

# Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram - Thai Wartime Leadership - Reconsidered

## บทคัดย่อ

บทความวิจัยนี้เสนอมุมมองใหม่ในการทำความเข้าใจบทบาทและพฤติกรรมของ จอมพล ป. พิบูลสงคราม ในสมัยสงครามโลกครั้งที่สอง ซึ่งเกี่ยวข้องกับประเด็นหลักที่ยังถกเถียงกันไม่รู้จบในวงวิชาการว่า ทำไมผู้นำไทยจึงตัดสินใจเข้าร่วมสงครามข้างญี่ปุ่น-อักษะ สาละสำคัญในที่นี้เป็นการศึกษาวิจัยเพื่อทบทวนคำอธิบายเดิมเกี่ยวกับการดำเนินนโยบายสงครามโลกครั้งที่สองของ จอมพล ป. พิบูลสงคราม ผู้วิจัยเห็นว่าแนวทางการศึกษาวิจัยที่ผ่านมาทั้งในแวดวงวิชาการ

ของตะวันตกและของไทยเราเอง แม้จะมีความแตกต่างกันอย่างมากในวิธีการศึกษาและข้อเสนอลหลักก็ตาม แต่ทั้งหมดกลับมีจุดอ่อนที่ผิดพลาดเหมือนกันในการวิเคราะห์พฤติกรรมของผู้นำไทย เนื่องจากการพิจารณาบทบาทของ จอมพล ป. ในบริบทของการตามกระแสโลก-ลัทธิฟาสซิสต์ คือมักเปรียบเทียบผู้นำไทยกับผู้นำของเยอรมัน-นาซี ทำให้ภาพของจอมพล ป. อยู่ในบริบทที่ไม่ตรงกับความเป็นจริง ผู้เขียนกลับเห็นว่าแนวทางที่ดีที่สุดในการทำความเข้าใจบทบาทและพฤติกรรมของจอมพล ป. นั้น น่าจะพิจารณา

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ในบริบทของกระแสการต่อสู้ของผู้นำท้องถิ่น-  
นักชาตินิยม โดยทำการศึกษาเปรียบเทียบจอมพล  
ป. กับผู้นำประเทศต่างๆ ในเขตเพื่อนบ้านเอเชีย  
ตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ด้วยกัน ด้วยวิธีการศึกษาทาง  
**Prosopography or Collective Biography** เพราะ  
ในฐานะผู้นำประเทศเล็กๆ พวกเขามีภูมิหลังทาง  
สังคม-เศรษฐกิจที่เหมือนกัน และต่างมีประสบการณ์  
ทางการเมืองซึ่งล้วนตกอยู่ภายใต้สภาพแวดล้อม  
ที่คล้ายกัน คือต้องต่อสู้กับอิทธิพลของมหา  
อำนาจตะวันตก จึงไม่แปลกใจที่จอมพล ป. และ  
ผู้นำในแถบเพื่อนบ้านส่วนมากต่างหันไปพึ่งและ  
ตัดสินใจเข้าร่วมสงครามฝ่ายญี่ปุ่นเมื่อสงคราม  
เกิดขึ้น ฉะนั้นการเป็นพันธมิตรกับญี่ปุ่นในสมัย  
สงครามโลกฯ จึงไม่ใช่เป็นความทะเยอทะยาน  
ตามแบบอย่างลัทธิฟาสซิสต์ของผู้นำไทย แต่เป็น  
ความจำเป็นและเพื่อความอยู่รอดภายใต้สถานการณ์  
ทางการเมืองระหว่างประเทศในขณะนั้นโดย  
เฉพาะการแข่งขันอำนาจและอิทธิพลของมหา  
อำนาจสองฝ่าย ระหว่างฝ่ายเดิมนำโดยตะวันตก  
และใหม่นำโดยญี่ปุ่น

## Abstract

In this article the author re-examines  
Phibun's actions during the Pacific War.  
The main question concerns Phibun's decision  
to become one of Japan's Allies in 1941,  
and I would suggest that the best way  
to understand Phibun's role is to consider  
him as one of the 'new elite' and a  
local Nationalist Leader in comparison to  
the other Leaders of the Southeast Asia.  
Phibun and his neighboring Leaders came  
from similar backgrounds. They were  
members of the 'middle class' and of  
the new elite. In addition, they were

ardent nationalists and were impressed by  
Japan's victory over a Western Power, as  
well as were interested in Japan's de-  
velopment as an alternative model. When  
the Pacific War broke out in 1941, Phibun  
and his neighboring Asian Leaders chose  
to collaborate with the Japanese because  
they thought that only in this way could  
they survive and advance the case of  
their political power, factions, and Nations.  
Undeniably, collaboration was the only  
alternative against the Western Powers and  
also offered the only opportunity to arouse  
the population's fever and to build a  
United Front, as well as to strengthen native  
political power.

## Introduction

Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram, popu-  
larly known as Phibun (Pibul), was the  
Thai Prime Minister during the Second World  
War when Japanese troops entered Thailand  
on December 8, 1941. After some token  
skirmishes against the Japanese to vin-  
dicate the country's honor, the military  
regime under Phibun allowed Japanese  
forces to march through Thai territory.  
Then Phibun joined them as an ally in  
the war to regain control of the political  
situation. Phibun hoped to save the army  
and the country, at least its formal so-  
vereignty, and to escape the ravages of  
Japanese conquest.

His actions during the War, however,  
still remain both memorable and contro-

versial in Modern Thai History. The most prominent question concerns Phibun's decision to become one of Japan's Allies in 1941. Although many scholars have tried to answer this question, they are quite different in both their approach and interpretation, than that of my own. The main point is that they have explained Phibun's behavior and role in the wrong context.

Scholars of this period may be roughly divided into two thoughts: one American and the other Thai. On the one hand, the American works such as those by Edward Thadeus Flood (1967)<sup>2</sup>, William Swan (1987,1988)<sup>3</sup>, and E. Bruce Reynolds (1994, 2005)<sup>4</sup> primarily rely upon Japanese sources and other international factors, especially the Thai - Japanese Relationship from the

late 1930s through to the Pacific War, to examine Phibun's behavior. On the other hand, Thai works such as those by Thamsook Numnonds (1977)<sup>5</sup>, Charivat Santaputra (1985)<sup>6</sup>, and Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian (1995)<sup>7</sup> mainly use Thai resources and focus on internal factors, particularly Thai Politics and Traditional Thai Diplomacy, to analyze his behavior. While both views have their own strengths, their weakness is similar when they consider Phibun's behavior to that of a fascist leader, such as Hitler or Mussolini.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast to such an approach, I argue that the best way to understand Phibun's behavior is to consider him as one of the 'new elite' and a local Nationalist Leader in the Southeast Asian context, which confronted the conflict of

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<sup>2</sup>Flood, E.T., "Japan's Relations with Thailand, 1928-1941" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 1967), and "The 1940 Franco-Thai Border Dispute and Phibun's Commitment to Japan", *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, X (September 1967): 304-325.

<sup>3</sup>Swan, William, "Thai-Japanese Relations at the Start of the Pacific War: New Insight into a controversial Period", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, XVIII, 2 (September 1987): 270-293; and "Japanese Economic Relations With Siam: Aspects of Their Historical Development, 1884-1942". (Ph.D. dissertation, Australian National University, 1988).

<sup>4</sup>Reynolds, Bruce E., *Thailand and Japan's Southern Advance 1940-1945*. (Hampshire: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1994); and, *Thailand's Secret War: The Free Thai, OSS, and SOE during World War II*. (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>5</sup>Thamsook Numnonda, *Thailand and the Japanese Presence 1941-1945*. (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1977).

<sup>6</sup>Charivat Santaputra, *Thai Foreign Policy 1932-1946*. (Bangkok: Thammasat University, 1985).

<sup>7</sup>Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, *Thailand's Durable Premier: Phibun through Three Decades 1932-1957*. (Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>8</sup>Except Kobkua's work, she argues to say that Phibun's nation-building programme was more or less a replica of the Fascist or Nazi model of nation-building could only lead to an academic cul-de-sac. See Kobkua, *Thailand's Durable Premier*, 103.

World Powers - the Western and the Japanese. I believe that by comparison, Phibun's behavior and his role in the War with that of the other Southeast Asian Leaders is more revealing because those Leaders were also members of the new elite and prominent local nationalists who had to deal with both the Western Powers and the Japanese influence.

In my comparison, I have applied collective biography or prosopography<sup>9</sup> as the methodology to interpret the modern Thai and Southeast Asian elite. Following this, I will first begin with Harry Benda's Thesis and the emergence of the modern Southeast Asian elite. I will then analyze the personal backgrounds of Phibun, Dr. Ba Maw, Aung San, Sukarno, Mohammad Hatta, and Manuel Luis Quezon, in order to understand their characteristics and reasoning. Next, I shall focus on their political experience to explain why most of these Leaders decided to cooperate with Japan, while the Leader of the Philippines distanced himself from them. Finally, I will concentrate on those who collaborated to examine whether the way

in which they tried to deal with the Japanese during the Occupation occurred in the same way or not and also the reasoning behind their decisions. I hope that by comparing the behavior of other the Southeast Asian Leaders one can better understand Phibun's behavior and his role in Modern Thai History.

## **Benda's Thesis and the Emergence of the Modern Southeast Asian Elite**

To understand the emergence of the new elite, Benda's work provides an excellent initial conceptual framework.<sup>10</sup> Benda explicitly models the factors that contribute to the emergence of these two types of oligarchic elite that he has identified with the 1960's in Southeast Asia. They are "ideal types" a la Weber, and he is careful to qualify both in his classifying schemes and the variables with which he produces the two differing groups. His two types of elite are an "intelligentsia elite", which owes its power solely to its Western-style education and orientation, and a "modernizing elite", which owes

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<sup>9</sup> For an interesting survey of its literature in 1971, see Lawrence Stone, "Prosopography", *Daedalus* 100 (1971): 69-85; and for more updated aspects of this method, see Sorasak Ngamcachonkulkid, "The Seri Thai Movement: The First Alliance Against Military Authoritarianism in Modern Thai History" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2005), Chapter 1.

<sup>10</sup> Harry Benda, "Political Elites in Colonial Southeast Asia: An Historical Analysis", *Continuity and Change in Southeast Asia: Collected Journal Articles of Harry J. Benda*. (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1972), 186-204.

its position to its long-standing social position or “ascriptive” nature.

Nevertheless, Benda is not interested in the politics of these elite, just their sociological origin. He identifies the two variables involved which produced these two different outcomes. First, there are the “pre-modern influences” (whether the States in question were “Indianized”, “Sinicized” or “Hispanized”) and the second, the nature of the Colonial Rule underlying these structures that affected the outcome: direct as opposed to indirect rule.<sup>11</sup>

The emergence of the new elite in Thailand and the Philippines, according to Benda’s model, can be classified as the “modernizing elite”. For instance, in the latter case, the Spanish essentially transformed the *datus* into a privileged, landed class of principles, the major beneficiaries of the new social, economic, and legal order introduced by the Spanish. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, a class of *mestizos* was able to inter-marry and overtake this group. Benda characterizes the Philippines as a case of the “modernizing elite” because the elite of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was drawn on an ascriptive basis from a class structure established in the previous centuries.<sup>12</sup>

In contrast, both in Burma and Indonesia, the emergence of the new elite,

can be classified as the “intelligentsia elite”. Like Burmese, Java was Indianized, which meant that it was a society of basically two classes, a King and His Subjects. Typical of this pattern was the fact that all power and control over land resided with the King and the Royal Family, and there were no landed classes. With Colonial Rule imposed by both the British and the Dutch, this situation meant that the pre-modern elite were essentially destroyed by it. The elite who eventually wrestled power from the British and the Dutch, were not of the ascriptive class but that of a new unattached elite arising from their Western education and orientation.<sup>13</sup>

Whether one agrees with Benda’s model or not, it cannot be denied that the role of education in the creation of the new elite was paramount. (For Benda, the acquisition of education appears to be a key independent variable in his model although he does not identify it as such). However, if we compare the emergence of the new elite in Thailand, Burma, Indonesia, and the Philippines, there appears to be several major variables which led to the creations of the new elite in those four Nations, one of them being education, which seems to be a

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<sup>11</sup> Benda, *Continuity and Change in Southeast Asia*.

<sup>12</sup> Benda, *Continuity and Change in Southeast Asia*, 194.

<sup>13</sup> Benda, *Continuity and Change in Southeast Asia*, 196-200.

necessity in them all.<sup>14</sup>

## Background of Phibun and Other Southeast Asian Leaders

Phibun and his neighboring Leaders came from similar backgrounds. All were members of the 'middle class' and also of the new elite. As part of this group, they were also all ardent nationalists who led their respective movements in their own Countries. Most of them shared the same feelings towards Japan. They were impressed by Japan's victory over a Western Power and were also interested in Japan's development as an alternative model.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, States worldwide were growing in their capacities and in the tasks which they undertook. Their growing military and economic strengths required a vast increase in the numbers of bureaucrats and state officials. In order to produce individuals capable of running the State, the Colonial Powers were forced

to introduce education. This trend was also evident in Burma, Indonesia, the Philippines, and even in Thailand, an independent state, which introduced its own educational system.<sup>15</sup> In the three former cases, the unintentional consequence of the policy to educate a greater number of Colonial subjects, however, was as Benda has shown, to produce an elite which came to see itself through a nationalistic framework, as the rightful leaders in their respective Countries.

During the emergence of nationalistic movements at the turn of the Century, the Filipino, Burmese, Thai and Indonesian Leaders had all come from middle-class backgrounds and possessed a Western education and training.

Quezon was born in 1878 in Baler, in the Province of Tayabas. His father was a mestizo - a son of a Spanish father and a Filipino mother. Like Sukarno's father, Quezon's was also a village school teacher.<sup>16</sup> When the Filipinos first fought

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<sup>14</sup> In the case of Thailand, see Warunee Osatharom, "Kansuksa nai sangkhomthai ph.s.2411-2475" (Education in Thai society 1868-1932). (M.A. thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1981), in the case of Burma, see John Leroy Christian, *Modern Burma: A Survey of Political and Economic Development*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1942), in the case of Indonesia, see Robert Van Niel, *The Emergence of the Modern Indonesian Elite*. (The Hague, 1970), and in the case of the Philippines, see Benedict Anderson, "Cacique Democracy in the Philippines: Origins and Dreams", in Vincente L. Rafael, ed., *Discrepant Histories: Translocal Essays on Filipino Cultures*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 3-47.

<sup>15</sup> In the case of Thailand, see T. Bunnag, *The Provincial Administration of Siam, 1892-1915*. (Kuala Lumpur, 1977); and David K. Wyatt. *Politics of Reform in Thailand: Education in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969).

<sup>16</sup> Elinor Goettel, *Eagle of The Philippines President Manuel Quezon*. (New York: Julian Messner, 1970), 15-16.

against the Spanish between 1896-98, and then later against the Americans, 1899-1902, Quezon offered his services to the Revolutionary Army. He was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant, and later became Aide-de-Camp to General Aguinaldo.<sup>17</sup>

Dr. Ba Maw was born in 1893 at Maubin. His father was an Official to the Courts of Kings Mindon and Thibaw.<sup>18</sup> His father was also a Nationalist Leader and it was not surprising that Dr. Ba Maw became the Chief Defense Counsellor for Saya San, the Nationalist Leader of the 1930 Peasant Rebellion, and for other rebellion leaders.<sup>19</sup>

Phibun was born in 1897 in Nonthaburi, now a satellite town of Bangkok. His parents were hard-working durian producers. At the age of twelve he was sent to the Military Academy, where he graduated in 1915.<sup>20</sup>

In the same year, Aung San was born into a farming family in Natmauk, a small township in the dry zone of Central

Burma. At the age of fifteen, Aung San won a scholarship and a prize for coming first in the Pre-High School Government Examinations held throughout the Country in the Buddhist and National Schools.<sup>21</sup> In 1932, when the Saya San uprising was suppressed and its leaders executed, Aung San first enrolled into a college.<sup>22</sup>

Sukarno was born in 1901 in Surabaya and started his primary education at the school where his father taught in Mojokerto.<sup>23</sup> In 1916, Sukarno studied high school at the Hogere Burger Scholl (HBS) in Surabaya, where he lived in Umar Sayed Tjokroaminoto's house. This environment was of crucial importance to Sukarno because Tjokroaminoto was a Chairman of the Mass Nationalist Organization, Sareket Islam. In addition, Surabaya was also a central location that figured strongly in Indonesian Nationalism at the time, as well as, the crucible of nationalist thought and action.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Carlos Quirino, "Quezon, the Nationalist", *Historical Bulletin* 22, nos.1-4 (January-December 1978):174-184.

<sup>18</sup> Ba Maw, *Breakthrough in Burma: Memoirs of a Revolution, 1930-1946*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 436.

<sup>19</sup> Ba Maw, *Breakthrough in Burma*, 436; and see David I. Steinberg, *Burma: A Socialist Nation of Southeast Asia*. (Colorado Westview Press, Inc., 1982), 31.

<sup>20</sup> Kobkua, *Thailand's Durable Premier*, 1-2.

<sup>21</sup> Aung San Suu Kyi, *Aung San of Burma*. (The University of Queensland Press, 1984), 1-3; and Maung Maung, *Aung San of Burma*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 3.

<sup>22</sup> Aung San Suu Kyi, *Aung San of Burma*, 4.

<sup>23</sup> Kahin, George McTurnan. *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963), 90.

<sup>24</sup> J.D. Legge, *Sukarno: A Political Biography*. (Allen Lane: The Penguin Press, 1972), 29.

Hatta was born in 1902 in Bukittinggi, the center of Minangkabau in Sumatra. Hatta's family were deeply religious as both his grandfather and father were religious teachers. Hatta himself was very religious and he was one of the comparatively few Western-trained Leaders in Indonesia, who from childhood had been well-known for his devotion and attachment to Islam.<sup>25</sup>

Three of them had studied in Europe: Phibun studied Artillery in France from 1924 to 1927.<sup>26</sup> Dr. Ba Maw studied Law in India, England, and France from 1914 to 1924.<sup>27</sup> Hatta studied and earned an Economics Degree in Holland in 1932.<sup>28</sup> Though Aung San, Quezon, and Sukarno studied in their own Country's, their education was strictly along Western lines. Aung San studied Art, English Literature,

Modern History, and Political Science at Rangoon University.<sup>29</sup> Sukarno earned an Engineering Degree from the Bandung Technical College,<sup>30</sup> while Quezon studied Law at the University of Santo Tomas, Manila.<sup>31</sup>

Quezon, who became the first President of the Commonwealth and he was also the first example of the new elite player in this group. He came from a lower middle-class Spanish mestiza family background. His education was sponsored by the Spanish clergymen. He fought for the revolution, spent time in jail but managed to finish with a Law Degree. His election as Governor of Tayabas, where he was a political outsider, arose from a variety of factors: his ties to Spanish elite culture through his family background,

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<sup>25</sup> Mohammad Hatta, "My Family", in *Mohammad Hatta: Indonesian Patriot*. Edited by C.L.M. Penders. (Singapore, 1981), 1-17; and Deliar Noer, *Portrait of a Patriot: Selected Writings by Mohammad Hatta*. (Netherlands: Mouton & Co, 1972), 5-6.

<sup>26</sup> Kobkua, *Thailand's Durable Premier*, 2.

<sup>27</sup> Taylor, Robert H., "Burma in the Anti-Fascist War" in *Southeast Asia Under Japanese Occupation*. Alfred W. McCoy, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 160; and Ba Maw. *Breakthrough in Burma*, 436.

<sup>28</sup> Mohammad Hatta, "An Economic Graduate Returns To Indonesia", in *Mohammad Hatta: Indonesian patriot*, 128-134; and Willard A. Hanna, *Eight Nation Makers: Southeast Asia's Charismatic Statesmen*. (New York: St Martin's Press, 1964), 21.

<sup>29</sup> Maung Maung, *Aung San of Burma*, 3.

<sup>30</sup> Bernhard Dahm, *Sukarno and the Struggle for Indonesian Independence*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), 43-44; and Legge., *Sukarno: A Political Biography*, 62-64.

<sup>31</sup> G.H. Enosawa, *Manuel L. Quezon: From Nipa House To Malacanan*. (Tokyo: The Nippon Press, Ltd., 1940), 130-131.



his education, and his own individual talent.<sup>32</sup> Quezon's case thus confirms the importance of education as the route to power, with Quezon fitting nicely into Benda's 'model of the modernizing elite' - someone from an ascriptive class with a Western-style education and orientation.

Like Quezon, Phibun, Dr. Ba Maw, Aung San, Sukarno, and Hatta would emerge as the new elite in this context - Western education and training.

Upon his return to Thailand in 1927, Phibun was assigned to serve as a Major on the Army General Staff and to teach at the Military Academy. He held this post until the overthrow of the Absolute Monarchy in June 1932, in which he was involved as a leader of a small group of about twenty junior officers within the People's Party. After the Revolution of 1932, Phibun was appointed a Minister in the first Cabinet, which provided him

with an opportunity to enter into the political arena.<sup>33</sup> Dr. Ba Maw was an Advocate and became a Lawyer-Politician during the Dyarchy and Burma's Constitutional Period,<sup>34</sup> while Aung San, Sukarno, and Hatta had first appeared to be part of the new elite when they were students in University. The three later became prominent student-politicians during the intensifying nationalistic campaigns in Burma and Indonesia.<sup>35</sup>

Growing up in the new elite, Phibun and his neighboring Asian Leaders also got the feel of the nationalistic ideas from their Western education and the real experience gained in their own Countries. They, therefore, were all ardent nationalists who led their respective movements within their own Countries. Phibun's period has been seen as the growth of an assertive Thai Nationalist Movement.<sup>36</sup> Quezon became the leading advocate of national

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<sup>32</sup> Michael Cullinane, "The Politics of Collaboration in Tayabas Province: The Early Political Career of Manuel Luis Quezon, 1903-1906", in Peter Stanley ed., *Reappraising an Empire: New Perspectives on Philippine-American History*. (Cambridge, 1984), 59-84.

<sup>33</sup> Jiraporn Witayasakpan, "Nationalism and The Transformation of Aesthetic Concepts: Theater in Thailand during The Phibun period", (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1992), 91-95.

<sup>34</sup> Ba Maw, *Breakthrough in Burma*, 436; see U Maung Maung, *Burmese Nationalist Movement, 1940-1948*. (Hong Kong: Kiscadale Publications, 1989), 1-18; John F. Cady, *Southeast Asia: Its Historical Development*. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), 511-520.

<sup>35</sup> U Maung Maung, *Burmese Nationalist Movement*, 1-18; Hanna, *Eight Nation Makers*, 21; and Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution*, 90.

<sup>36</sup> Benjamin A. Batson, "Siam and Japan: The Perils of Independence", in *Southeast Asia Under Japanese Occupation*, 273.

independence. He led the Nationalist Movement of the Philippines for the seventeen years.<sup>37</sup> The key political figures engaged in the Nationalist Movement of Burma both before and during the Second World War were Dr. Ba Maw and Aung San, who headed a group of younger radicals of the Thakin and the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL).<sup>38</sup> Sukarno and Hatta rose to their own prominence in the Nationalist Movement of Indonesia before and after the War.<sup>39</sup>

## Nationalism and the Japanese Influence

The spread of nationalism from the European to the Rest of the World has probably been the most influential force in the Twentieth-Century. Nationalism in Southeast Asia was influenced by a number of factors, most notably that of Western education which had opened the minds of the Southeast Asian Leaders to the political ideas of the West, including self-government. Also, economic dislocation and distress caused by Western Rule was, indeed, crucial for the growth of Southeast

Asian Nationalism. Knowledge of epoch-making events in neighboring countries in Asia, such as the events in China, India, and Japan also promoted nationalistic sentiments amongst the Southeast Asian people.<sup>40</sup> However, in comparing Phibun with his neighboring Asian Leaders, we can see that one of the most prominent factors was the Japanese influence.

The Japanese influence, according to Dr. Ba Maw's memoirs, dominated the minds of most Southeast Asian nationalist leaders. It worked within the broad spectrum of the radical mind throughout Southeast Asia. In actual fact, it goes back to the most important event in recent Japanese Military History, its victory over Russia in 1905. It was the first victory in a very long time by an Asian Country over a more powerful country. The impact of that victory on the Asian subconscious never really died away. It was further deepened by Japan's subsequent rise as a World Power that was capable of holding its own against the Western military might and its industrial strength. Japan's victory over Russia was a historical break-through

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<sup>37</sup> See Alfred W. McCoy, "Quezon's Commonwealth: The Emergence of Philippine Authoritarianism", in *Philippine Colonial Democracy*, ed. Ruby R. Paredes (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1989), 116.

<sup>38</sup> David Joel Steinberg (ed.), *In Search of Southeast Asia: A Modern History*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), 279-280; *Aung San Suu Kyi, Aung San of Burma*, 10-13; and Ba Maw, *Breakthrough in Burma*, 51-102.

<sup>39</sup> Dahm, *Sukarno and the Struggle*, 211-224; and Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution*, 90-94.

<sup>40</sup> D.R. Desai, *Southeast Asia: Past & Present*. (Colorado: Westview Press, Inc., 1994), 136-137.

which gave all oppressed races new dreams.<sup>41</sup>

Whether one agrees with Dr. Ba Maw's argument or not, it cannot be denied that the Japanese influence made a deep impression on the Burmese, Thai, and Indonesian Leaders' dreams. These Leaders recognized that Japan's Power could help them achieve their major aim. Thai Leaders often looked on Japan as a model of a successful Asian entity against the West.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, Phibun viewed Japan as a big power that could support the Thai Government with both its Internal and International Policies and against the Western Powers.<sup>43</sup> The Burmese and Indonesian Leaders also viewed the Japanese in this way. For them, the Japanese could help to overthrow the Western Colonial System and to establish a new regime as well as enhancing their own political power. The rise of Japan as the leading Asian Power in the World, therefore, was very much welcomed by them. In addition, the idea of the Asian People being emancipated from European Colonialism was influential to the Nationalistic Move-

ments in Southeast Asia, namely in Burma and Indonesia.<sup>44</sup>

By contrast, the Japanese influence, particularly the Japanese victory in 1905, was less of the case in the Philippines. Having fought against the Spanish and Americans between 1896-1902, the Philippines had made it clear that it preferred to rule itself. In addition, the Filipinos directed their cultural and economic nationalism more against Japanese than towards the Spanish or the Americans.

During the decades of American Rule, some Filipinos reacted by admiring the Japanese, inheritors of an ancient culture and the leading Oriental Power. Pio Duran, for example, argued that Filipinos should consider being assimilated by Japan.<sup>45</sup> Most educated Filipinos including Quezon, however, preferred to believe the contrary. They tended to seek a social life integrated with those whose Occidental Culture they shared. More importantly, when America had promised by Constitutional Development to evolve another Republic in the Philippines, most Filipinos cooperated, and moderate constitutionalists replaced mili-

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<sup>41</sup> Ba Maw, *Breakthrough in Burma*, 47.

<sup>42</sup> Batson, *Southeast Asia Under Japanese Occupation*, 273.

<sup>43</sup> Charnvit Kasetsiri, "The first Phibun Government and Its Involvement in World War II", *Journal of the Siam Society*, 62, 2 (July 1974): 56-62.

<sup>44</sup> See Maruyama Masao, *Thought and Behavior in Modern Japanese Politics*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 51.

<sup>45</sup> Pio Duran, *Philippine Independence and the Far Eastern Question*. (Manila: Community Publishers, 1935), 152, 164.

tary nationalists as her leaders.<sup>46</sup>

Phibun and his neighboring Asian Leaders were members of the “middle class” and became the new elite, who possessed Western education and training. As the new elite, either the “intelligentsia” or “modernizing”, they were all ardent nationalists who led the respective nationalist movement in their countries. Nevertheless, although they appeared to have the same character and thoughts, the new elite and nationalists did not look to the emergence of Oriental Power with the same view. While the Japanese influence made a deep impression on the Burmese, Thai, and Indonesian Leaders, their counterparts in the Philippines still cooperated with their Occidental Ruler and therefore maintained its loyalty to the United States. The major factor that made them different was their political experience.

## Political Experience

Although Thailand was not colonized by Western Powers, the struggle of the Thai Leaders was no different from that of the other Southeast Asian Nationalist Leaders of the time. Thai Leaders, particularly after the 1932 Revolution, had tried to eliminate Western influence and powers.

In this struggle, it was not surprising to see that the influence of nationalism played a major role in their political effort. Like his neighbors, Phibun was involved in politics because he intended to solve the problems stemming from his concerns over independence and the West. In the fight to solve the National problems, Phibun would eventually get engaged to the Japanese because he recognized that Japan’s Power could help him achieve his goal. Phibun’s experience was similar to that of the Leaders of Burma and Indonesia, where the Colonial Rulers had no intention of granting independence, but it was rather different for Quezon in the Philippines, where American Policies had permitted the granting of Full Sovereignty.

Phibun’s involvement in politics began in Paris in 1927, where he became acquainted with Pridi Phanomyong and a select group of students known as the People’s Party. The People Party declared that if they were to attain power, then they would establish absolute national independence.<sup>47</sup> After the overthrow of the Absolute Monarchy in 1932, Phibun became disillusioned with the current political development of his Country. He first became the Minister of Defence in 1934.

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<sup>46</sup> Theodore Friend, *Between Two Empires: The Ordeal of the Philippines, 1929-1946*. (New Haven: Yale University, 1965), 37-39.

<sup>47</sup> See Reynolds, *Thailand and Japan’s Southern Advance*, 8-9.

Later, in 1938, when Phahon became the Leader of the People Party and when the second Premier at that time chose to retire, Phibun became the third Premier to take Office after the 1932 Revolution and was to hold that post until the outbreak of the Second World War in Southeast Asia during 1941.<sup>48</sup>

During this period, Japan's importance to Thailand had increased steadily. The Leaders of the 1932 Revolution, which included Phibun, hoped that eventually Japan, with its anti-Western attitudes, would help them to counter Western influence.<sup>49</sup> They were all for making use of Japan as the political and economic lever with which to use against the demands and influences of the Western Powers in Thailand.

By 1938, Thailand already appeared to be moving towards Japan and away from its traditional European regional mentors, Britain and France. This was reflected in the consolidation of military rule and the adoption by Phibun, Leader of the Military, of a quasi-fascist authoritarian State, with a pro-Japanese stance on interna-

tional issues.<sup>50</sup> The real turning point in Thai - Japanese relations, came during the French Indochina War of 1940-1941, when the Thai Armed Forces were receiving supplies from Japan. Also during that period, Japan had mediated in the Franco - Thai Border Dispute and they were of course, heavily biased towards Phibun's Government.<sup>51</sup>

Although the Thai success in the French Indochina War was of great benefit to the Phibun Government, the War had a further effect on the future of Phibun's Foreign Policy.<sup>52</sup> The War was the first major incident that moved Thailand into conflict with the West and it paved the way for future Thai co-operation with Japan. During the War, the Phibun Government had sent a number of Diplomatic Missions to sound out international opinion. Both Great Britain and the United States had made it clear that they preferred the 'status quo' that was already in place in Indochina.

In addition, the United States Government had decided to block the delivery of planes, which had been bought by

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<sup>48</sup> Kasetsiri, "The first Phibun Government", 35.

<sup>49</sup> Kasetsiri, "The first Phibun Government", 56.

<sup>50</sup> Kobkua, *Thailand's Durable Premier*, 245; and Batson, *Southeast Asia Under Japanese Occupation*, 272-276.

<sup>51</sup> See Kamon Pensrinokun, "Adaptation and Appeasement: Thai Relations with Japan and The Allies in World War II" in *Thai-Japanese Relations in Historical Perspective*. Chaiwat Khamchoo and E. Bruce Reynolds (ed.) (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 1988), 136-150.

<sup>52</sup> See Santaputra, *Thai Foreign Policy*, 192-243.

the Phibun Government from an American company and way-laid them in Manila prior to their delivery in Bangkok, due to the deteriorating situation in French Indochina. Japan immediately offered the same number of planes to the Phibun Government.<sup>53</sup> Thus, Phibun became convinced that there was nothing to be gained from any further association with the West. The traditional Francophobic attitude had broadened into a general anti-Western feeling, which now included America.

After the Indochina War, the Bangkok - Tokyo Relationship improved immensely and Phibun began to give serious consideration to the Japanese idea of "Asia for the Asiatics".<sup>54</sup> In addition, to working with the Japanese, Phibun believed that Thailand could stand as an independent and equal partner in overthrowing Western domination in Southeast Asia.<sup>55</sup>

Like Phibun, both Dr. Ba Maw and Aung San hoped that the Japanese could help them to achieve their goals. The Burmese Nationalist Movement moved closer to the Japanese influence because British

Policies did not allow full sovereignty. The British were proceeding at a 'snail's pace' with self-government. In 1937, Burma was separated from British Ruled India and its new Constitution formed the basis of the Burmese Governmental Structure, with a Burmese Prime Minister and Cabinet. The essentials of power, however, remained firmly in the hands of the British Governor and with Westminster.<sup>56</sup> When the Second World War began in 1939, it stimulated Burma, as in India, to demand that Britain should grant them immediate independence. The key political figures engaged in the nationalist agitation of this period were Dr. Ba Maw and Aung San.<sup>57</sup>

Dr. Ba Maw and Aung San were involved in politics during intensifying Burmese nationalist campaigns. Dr. Ba Maw's involvement in politics began when he was a leader of the parliamentary wing of GCBA (Anti-Separation League).<sup>58</sup> In 1932 - while Phibun overthrew the absolute monarchical system in Thailand - Dr. Ba Maw won a landslide victory in the 1932 Elections. When he became Minister of Education and Public Health in 1936, he

<sup>53</sup> Santaputra, *Thai Foreign Policy*, 192-243; Kasetsiri, "The first Phibun Government", 50-51; and James V. Martin, Jr., "Thai-American Relations in World War II", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, XXII, (August, 1963): 454-455.

<sup>54</sup> Kasetsiri, "The first Phibun Government", 56.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>56</sup> Cady, *Southeast Asia*. 518-520.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 520-526.

<sup>58</sup> Ba Maw, *Breakthrough in Burma*, 436.

formed and led the Sinyetha Wunthanu Party (Poor Man's Party).<sup>59</sup> In 1936, Dr. Ba Maw won the General Elections and formed a Coalition - made up of minor parties, minority leaders, and defectors from other parties - to lead the first Government of separated Burma.<sup>60</sup> Between 1937 - 1939, while he was Prime Minister, Dr. Ba Maw formed and led the Freedom Bloc together with Aung San.

Aung San's political involvement began when he was a student at Rangoon University. The 1936 Strike, which was an important landmark in the political development of the young nationalists, made Aung San widely known as a student leader.<sup>61</sup> In 1938 he left university to become a member of the "Our Burma Party" (the Dobbama Asi-Ayone) of Thakins (Our Own Master), the only militant and intensely nationalistic political party in the Country at the time. He was soon elected General Secretary of the Party.<sup>62</sup>

In 1939, after the outbreak of the War in Europe, Aung San helped found the Freedom Bloc, an alliance of Dr. Ba Maw's Sinyetha Party, the Dohbama Asi-Ayone, the students, and some individual

politicians. Dr. Ba Maw was the President of the Bloc and Sung San was the General Secretary. The message of Freedom Bloc to the Nation was that the people would support the British War Effort only if they were promised independence at the end of the War. If the British Government was not prepared to make such a declaration, then the people should oppose the war effort strenuously.<sup>63</sup> The British authorities responded by making large-scale arrests of the nationalists. By the end of 1940, many of the Thakin leaders, including Dr. Ba Maw, who had refused to co-operate with British Policies in any way, were sent to prison.<sup>64</sup>

At the same time that Dr. Ba Maw was imprisoned, Aung San went underground and slipped out of the country to search for supporters to provide aid in Burma's struggle for independence. He went to Amoy in China and stayed there for two months, during this time Japanese agents came and arranged for him to go to Tokyo.<sup>65</sup> After staying in Tokyo for about three months, Aung San returned to Burma early in 1941 to convey the plans given him by the Japanese to his

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<sup>59</sup> Ba Maw, *Breakthrough in Burma*, 436; Steinberg, *Burma*, 31.

<sup>60</sup> Steinberg, In *Search of Southeast Asia*, 279-280.

<sup>61</sup> Aung San Suu Kyi, *Aung San of Burma*, 10.

<sup>62</sup> Maung Maung, *Aung San of Burma*, 4.

<sup>63</sup> Aung San Suu Kyi, *Aung San of Burma*, 13; and see Ba Maw, *Breakthrough in Burma*, 51-102.

<sup>64</sup> See Ba Maw, *Breakthrough in Burma*, 218-228.

<sup>65</sup> Maung Maung, *Aung San of Burma*, 4.

friends, “the Thirty Comrades”. He went back to Tokyo soon thereafter, taking with him the first group of young men to be given military training by the Japanese for the purpose of leading an uprising in Burma.<sup>66</sup>

Similar to Phibun, Sukarno and Hatta also hoped that the Japanese could help them achieve their major aim. The Indonesian Nationalist Movement moved closer to the Japanese influence because Dutch Policies had no intention of granting independence to their territories.<sup>67</sup> In the 1920s and 1930s the Dutch provided little leeway for the development of an Indonesian nationalist movement that could bargain for political concessions and increased representation in the manner of the Burmese nationalists. Although the consultative powers of the Volksraad (People’s Council), set up in 1918, were minimally expanded in the ensuing years, in the end it could not satisfy Indonesian aspirations.<sup>68</sup> The first mass nationalist movement, the Sarekat Islam, split-up in the early 1920s; then between 1926 - 1927, the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) was

crushed as a political force following its abortive revolts.<sup>69</sup> In an alarmed reaction to what was seen as the threat of communism and political extremism, the Dutch sent key nationalist figures into internal exile in the late 1920s and early 1930s; among these figures were those who were to become the leaders of the Indonesian nationalist movement: Sukarno, Hatta, and Sutan Sjahrir.<sup>70</sup>

Sukarno and Hatta, like the Burmese Leaders, were involved in politics during the intensifying nationalist campaigns. Sukarno and Hatta’s involvement in politics began when they were university students. Sukarno had his role in Bandung whereas Hatta had his in Holland. While Hatta was a student of Economics and President of the Indonesian Students Association, he also rose to prominence in the nationalist movement abroad at the same time that Sukarno was rising to prominence in Indonesia.<sup>71</sup> In 1927, the Partai National Indonesia (Indonesian Nationalist Party) or PNI was established by the members of the Bandung Study Club under the chairmanship of the young engineer,

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<sup>66</sup> See Calvocoressi, Peter., Wint. Guy., and Pritchard, John., *Total War*. Volume 2. Revised second edition. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), 1000-1002.

<sup>67</sup> See Theodore Friend, *The Blue-Eyed Enemy: Japan Against The West in Java and Luzon, 1942-1945* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988), 33-49.

<sup>68</sup> Friend, *The Blue-Eyed Enemy*, 34-37.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 38-42.

<sup>71</sup> Hanna, *Eight Nation Makers*, 21.



Sukarno. The PNI's aim was for complete economic and political independence for Indonesia, with a Government elected by, and responsible to, the Indonesian people. Such independence could only be reached, it held, by total non-compliance with the Dutch.<sup>72</sup> In 1932, Hatta returned home and became involved with Sukarno in the nationalistic cause.<sup>73</sup>

Sukarno was arrested twice; the first time in 1927 and then in 1933. The Dutch also arrested Hatta and hundred of others, including Sjahrir in 1933. After that, the Dutch consigned Sukarno and Hatta into exile. Sukarno was sent to Endah and then to Sumatra, to the town of Bengkulu or Benculin, where he was confined until released by the Japanese in 1942.<sup>74</sup> Hatta and Sjahrir, along with numerous others, were sent to Boven Digul and were later relocated to Banda Neira, one of the original "spice islands" of the Moluccas, where they were confined until their release just before the Japanese invaded in early 1942.<sup>75</sup>

Sukarno and Hatta, like the Burmese Nationalists Leaders, felt hopeless in their struggle for independence and their attempt to find foreign aid. Indonesian nationalists looked up to Quezon and, when he visited Java in 1934, they asked how to go about gaining independence. Quezon said "Open all these windows and shutters, then take away your guards. Hold your meetings in the open, and in front of the Dutch themselves...make a hell of a lot of noise! And if you do that long enough, you'll eventually get what you want".<sup>76</sup> What the Indonesians replied or thought was not recorded. Sukarno had made a hell of a lot of noise and the Dutch banished him to Flores.<sup>77</sup> For these Indonesian Nationalist Leaders, therefore, it seems that they were "waiting for Japan".<sup>78</sup> Sukarno, who had already declared in 1929 that the Pacific War would hasten the coming of freedom, looked forward to the outbreak of the Pacific War by saying that Indonesian "would receive help from other Asian peoples".<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution*, 90.

<sup>73</sup> Hanna, *Eight Nation Makers*, 21.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>75</sup> Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution*, 93-94.

<sup>76</sup> Carlos Quirino, *Quezon: Man of Destiny*. (Manila: McCullough, 1935), 35-36, cited in Friend, *Between Two Empires*, 170; Friend, *The Blue-Eyed Enemy*, 53.

<sup>77</sup> Friend, *The Blue-Eyed Enemy*, 53.

<sup>78</sup> See Dahm, *Sukarno and the Struggle*, 211-224.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 216.

Unlike Phibun and other nationalist Asian leaders, Quezon did not need the Japanese help to achieve the major aim. The Philippine Nationalist Movement did not move closer to the Japanese influence because American Policies had been initiated to develop self-government and permit Filipinos to gain their independence. When the Americans completed their takeover of the Philippines in 1901, they decided to promote Filipino political participation towards the distant goal of self-government. President William McKinley, in 1900, asserted that the goal of US Policy in the Philippines was to guide the Filipinos to self-government.<sup>80</sup> Following this mandate, the first Civil Governor, William Howard Taft, launched a program which highlighted: mass education; expansion of health services; expansion of the civil bureaucracy based on native participation; and Filipino political participation, beginning with local elections.<sup>81</sup> At this political level, it allowed Quezon to emerge as a major political figure, who had led the nationalist movement and obtained the independence by peaceful means, by persistently and continuously pleading his cause in the halls of the U.S. Congress and the White House.

Quezon's political career that had run for twenty-eight years, where he had held the foremost electoral positions that his Country could offer (Senate President and President of the Commonwealth) during the crucial years of the movement for national independence. He started out as a Provincial Fiscal in Mindoro and Tayabas (1903), Provincial Governor in Tayabas (1905), and an Assemblyman (1907). His close relationship with some of the most influential Americans in his area - Philippine Constabulary Chiefs H.H. Bandholtz and James Harbord, Judge Paul Linebarger and James Ross - were a major factor in his rise to prominence. From the Assembly, Quezon went on to become Resident Commissioner in Washington, D.C. (1909 - 1916), returning to the Philippine political scene in 1916 as Senate President until 1934, then becoming the first President of the Commonwealth (1935 - 1944), a position he held even during the tenure of the Government-in-Exile in Washington until he died in 1944.<sup>82</sup>

During his political career, Quezon was one of the longest and the most successful leading advocates for national independence. The route to indepen-

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<sup>80</sup> Daniel B. Schirmer and Stephen Rosskamm Shalom (ed.), *The Philippines Reader: A History of Colonialism, Neocolonialism, Dictatorship, and Resistance*. (Quezon City: Ken Incorporated, 1987), 40.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 43-44.

<sup>82</sup> See Cullinane, *Reappraising an Empire*, 59-84; McCoy, *Philippine Colonial Democracy*, 114-156.

dence advanced step by step in the early 1930s.<sup>83</sup> Following the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934, a self-governing Filipino Government - the Philippine Commonwealth - and Head of State had been installed, even though the Americans still retained the ultimate sovereignty. They, however, agreed on a timetable for the transition to full Independence by 1946.<sup>84</sup>

This timetable, made the Philippine Nationalist Movement entirely different from that of Burma and Indonesia. The Filipinos did not need any help from the Japanese. Instead Japan appeared as a threat to the success of the post-independence Republic of the Philippines.<sup>85</sup> In this sense, Quezon still cooperated with Americans and prepared to defend itself against the Japanese attack when Japan Imperialism became more menacing throughout the later 1930s. In 1935, Quezon asked Douglas MacArthur to come to the Philippines to develop a Military Plan to make the Islands secure. MacArthur was appointed Military Adviser to the Commonwealth Government and was basically responsible to

Quezon.<sup>86</sup> On April 1, 1941, Quezon created the Civilian Emergency Administration (CEA) to prepare Civil Defense Plans for the Country. Later in the month, an Alien Registration Law was passed, primarily to check on overseas Japanese.<sup>87</sup> During this period, Quezon frequently reiterated that the Philippines would fight with the United States against Japan: "At stake is our own future independence and the assurance that independence may endure."<sup>88</sup> Not surprisingly, Quezon decided to leave and set up the Government-in-Exile in America when the Pacific War arrived.<sup>89</sup>

Prior to the Pacific War, Phibun and his neighboring Asian Leaders intended to solve problems stemming from their concerns over independence and Western Powers, and learned how to deal with both the Western and Japanese in order to maintain and obtain their goals. Phibun intended to co-operate with Japan because he learned that only by collaboration with them could Thailand stand as an independent and equal partner in overthrowing

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<sup>83</sup> See Friend, *Between Two Empires*, 95-108.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 136-148.

<sup>85</sup> See David Joel Steinberg, *Philippine Collaboration in World War*. (Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1967), 22-25; and Friend, *Between Two Empires*, 169-183.

<sup>86</sup> Steinberg, *Philippine Collaboration*, 20-21.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>88</sup> Louis Morton, *The Fall of the Philippines*. (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1953), 354-355.

<sup>89</sup> See Manuel Quezon, *The Good Fight*. (New York: Appleton-Century & Co., 1946).

the Western domination of Southeast Asia. Phibun's alternative was similar to that of the Leaders in Burma and Indonesia, where nationalists felt hopeless in their struggle for independence, unlike Quezon in the Philippines, where the Japanese appeared as a threat to the success of a full sovereignty. When the War arrived, Phibun's choice was clear. Like his neighbors, Phibun wanted to reach his Country's major aim - Independence - so he chose to co-operate with the Japanese. Quezon, on the other hand, had learned that by working with the Americans that they would allow the Philippines to gain her own independence.

## Co-operation with Japan

When the Pacific War broke out in 1941, Phibun chose to collaborate with the Japanese rather than to resist them because it offered the survival of their interests, peoples, and Nations. The same situation prevailed in both Burma and Indonesia, though not in the Philippines. In the two former countries, the leaders first attempted to assure their own political survival and then to advance the cause of whatever national, factional or com-

munal group they were leading.<sup>90</sup> The ways that Phibun and his neighboring Asian Leaders tried to deal with Japan were not too different from one another. They manipulated the Japanese skillfully to further their own political ends and in a manner that left the Japanese Military confused or vengeful but rarely in command of the situation. there was also resistance, within their co-operation.

Although the emergence of Japan afforded Thailand an opportunity to satisfy the political needs of the Leaders of the 1932 Revolution on the one hand and to serve national interests on the other, it would be an exaggeration to say that Phibun was ready to join Japan before the Pacific War started. Unlike Burmese Leaders, Phibun decided to co-operate with Japan only when the Nation was invaded and there was no prospect of help from the Western Powers, especially from Great Britain.<sup>91</sup>

When Japan invaded Thailand on December 8, 1941, Phibun let the Japanese Forces pass through his Country to attack Burma and Malay. After that, he decided to collaborate with Japan by signing a Treaty of Friendship and Military

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<sup>90</sup> I apply this idea from McCoy's analysis, see McCoy, Alfred W., "Introduction", in Alfred W. McCoy, ed., *Southeast Asia under Japanese Occupation*, 5.

<sup>91</sup> See Kamon, *Thai-Japanese Relations*, 130-150; and Richard Aldrich, "A Question of Expediency: Britain, the United States and Thailand, 1941-1942", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, XIX, No.2 (September 1988): 209-244.

Co-operation and subsequently declared war on the United States and Great Britain.<sup>92</sup> This was the first step that Phibun tried to assure his political survival. For instance, Phibun argued that Thailand had to co-operate with Japan militarily in order to prevent the latter from occupying the Country.<sup>93</sup> Conversely, a failure to co-operate with Japan would turn Thailand into an Occupied Territory, something Phibun had been working hard to avoid from the early stages of the War. It cannot be denied that this military co-operation was, to Phibun, the best possible way to save the Nation, as well as to strengthen the political power base of his Faction, a Military Group within the People's Party.

On the strength of the Military Pact with the Japanese, Phibun could advance the cause of his faction and Nation. By manipulating anti-Japanese attitudes, he could eliminate the Civilian Faction from his Cabinet. Pridi, the Leader of the Civilians, was appointed a Member of the Board of Regents, essentially a non-political function. Three other leading Civilian Ministers, Direck Chainam, Thawee Bunyaket, and Khuang Aphaiwong, were also eliminated from the Cabinet within two weeks

following the attack on Pearl Harbor.<sup>94</sup> Phibun now had a free hand to pursue his policy toward the cause of Nation.

To advance the cause of Nation, Phibun had tried to accomplish several objectives. One of them was to continue territorial expansion, which he carried out during the second stage of his goal of reclaiming "lost territory". In May 1942, Thai troops marched into the Shan States and occupied the area around Keng Tung in northeastern Burma. This acquisition of the "United Shan States" or "Original Thai States" was confirmed by a Treaty with Japan in August 1943, at which time the Japanese also turned over to Thai Administration: Perlis, Kedah, Trengganu, and Kelantan - the four Malay States that King Chulalongkorn had transferred to Britain in 1909.<sup>95</sup>

It should be noted that Phibun's Policy to deal with the Japanese was not only a line of co-operation but also a line of resistance. The broad policy line of the Nation was well summarized by Phibun when speaking to his Chief of Staff in 1942: "Which side do you think will be defeated in this war? That side is our enemy".<sup>96</sup> In this sense, Phibun

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<sup>92</sup> On December 21, 1941, a military pact was signed with Tokyo. On January 25, 1942, the Thai government declared war on the United States and Great Britain.

<sup>93</sup> Kobkua, *Thailand's Durable Premier*, 252-254.

<sup>94</sup> Kasetsiri, "The first Phibun Government", 54-55.

<sup>95</sup> Wyatt, David K., *Thailand: A Short History*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 258.

<sup>96</sup> Net Khemayothin, *The Underground Work of Colonel Yothi*. (Bangkok, 1957), 1.

was also prepared for resisting Japan when the time came. As the war situation changed, Phibun himself made some efforts for the anti-Japanese underground, which was in contact with China. He also planned to improve the roads leading to the northwest to allow ready communication with the Thai Forces in the Chiang Mai area and the Shan region. It was in this direction that he anticipated linking up with the Nationalist Chinese in February 1943 for joint operations against the Japanese.<sup>97</sup>

In 1943, Phibun also undertook a crash project to relocate the National Capital to Phetchabun, some 300 kilometers north of Bangkok. In his Phetchabun Strategy, Phibun wanted to relocate his Military Headquarters to a more secure location and await the right moment to turn against the Japanese.<sup>98</sup> However, his project was denied and his Regime fell in 1944 because of an internal political conflict, particularly between his Faction and that of Pridi's.<sup>99</sup> Many civilian factions, including Pridi - the Leader of the Underground Free Thai Movement, together

with the elected Assemblymen, disagreed with Phibun's plan. His Government was replaced by a more pro-Allied one, which conducted intense maneuvering to repair Thailand's relationship with the Allies, while maintaining its relationship with Japan.<sup>100</sup>

Burmese Leaders, unlike Thai Leaders, had already co-operated with the Japanese before the War began. As we have seen, Aung San had joined the Japanese Training Program in early 1941. When the War started, Aung San worked with Colonel Suzuki in Bangkok to establish the Burma Independence Army (BIA) and to prepare for the Japanese invasion of Burma.<sup>101</sup> While Dr. Ba Maw was waiting for the Japanese arrival, Aung San and the BIA left Bangkok to march into Burma on December 31 1941. After Japan's Occupation of Rangoon in March 1942, Dr. Ba Maw escaped from the Moukout Jail and contacted the Japanese in May. On August 1, 1942, the Burmese Executive Central Administration, an Occupation Government, was set up in Rangoon with Dr. Ba Maw as Premier.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Reynolds, *Thailand and Japan's Southern Advance*, 171-172.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 171.

<sup>99</sup> See Sorasak Ngamcachonkulid, *The Free Thai Movement and Thailand's Internal Political Conflicts (1938-1949)*. (Bangkok: Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1991).

<sup>100</sup> Batson, *Southeast Asia under Japanese Occupation*, 282-283.

<sup>101</sup> Becka, Jan., *The National Liberation Movement in Burma during the Japanese Occupation Period (1941-1945)*. (Prague: the Oriental Institute in Academia, 1983), 74-75.

<sup>102</sup> Ba Maw, *Breakthrough in Burma*, 228-250.

Like Phibun, Dr. Ba Maw and Aung San tried to strengthen their political power and advance their national goal of independence during the Occupation. To strengthen their own political power, they attempted to enhance their political power base. Aung San emphasized that the Burmese National Liberation Movement should rely on its own strength; he thought that the most important task was to build up strong National Armed Forces.<sup>103</sup> Thus, he concentrated on strengthening and disciplining the Army.<sup>104</sup> Aung San, as the Commander in Chief of the BIA, and some Thakins tried to maintain and advance their positions in Army, the Burma Defence Army (BDA). After Burmese Independence was proclaimed in 1943, the BDA was reorganized and renamed Burma National Army (BNA). Another Thakin, Nei Win became the new Commander in Chief of the BNA, after Aung San had taken the post of Defence Minister.<sup>105</sup>

Dr. Ba Maw first established his political power base and party in November 1942, when he managed to combine the two main organizations of the defunct Freedom Bloc into a single party - a coalition called the Dou Bama-Hsinyetha, with himself as

President.<sup>106</sup> This Party was the only legal party at that time and continued its major role in Burmese politics during the Occupation. After Burmese Independence was proclaimed in 1943, Dr. Ba Maw launched a new political party known as the Greater Burma Party to displace the Dou Bama-Hsinyetha Coalition. The professed task of this new party was to contribute to a closer unity of the nationalist ranks and to more effectively mobilize the people for the construction of the "New Order" and the Prosecution of the War.<sup>107</sup>

On August 1, 1943, Burmese Independence was proclaimed. The Japanese declared Burma to be an Independent and Sovereign State, promulgated the new Constitution, and formally announced the election of Dr. Ba Maw as Head of State. The Head of State also held the Office of the Prime Minister. Some Thakins were also Members of the Cabinet: Aung San - Minister of National Defence; U Nu - Minister of Foreign Affairs. However, the majority of the posts in the Government of Independent Burma were held by the Dou Bama-Hsinyetha Coalition, similarly to the Burmese Central Executive Administration of 1942.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>103</sup>Becka, *The National Liberation Movement*, 105.

<sup>104</sup>Aung San Suu Kyi, *Aung San of Burma*, 22.

<sup>105</sup>Becka, *The National Liberation Movement*, 116-118.

<sup>106</sup>*Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>108</sup>Cady, *Southeast Asia*, 576.

The Burmese Leaders' Policy to deal with the Japanese was not merely a line of co-operation but a line of resistance as well, like that of Phibun's. After Independence was proclaimed, it soon became clear that the independence was only nominal. While Dr. Ba Maw remained in the role of collaborator, Aung San was in favor of launching the anti-Japanese resistance movement by co-operating with the Allies. In July, 1944, Aung San tried to combine the major anti-Japanese movements, the Communist Party of Burma, the People's Revolutionary Party, and the Young Army Resistance Group, establishing a United Anti-Fascist Movement, finally known as Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL). Aung San was elected the President of this League. The AFPFL contacted the British Army while still co-operating with the Japanese. By obtaining weapons from both sides, the AFPFL brought its resistance out into the open in March 1945 and continued its fight until the Japanese surrendered.<sup>109</sup>

The Indonesian Leaders, also like Phibun, decided to co-operate with Japan when the Japanese arrived. On February 14, 1942, the Japanese attacked and

quickly overran South Sumatra. Early on March 1, they landed on Java and within 8 days the Dutch forces surrendered on behalf of all the Allied Forces in Java. On March 17, 1942, Sukarno was invited to meet Colonel Fujiyama, the Sumatran Commander. Sukarno decided to accept Fujiyama's offer without any real hesitation.<sup>110</sup> Sukarno believed that Indonesian Independence could be achieved in some way or other through the Japanese Occupation.<sup>111</sup> Sukarno quickly contacted Hatta, Sjahrir, and some nationalists in Java. They agreed with Sukarno's decision and discussed future plans to deal with the Japanese.<sup>112</sup>

The Indonesian Leaders' decision to co-operate with the Japanese was no different from that of the Thai and Burmese Leaders. Sukarno and Hatta viewed the Occupation as offering many opportunities to strengthen their political power and advance their national goals. After their decision to collaborate with the invader, Sukarno and Hatta became the Leaders of the Indonesian Puppet Administration. Working with the Japanese, Sukarno and Hatta attempted to focus and mobilize mass movement to gain support for their

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<sup>109</sup> See Becka, *The National Liberation Movement*, 166-174; and Robert H. Taylor, "Burma in the Anti-Fascist War", in *Southeast Asia Under Japanese Occupation*, 169-174.

<sup>110</sup> Legge, *Sukarno*, 151-152.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>112</sup> Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution*, 104-105.



political power and national goals.<sup>113</sup>

To Sukarno and Hatta the best way of gaining mass support was to awaken, focus and mobilize the nationalistic fever. For this reason, they created the Putera Movement. On March 9, 1943, Sukarno began this movement, the Poesat Tenaga Rakjat (Center of People's Power), Putera or Poetera as it came to be known.<sup>114</sup> For the Japanese, the Putera was primarily a means for rallying Indonesian support behind their War Effort. But to Indonesian Nationalist Leaders, it was primarily the means for spreading and intensifying nationalistic ideas among the masses and focusing on concessions from the Japanese, that would lead towards self-government.<sup>115</sup> Certainly, it did arouse Indonesian nationalism and advanced their cause towards Independence.

The Indonesian Leaders' policy to deal with the Japanese, like that of the Thai and Burmese Leaders, was both visible and invisible. Sukarno and Hatta were to work above ground through the Japanese. They would hold Office under the Military Administration, serving the Japanese and softening the harshness of their Rule wherever possible, and also by

using whatever opportunities that were offered for keeping the nationalist hopes alive. Sjahrir would work to develop an underground network capable of organizing resistance against the Japanese Authorities. He would listen to the Allied radio stations and maintain contact with Sukarno and Hatta, informing them of the Underground's development and helping them to develop their own strategy.<sup>116</sup> Nevertheless, Sukarno avoided any active resistance until the Japanese surrendered.<sup>117</sup>

When the Pacific War broke out in 1941, Phibun and his neighboring Asian Leaders chose to collaborate with the Japanese because they thought that only in this way could they survive and advance the case of their political power, factions, and Nations. During the War, they manipulated the Japanese adroitly to further their own political ends. It cannot be denied that the co-operation with Japan was, to Phibun and the Burmese and Indonesian Leaders, the best means to save their Countries and to strengthen their personal, political, and National goals. In addition, it can be seen that although these Leaders accomplished progress towards their own personal and political

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<sup>113</sup>See Dahm, *Sukarno and the Struggle*, 229-231.

<sup>114</sup>*Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>116</sup>*Ibid.*, 104; Legge, *Sukarno*, 154.

<sup>117</sup>See Friend, *The Blue-Eyed Enemy*, 176-177.

agendas, they also accomplished a nationalistic mission. In this sense, we can see that the Southeast Asian collaborators were nationalists, who were more concerned with maintaining and/or achieving their own cause rather than helping the Japanese expansionists, unlike those of the Nazis in Europe. As the War situation turned in favor of the Allies, they swapped sides, without jeopardizing their political integrity because they had learned how to live with World Politics. Both Phibun and Aung San illustrated this point.

## Conclusion

There is no question that under Phibun, the Government made a serious attempt to fashion a State into the model of a world-conquering totalitarian nation. Fascist ideals and methods were liberally borrowed. But the Thailand of 1938-1944 was but a pale reflection of its Nazi, Fascist, and Japanese counterparts. It is thus a mistake to liken Phibun with Hitler, Mussolini, and the Japanese Military because they played a different role. Phibun actions showed how to live with World Politics in a Southeast Asia context.

Phibun's action during the Pacific War, therefore, needs reassessment. To better understand his behavior and role during the War, we should consider him as a member of the new elite and local Nationalist Leader in comparison to the other Leaders of this Region. Because

of the reasons that Phibun resorted to during the War were in the main, the only avenue open to Southeast Asian Leaders, we can see why Phibun attempted to deal with both the Western and Japanese Powers and why it occurred in a similar way to that of most of his neighboring Asian Leaders, the exception being the Leader of the Philippines.

As a local Nationalist Leader, Phibun joined forces with Japan because they had a common enemy, namely the Western Powers. When the Pacific War arrived, he chose to co-operate with the Japanese. Like the Burmese and Indonesian Leaders, Phibun thought that only in this way could he save his interests, people, and Nation as well as advancing the cause of his Faction and Country. Due to its Independence status during the War, Thailand was the Country least affected by the direct impact of the War and the Japanese Military action. The entrenched Thai elite survived the War unscathed and with only minor adjustments made to the Governmental Personnel.

Phibun's actions during the War did not damage his reputation or influence greatly. Although his Government fell, Phibun was still the obvious Leader of the Thai Nation. After the War and as a result of British pressure, Phibun along with some other Political Leaders, were arrested and charged with War Crimes. But in 1946, the Thai Supreme Court ruled

that the 1945 War Criminal Acts were unconstitutional, and the collaboration charges were dropped. In 1948 Phibun once again became the Prime Minister and dominated Thai Politics until 1957.

To most local Nationalist Leaders in Southeast Asia, it seemed that collaboration was the best way with which they could achieve progress towards their own personal, political, and national goals. For

example, collaboration was often the only alternative against the Western Powers. In addition, collaboration offered the only opportunity to arouse the population's fever and to build a United Front, as well as to strengthen native political power. In this sense, it may be worthwhile to compare Phibun with the rest of Southeast Asian Leaders, especially the Malaysian and Vietnamese.