins composed “a militant national song, in which they demanded both economic and political freedom, and they sang it regularly at busy comers of the campus [Rangoon University], to the amusement of their fellow students... Yet this was the song that was to rouse the people to revolutionary action.”⁹

A few weeks after the publication of their first manifesto, Thakin Ba Thaung sought the help of songwriter Saya Tin, the founder of the Young Men’s Buddhist (YMB) School in Mandalay who came to be known as YMB Saya Tin. Thakin Ba Thaung and associates chose the theme and text of the song, and Saya Tin composed it. After editing the lyric several times and testing the music and voice, the song was born.

တို့ဗမာသီချင်း

တကောင်းအဘိရာဇာ တို့ဗမာသာကီမျိုးဟာမို့ မညိုရုဏ်တေဇာ ယိုးဒယားနဲ့ ကုလားကိုပါ တိုက်ခိုက်ကာ...အောင်ခဲ့တာတို့ဗမာ။စိန်မှန်ကင်းအစစ်အဖြစ်ကြီးဖြစ်လျက်ထင်းတလှည့်ကြုံရ ထုံးနဲ့မသွေ ... လောကဓမ္မတာပေ ငါတို့ကံခေ ... ဖြစ်ရပြန်သလေ။ သို့သော် ... အရင်းကိုစစ် လျှင် ဗမာပြည် ... ငါတို့ ... ငါတို့ပြည်။

နောင်ဥဒါန်းဘယ်မကျေစရာ။ ရာဇဝင်တင်လား။ မျိုးရိုးနွယ်လား။ ကမ္ဘာတစ်ခုမှာဖြင့် ဗမာ အထင်အရှား။ တို့ခေတ်တွင်မှ - ညံ့ကြတော့မှာလား။ တို့ဗမာ။ တို့ဗမာမဟုတ်လေသလား။ တို့ဗမာ - ငါတို့ဗမာ။ ဒါ - ငါတို့ဗမာ။ ဒါ - ငါတို့ဗမာ။ အားလုံးညီညီ။ ယောက်ျားဘသား။ တို့ဗမာ။ နောင်လာနောက်သား။ ကောင်းစားဘို့ရာ။ တို့ကိုယ်ကျိုးလုံးလုံးမပါ။ ရဲရဲဗမာပီပီ။ ဗမာပြည် - တို့ဗမာတို့ပါ။ သခင်ကျင့်ကို - ကျင့်ကိုကျင့်ကြပါ။ သခင်မျိုးဟေ့ - တို့ဗမာ။ မိုးအောက် - မြေပြင် မှာ။ အထက်တန်းစိတ်နဲ့။ စာမရီသွေး - တို့ဗမာ။

သံပြိုင်။

ကမ္ဘာမကျေ - ဗမာတတွေ။ ဒါတို့ပြည် - ဒါတို့ပြည်။ ဒါ ငါတို့ပြည်။ ကမ္ဘာမကျေ - ဗမာတတွေ။ ဒါတို့ပြည် - ဒါတို့ပြည်။ ဒါတို့ပြည်။ ဒါတို့ပြည် - ဒါတို့ပြည်။ ဒါတို့ပြည်။ ဒါတို့ပြည် - ဒါတို့ပြည်။ ဒါတို့ပြည်။ တို့ဗမာ။ တို့ဗမာပြည်ကို။ တိုင်းရင်းသားအကုန်အစင်။ တို့ပြည်လို့မှတ်ထင်။ တို့ဝတ္ထ ရားပင်။ တို့ဗမာခင်။ အမျိုးသားရေးကြိုးပမ်းကြပါ။ တို့ဗမာဟေ့ - တို့ဗမာ။ အမျိုးသားရေးကြိုးပမ်း ကြပါ။

တို့ဗမာဟေ့ - တို့ဗမာ။

အရှေ့ကနေဝန်းထွက်သည့်ပမာပ။ တို့ခေတ်ကို ရောက်ရမည် မလွဲပါ။ တို့ဗမာဟေ့ - တို့ဗမာ။
ဗမာပြည်တစ်ဝန်းအကုန်၊ တို့အိမ်မှတ်ပါ။ တို့ယာမှတ်ပါ။ အဲ - ဒါတို့ဗမာ။ ။

(သံပြိုင် ပြန်ကောက်)^{၁၀}

“We Burmese” Song

Descendants from Tagaung's founder Abiraza of Sakya race
The fame of us Bama (Bama) has not faded away.
Who won victory over the Yodaya and Kalar¹¹ - We Bama.
Formerly cluttered diamonds, now worthless firewood.
That has brought the course of the world to us
Let us remember our origins - and we are Bama, and our country is
Bama

Long, long live “our Burmese” fame;
In history shines “our Burmese” name.
Our race well known the world over.
Should we now prove inferior?
Tut! Tut! not we, not we,
For Bama, Bama are we!
Are we not Bama? We are, we are,
Then unite and act, “Father’s sons” we are,
Not for us, but for those of hereafter
Be brave, be brave, like a true Bama,
Burma, Burma for us Bamans.
Act and behave like Masters (Thakins),
For Bama are a race of Masters.
Under the heaven and on earth,
High-minded and of *Zamay*’s blood.

Chorus to be repeated twice

For so long as the world will last,
Burma is ours, Burma is ours.

This is our country, this is our land,
 This our country till the end.
 This is our country, this is our land,
 This our country till the end.

Let all our countrymen
 Consider this as our land,
 Our duty then
 Is to love Burman.
 Mark ye, Bama, Bama are we;
 And all must work for nation's cause.
 Our glorious time will come
 As sure as the rising sun from the East.
 We Bama, we Bama
 Consider the whole of Burma
 As our true home sure.
 Consider it as ours, Man!
 This is like a true Bama.

Chorus to be repeated twice

For so long as the world will last,
 Burma is ours, Burma is ours.
 This is our country, this is our land,
 This our country till the end.
 This is our country, this is our land,
 This our country till the end.¹²

The *Dobama* song has four parts.¹³ The first provides a historical background featuring the past glories of the Burmese. The lyric traces Burmese lineage to the Sakya race and implies that Burmese are descendants of Gautama Buddha. Then, the song extolls the military victories by Burmese kings over the neighboring kingdoms located in present day Thailand and India, described as Yodaya and Kalar, respectively. The second part highlights the humiliation and the inferior

status of Burmese under the British Raj. The song rhetorically expresses the process of subordination under British rule through the metaphor that refers to Burmese as “formerly cluttered diamonds, now worthless firewood.” The first two parts of the *Dobama* song can be summarized in Partha Chatterjee’s succinct description: “Ancient glory, present misery: the subject of this entire story is ‘us’.”¹⁴ The third and fourth parts of the song urge people to “work for the nation’s cause” — in this context, Independence and nation building — and rouse patriotism. The song repeatedly reminds the people to “consider the whole of Burma as our true home sure” and “let all our countrymen consider this as our land, our duty then is to love Burmese,”¹⁵ and above all, it claimed that “Burma for us Burmese.” In his own official interpretation of the song, Thakin Ba Thauung stated that the adoption of thakin as an honorific title and the call for action and behavior of Master race are not just exclusively for members of the *Dobama Asiayone*, but for all people of Burma without any discrimination (“For Burmese are a race of Masters”).¹⁶ Thus, the Burmese nation is “imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.”¹⁷ The fraternity that the *Dobama* song had constructed made people to act together for “our land.”

The chorus of the *Dobama* song, which was later adapted to become the national anthem for the Union of Burma, is also useful for understanding the emergence of nationalism. *Kabar ma keyi*, the key word of the chorus that re-appears as an intertextual theme in the other two songs discussed in this article, were translated as. “For so long as the world will last.” It could also be literally translated as “Till the world ends up shattering.” The phrase *kabar ma keyi* implies that “race, language and religion” (the motto of the *Dobama Asiayone*) needed to be saved from extinction. It warns of the danger and expresses concern of the disappearance of one’s nation and history. Therefore, the chorus of the *Dobama* song vows: “For so long as the world will last, Burma is ours, Burma is ours.” The musical form of the chorus was also different from the rest of the song. Though the song was composed in a traditional

Burmese musical style, the chorus contains a western melody. The song demonstrates an uneasy hybridity¹⁸ because of the attempt to maintain a traditional style, while experimenting with the inclusion of western musical influences.

However, the *Dobama* song seized public mood and stirred spirited nationalism through its widespread transmission. The first public performance of the song was on a Saturday evening at Thaton Residential Hall of Rangoon University on July 19, 1930.¹⁹ When a group of thakin gave a heartfelt performance, both Ba Sein and Lay Maung who were among the audience are said to be so much carried away with the singing that within a few days they applied for membership in the *Dobama Asiayone*.

They later played leading roles in the Thakin party and became well-known participants in Burmese Independent Movement. YMB Saya Tin also became a Thakin. On the evening after the Thaton Hall performance, the Thakin group held a mass meeting at the platform of the Shwe Dagon Pagoda, where Thakin Ba Thaung explained the objectives of the *Dobama Asiayone* and the significance of affixing the title of Thakin to their names. Then Thakin Tin provided a spirited performance of the song with other members of the Thakin movement joining him in the chorus. At the request of the audience, the singers performed several encores of the song. Pamphlets containing lyrics for the song sold out. The next day's edition of *Suriya*, a local newspaper, published a letter requesting additional performances of the song. The *Dobama Asiayone* also received several queries and letters of invitation for further performances from Rangoon and many other provinces. The thakin performers traveled across the country to give concerts and introduced the song and discuss its significance. Within a few years, there were many chapters of the *Dobama Asiayone* established throughout the country, and the *Dobama* song became *de rigueur* for the opening and closing of its meetings. The song was not only performed at the public rallies, meetings and ceremonies organized by the Thakin party but also at soccer games, temple festivals and other crowded gatherings. The

song also received publicity when its full text was published in the September issue of the *World of Books*.

In his official interpretation, Thakin Ba Thaung claimed, "Some clever people call Dobama song as a political *Kammava*²⁰ song. When the evil spirits and ghosts enter a village or town, the Sangha (Buddhist clergy) recited *Kammava* text with accurate and proper intonation, and the effect of *Kammava* drives the evil spirits away. In the same manner, *Dobama* song is a *Kammava* song that has to be sung with rousing pride and gusto in order to drive the invading and exploitative British evil spirits running out sooner from Burma."²¹ Thakin Ba Thaung and his associates cleverly and effectively secularized one of the most powerful traditional religious practices in order to engender the people with modern nationalism and provided the basis for imaging a political/national community. This demonstrates, as Penny Edward notes, that "the cultural foundations of this modern construct were by no means new...What was new were the terms of reference framing these linguistic, religious, and artistic expression."²²

Over time, the political goals of complete independence from the British articulated and advanced by the thakins, gained widespread support from the population. In 1935, when Burma's most influential and respected writer Kodaw Hmaing threw his lot in with the young thakin nationalists and adopted the title of thakin, his association enhanced the prestige of the organization and conferred it with greater moral authority. Within a few years, well-known student leaders, such as Aung San, Nu, Hla Pe and Thein Pe, and two other Leftist political leaders Than Tun and Soe joined Thakin Kodaw Hmaing's *Dobama Asiayone*. Thakin Aung San, who became General Secretary of the organization in 1939, led a group comprised of thakin and students to clandestinely undergo military training in Japan. This group formed the nucleus of the emerging Burmese Army.

From the Dobama song to Kabar Ma Kyei, Burma's national anthem

Early in 1942, the Japanese armed forces together with Aung San's Burma

Independence Army drove the British from Burma. During the ensuing Japanese occupation, the pro-Japanese government established by Dr. Ba Maw adopted the chorus of the *Dobama* song as the national anthem. After World War II, Thakin Aung San negotiated Burma's Independence from the British and began taking steps to draft a Constitution. Accordingly, various committees were appointed including the State Flag, Song and Seal Committee. The committee comprised ten members with Deedoke U Ba Cho (later Thakin Tin) serving as Chairman.²³ The Committee laid the following guidelines for composing the national anthem:

- a) The State song [national anthem] shall be acceptable to all the indigenous peoples.
- b) The wording and tune of the song shall be so unique as to arouse the spirit of indigenous peoples.
- c) The State song shall be entirely different from the current popular songs.
- d) The duration of the song shall be between one and a half minutes and two minutes.

It was also instructed that the words chosen for the national anthem be in line with the following points:

- a) This country is our Union of Burma,
- b) This country is our birth-place, our hearth and home, our final resting place,
- c) This is the land we love and cherish,
- d) We will risk our lives to defend this country with prowess and wisdom,
- e) We will put forth all efforts so that the power and glory of this country shine brightly,
- f) All our peoples stand firm and united,
- g) We will strive for the perpetuity of the State.

During the session of the Constituent Assembly, the composition of the national anthem involved many drafts. And in finalizing it, the Constituent Assembly took into consideration the following:

- a) The chorus tune-scale of the *Dobama* song had long been embedded in the hearts of the people.
- b) The basic principles of freedom, justice and equality for all peoples were no written into the Constitution.²⁴

The toned-down version of *Dobama* song (its chorus) was adopted by the third session of the Constituent Assembly on September 22, 1947. The text was:

ကမ္ဘာမကျေ (နိုင်ငံတော်သီချင်း)

တရားမျှတ လွတ်လပ်ခြင်းနဲ့မသွေ ခိုပြည်၊ ခိုမြေ များလှစပ်သိမ်း ငြိမ်းချမ်းစေဖို့ ခွင့်တူညီမျှ
ဝါဒဖြူစင်တဲ့ ပြည် ခိုပြည်၊ ခိုမြေ။ ပြည်ထောင်စုအမွေ အမြဲတည်တံ့စေ အဓိဋ္ဌာန်ပြုပေ ထိန်းသိမ်း
စို့လေ။

(ကမ္ဘာမကျေ ဗမာပြည် ခိုဘိုးဘွားအမွေစစ်မို့ ချစ်မြတ်နိုးပေ)^၂

ပြည်ထောင်စုကို အသက်ပေးလို့ ခိုကာကွယ်မလေ

ဒါ့ခိုပြည်၊ ခိုမြေ၊ ခိုပိုင်နက်မြေ

ခိုပြည်၊ ခိုမြေ၊ အကျိုးကို ညီညာစွာ ခိုတတွေ ထမ်းဆောင်ပါစို့လေ

ခိုတာဝန်ပေ အဖိုးတန်မြေ။

Kabar Ma Kyei (national anthem)

Ever to justice and liberty,

Our nation, our land.

Peace for all peoples and equality,

A nation with a pure ideology,

Our nation, our land.

Let the Union's heritage endure

Thus shall our resolution stands.

For so long as the world will last (Until the world ends up shattering),

Long lives Burma!

We love our land because this is our ancestor's true heritage.

We will sacrifice our lives to protect our Union.

This is our nation, this is our land, and we own it.

Let us strive in unity for the good of our land.

This is our very duty to our invaluable land.”²⁵

On September 24, 1947, the Constituent Assembly unanimously adopted and enacted the final Constitution presented by the Drafting Committee. And the Assembly was prorogued with all the members, the officers and staff singing the national anthem.

Burma's national anthem, which people refer to as the “*Kabar Ma Kyei*,” is pervasive in people's daily lives. Since Independence in 1948, state radio broadcasts the national anthem at the opening of its morning service. The national anthem is also regularly performed in classrooms, sporting events and official ceremonies. However, the question about whose social/political imagination or “voice” are being performed in this national anthem emerged in the postcolonial period. A rival politician assassinated the independent hero Thakin Aung San and other cabinet members in 1947 on the eve of Independence. Young Thakin leaders, who sang the *Dobama* song together during the Independent struggle split and took up arms against one another, and minority ethnic groups engaged in insurrection against newly formed central government. In 1948, after achieving Independence from the “British devil,” civil war broke out in Burma. The question of representation (such as - who benefit the Independence at the expense of who?) became a contentious issue and remains an ongoing concern, especially in the aftermath of military coup in 1962 that ended the parliamentary civilian rule and exacerbated civil war.

“Kabar Ma Kyei Bu”

However, the “Kabar Ma Kyei” vow - “For so long as the world will last or Until the world ends up shattering” - and its expression of a “duty to protect our nation”, which both the *Dobama* song and the national anthem articulate as an intertextual theme, continues to persist. When prodemocracy popular uprising broke out in August 8, 1988, known as “Four Eights (8-8-88) Movement”, one of the songs people sang on the street was the national anthem. After the bloody military crackdown in August that lefts thousands of people dead, a new democracy song was

born with a title of “*Kabar Ma Kyei Bu*.”

ကမ္ဘာမကြေဘူး

ကမ္ဘာမကြေဘူး ငါတို့တွေရဲ့သွေးနဲ့ရေးတဲ့ မော်ကွန်းတွေ

တော်လှန်ရေး ဒီမိုကရေစီတိုက်ပွဲအတွင်းမှာ ကျဆုံးသော

အော် သူရဲကောင်းတို့ရေ

အာဇာနည်တွေ နေတဲ့တိုင်းပြည်

ရဲရဲတောက် တို့ဗမာတွေ။

ကိုယ်တော်မှိုင်းရာဇဝင်တွေလည်း ရိုင်းခဲ့ရပြီ အစိုးရ

သခင်အောင်ဆန်း နိုင်ငံတော်လည်း သွေးစွန်းခဲ့ပြီ အဖရေ

အော် လုပ်ရက်ကြပေ

ပေတရာပေါ်မှာ ပြည်သူအလောင်းတွေ

အတုံးအရုံးလဲပြီကာနဲ။

“*Kabar Ma Kyei Bu*”

For so long as the world will last (or Until the world ends up shattering

Until the world ends up shattering,)

The history that was written with our blood will last

O heroes - those who fell in the revolution of democracy struggle

This is the country of martyrs

We the brave Bama

Kodaw Hmaing, history has gone ugly, Grandpa!

Thakin Aung San, the State has been tainted with blood, Dad!

O mercilessly deed

The dead bodies of people on street

Falling down in a heap

The song shares the same powerful theme of “*Kabar Ma Kyei*” - the fear the one’s history will vanish. It also called for preserving the “true history” of Burma that was written with martyrs’ bloods, and then covered-up and distorted by successive military regimes. With a somber tone evoking heartfelt sadness and shock, the song invokes the two most

influential *Dobama Asiayone* leaders who became father figures for the country, Thakin Kodaw Hmaing and Thakin Aung San. Interestingly, the pseudonym of the songwriter is Naing Myanmar, a young activist with ties to the underground student union leaders active in 1988. However, the song's melody was adapted from a western hit song, "Dust in the Wind" recorded by the American rock band Kansas, which was popular with young people at that time. The choice of music represents an apparent attempt by the songwriter Naing Myanmar to enhance its appeal with maximum political impact during the peak of the democracy struggle.

In late August and early September, groups of guitar-playing activists gave public performances all over Rangoon and sang the song to those who attended peaceful rallies and sit-in hunger strikes calling for the restoration of democracy in Burma. The first public performance of the song after the military coup was at the funeral for Daw Khin Kyi, the wife of Thakin Aung San and the mother of democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, which took place on January 2, 1989. Tens of thousands of wet-eyed, well-wishers and political activists attended the funeral and sang "*Kabar Ma Kyei Bu*", repeatedly invoking Thakin Kodaw Hmaing and Thakin Aung San. Pamphlets containing the lyric were widely distributed. The song was also publicized through short-wave radio broadcasts by foreign media organizations, such as BBC (Burmese), VOA (Burmese) and All India Radio. These broadcasts constituted a popular means for accessing uncensored news and information.

Conclusion

The three songs examined in this paper clearly reflect the sentiments of the anti-colonial, nationalist movement, the foundational values of Independent Burma and the democratic struggle respectively, and the transmission of the songs function as a constant sources of material for social/political imagination. However, the intertextuality and transmission of imagination do not rule out the evolution in the songs. Further research should be conducted to investigate how social/political imagination or "voice" evolved across these three songs because

they could open to multiple interpretations or reinterpretations that can form the basis for a nationalism that is either inclusive or exclusive.

Though a question of whose socio-political imagination the songs represented often emerges as a matter of contention, these songs can stir as well as depict nationalistic emotions, and can construct as well as constantly reconstruct a "history" of Burma and the vision of the nation. These songs demonstrated transformative power of music in providing people of Burma to be able to imagine and experience - through activities including hearing, singing, feeling and acting - a sense of nationalism or political community.

Note

- ¹ The author wishes to thank Prof. Penny Edwards, John Buchanan and Camilla Buzzi for incisive comments on an earlier draft of this essay.
- ² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, (Verso, 2006), p. 6-7. "(I)t (the nation) is an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."
- ³ Sue Tuohy, "The Sonic Dimensions of Nationalism in Modern China: Musical Representation and Transformation," *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 45, No. 1. (Winter, 2001), p. 124.
- ⁴ According to the thakins, the word Myanmar or *Myanmar Naingan* means the majority ethnic Burman excluding other ethnic nationalities. *Myanmar Naingan* (Myanmar State) was also the name given by Myanmar feudalists. Thus, Thakins claimed that they used Bama Naingan (Burma) and Bama (Burmese) to encompass all ethnic nationalities living in Burma, instead of Myanmar. See Commission for Compiling Dobama Asiayone History, *Dobama Asiayone Thamaing [History of the Dobama Asiayone]*, (Rangoon, Sapay Beikeman, 1976), Vol. I, p.215. This paper, therefore, will use Burmese to denote Bama.
- ⁵ *Dobama Asiayone Thamaing [History of the Dobama Asiayone]*, Vol. I, p. 127-132.
- ⁶ Despite its nationalist overtones and the use of race, the movement encompassed all ethnic groups. Some Indians were also included in its membership, adopting Thakin prefix - such as Thakin Apana, Thakin Naridu and Thakin Sengupta. Ibid, p. 213-217.

- ⁷ Tin Maung Than, *Thakin Naingandaw - Thakin Nation*, (Shwe Thingaha, 2002), p. 31
- ⁸ Aung San Suu Kyi, *Freedom From Fear and Other Writings*, (Penguin Books, 1991), p. 10
- ⁹ Maung Htin Aung, *A History of Burma*, (Columbia University Press, 1967), p. 295
- ¹⁰ *Dobama Asiayone Thamaing [History of the Dobama Asiayone]*, p. 24. According to Than Htut, the introductory paragraph was added later on by Thakins. See Than Htut, "Two Songs," in *Myanmar Historical Research Journal*, No. 8, (Universities Historical Research Centre, December 2001), p. 45.
- ¹¹ Derogatory terms for Siamese and Indians.
- ¹² Than Htut, *Two Songs*, p. 45, 43-44. Minor changes such as the usage of Bama, Yodaya and Kalar were made in this paper.
- ¹³ *Dobama Asiayone Thamaing [History of the Dobama Asiayone]*, p. 134. and Mya Han, *Dictionary of Colonial History of Burma*, (Universities Historical Research Centre, 1999), p. 52.
- ¹⁴ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*, (Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 97.
- ¹⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 6, footnotes 9. We may translate "consider themselves" as "imagine themselves."
- ¹⁶ *Dobama Asiayone Thamaing [History of the Dobama Asiayone]*, p. 27.
- ¹⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 7
- ¹⁸ Author's interview with Burmese musician Win Pe, December 14, 2008. Win Pe guesses that the chorus of the *Dobama* song was likely to be a cover version of a western song. He notes that the melody could have been borrowed from the western tradition of a waltz using a 3/4 time. As traditional Burmese music does not employ the technique of a 1.2.3 count found in some western musical traditions, the chorus is often performed with a 6/8 time.
- ¹⁹ Mya Han notes that the first performance was held in early July at a farewell reception for Thakin Thein Maung Gyi, who would go to England to study printing enterprise. See Mya Han, *Dictionary of Colonial History of Burma*, p. 53. In the *Dobama Asiayone Thamaing [History of the Dobama Asiayone]*, the first performance is recorded as taking place at the Thaton Hall event. This discrepancy likely reflects a distinction between private and public performances.

- ²⁰ *Kammava* is a Pali text that Sangha recited during the ordination ceremony. Only with accurate and proper intonation, the recitation accomplishes its intended effects. The *Kammava* is considered one of the most sacred and powerful texts in the Burmese Buddhist cannon.
- ²¹ *Dobama Asiayone Thamaing [History of the Dobama Asiayone]*, p. 25.
- ²² Penny Edwards, *Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation, 1860-1945*, (University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), p. 12.
- ²³ Than Htut, *Two Songs*, p. 46.
- ²⁴ Ibid, p. 47-48.
- ²⁵ Ibid, p. 48. Minor changes were made in this paper.

