

**News from “Burmah”: The Role of the English Press in the  
Making of the British Empire in Burma**

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2. *Friend of India*
3. *Hurkaru* (Full title: *The Bengal Hurkaru and India Gazette*)
4. *Statesman* (Full title: *The Statesman and The Friend of India*)

Digitalised Britain and India-based newspapers

1. *The Times of London* (often referred to as *The Times*)
2. *Illustrated London News*
3. *Manchester Guardian*
4. *Graphic*
5. *The Times of India* (formerly *Bombay Times and Journal of Commerce*, or *Bombay Times*)

## Abstract

This thesis studies the reportage in the English language press, primarily in Calcutta (but also covering Burma and Britain) of the Second and Third Anglo-Burmese Wars of 1852 and 1885, respectively. The wars were overwhelmingly the result of a combination of aggressive mercantilism and imperial territorial ambitions. Following frequent commercial disputes with the Burmese government, which customarily imposed a strict monopoly on trade, local British mercantile communities in Burma looked to wider audiences, including the British authorities, with a hope that it would result in political interference. This circumstance opened the way for the English newspapers, principally in Calcutta, to make crucial contributions to the British imperial expansion in Burma through news reporting. As this thesis demonstrates, the press made use of news to produce a political thrust for the Anglo-Burmese Wars in the early 1850s and 1885 – the scope of study which has little been explored.

This thesis presents three complexities in the press news reporting on British imperial expansion in Burma. First, the dynamics of news making is taken into examination. This approach explores an internal structure of the press, in particular, political and cultural roots of each newspaper and how they contributed to the construction of news. Run by and closely associated with people who had vested interests in the British Empire, such as the mercantile classes and missionaries, the newspapers became a political platform for these interest groups. They seized commercial disputes between British mercantile classes in Burma and the Burmese authorities in the early 1850s and 1885 as an opportunity to advocate for intervention – and, later, the annexation of Burma.

Secondly, the production of Burma's news throws light on the cross-border collaboration between diverse imperial actors in various locations. This is important for revising histories of Empire that inadvertently continue to reproduce metropolitan-periphery dichotomies. The thesis shows how, in addition to the people working in the newsrooms in Calcutta and London, news and information from local British residents in Burma – in particular, merchants and missionaries – significantly enabled newspapers to push for British intervention. Newspaper editors, policy makers, merchants and informants worked together as part of a complex imperial web, furthering both their own interests and positions as well as the overall interest of Empire. Thus, this approach will broaden our understanding of the complexity of British imperialism in Burma, where diverse imperial actors were working in close collaboration to make the conquest of Burma possible.

Finally, the thesis also offers an important footnote to the history of the press in the nineteenth century. While the advent of the telegraph has been hailed as a revolution in news-making of the time, the thesis shows how the elaborate claims for telegraph revolutionising news need moderation in the Burmese context for two reasons. One, telegrams made for speedier messages but did not change the content and perspective of the news produced. Two, telegraphy opened up direct channels of communication for officials, thereby leading to a relative decline in the importance of the printed press as the sole supplier of news.

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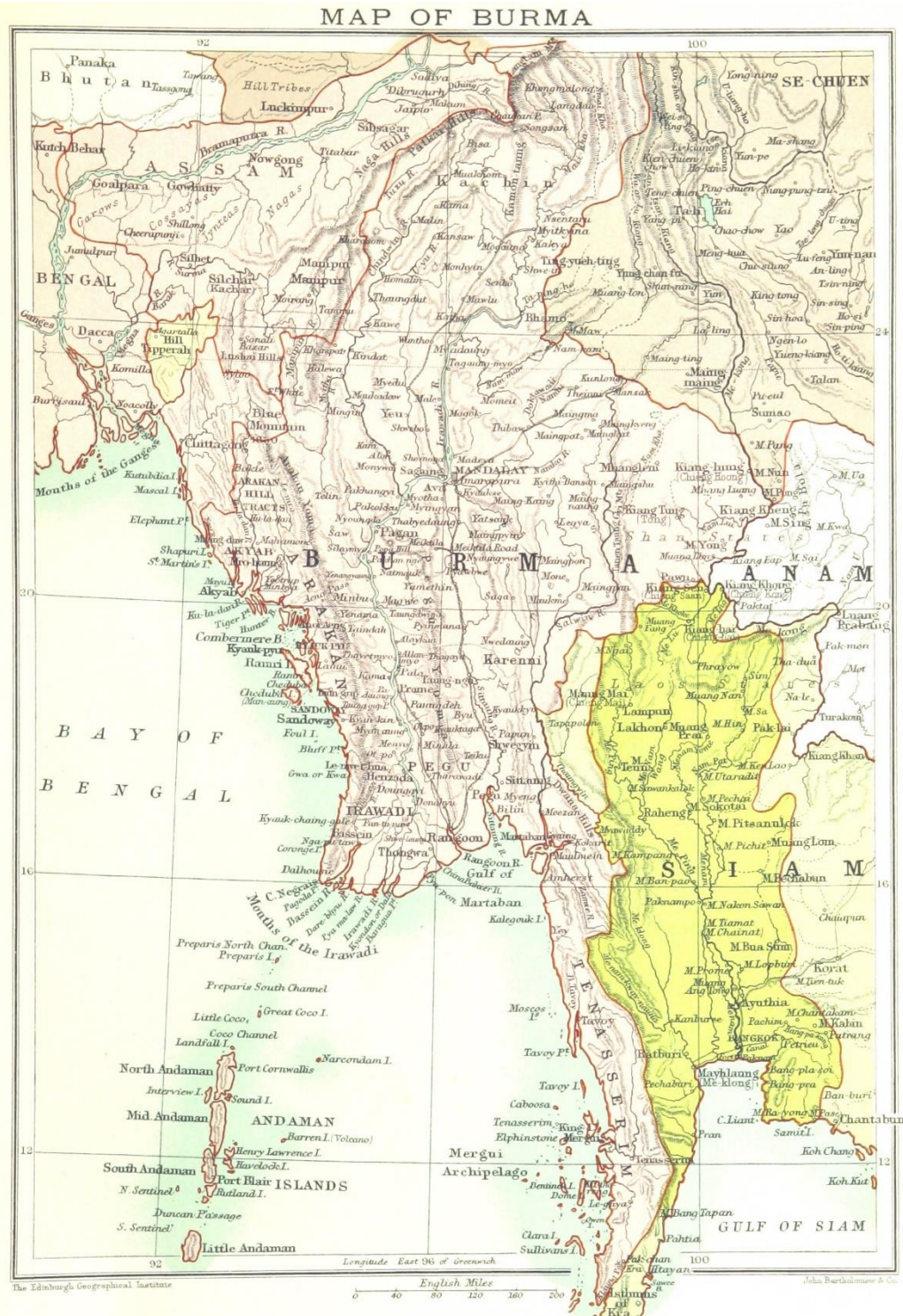


Figure 1: Map of Burma [Source: Map of Burma produced by John Bartholomew & Co. Taken from Ernest Hart, Picturesque Burma: Past and Present (London: Dent & Co., 1897), 27.]

## Introduction

From the latter decades of the twentieth century, historians have highlighted the complexity of British imperialism, particularly the contribution from diverse imperial actors, not only limited to the authorities. This focus is also the case for the extant literature on British imperial expansion in Burma, which has already highlighted how the British authorities and economic interests had made contributions to the Anglo-Burmese wars.<sup>1</sup> This thesis will throw light on another important factor that was involved in the making of the British Empire in Burma: the press. Similar to other imperial forces, it recognised British political and economic interests in Burma and became one of the most vocal advocates of imperial expansion, in particular during the Second and Third Anglo-Burmese Wars of 1852 and 1885, respectively. Contributions from newspapers in Calcutta and London have been mentioned by several historiographies – although they treat the press like an object being totally under the influence of political and economic forces.<sup>2</sup> This thesis argues that the press was an active participant in the campaign for British imperial expansion in Burma and should be regarded as a dynamic imperial force.

This thesis intends to widen, if not refresh, existing historiographies on British imperialism in Burma by highlighting a relatively understudied factor in the empire-making process – the role of the press in the British expansionism in Burma in the nineteenth century. The Anglo-Burmese relations can be traced back to the seventeenth century when the British merchants first came into contact with Burma, mainly through means of commerce. However, the nineteenth century saw a change from trade-oriented modesty to aggressive expansionism, as is evident in the case the three Anglo-Burmese Wars in 1824, 1852 and 1885 – the latter resulted in a total

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<sup>1</sup> Dorothy Woodman, *The Making of Burma* (London: Cresset Press, 1962); Damodar Ramaja SarDesai, *British Trade and Expansion in Southeast Asia, 1830-1914* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1977); Anthony Webster, *Gentleman Capitalists: British Imperialism in Southeast Asia, 1770-1890* (New York: I.B.Tauris, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Webster, *Gentleman Capitalists*, 152–53; SarDesai, *British Trade and Expansion in Southeast Asia*, 209–10.

annexation of Burma into the British India.<sup>3</sup> Historians have suggested that apart from political motives, there were economic drivers behind the British involvement in Burma. Unlike the First Anglo-Burmese War which primarily originated from a frontier dispute following the Burmese westward expansion into Manipur and Assam in the northeast of India<sup>4</sup> (See Figure 1), the Second and Third Burmese Wars – the main focus of this thesis – saw various sectors, in particular the British mercantile classes and the press, making crucial contributions by campaigning for intervention.<sup>5</sup> D. R. SarDesai and Anthony Webster, in particular, emphasise the pressure from the British mercantile classes in advocating for the Burmese Wars of 1852 and 1885, while also referring to the participation from the press in the merchant's advocacy for British imperial expansion.<sup>6</sup> However, neither of them attempt to unpack the politics behind the press' news reporting on Burma. This thesis further elaborates on the role of the press in British imperial expansion in Burma, by examining its imperialist stance shown in the news coverage of the Anglo-Burmese Wars. In doing so, it makes the broader point about reassessing the role of media in imperial history, not just as a vehicle of news, communication and information, but also as an agent of the empire. In the process, it sees political news, not just as reporting, but as defining political action.

My thesis investigates the coverage of the Anglo-Burmese wars in English newspapers in Calcutta, particularly the advocates of British intervention such as the *Englishman* and the *Friend of India* (of Serampore, Bengal), unpacking the process of news making. The selection of these papers is due to the position of Calcutta as the metropolis of British India (1772–1911) and its proximity to Burma – making affairs of Burma a considerably

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<sup>3</sup> The British gradually expanded their foothold in Burma by annexing Assam, Arakan and Tenasserim in 1826, Pegu or Lower Burma in 1853 and the remaining territory, known as Upper Burma, in 1885 (See Figure 1).

<sup>4</sup> Laurence Kitzen, 'Lord Amherst and Pegu: The Annexation Issue, 1824-1826,' *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 8 (1977): 179–80.

<sup>5</sup> This thesis does not cover the period of the First Burmese War because, first, the war was mainly originated from a frontier conflict and, secondly, the British and European community in Burma at that moment was rather small, if not non-existent. Since this thesis is highlighting a collaboration between local mercantile communities in Burma and newspapers in Calcutta and London, the emphasis is on the Second and Third Burmese Wars where local residents in Burma played the role in the press' campaign for imperial expansion.

<sup>6</sup> SarDesai, *British Trade and Expansion in Southeast Asia*, 114–16, 209–10, 214–15; Webster, *Gentleman Capitalists*, 152–55, 227.

great interest not only of the authorities in Calcutta, but also the British community there. As a unit of the British society, the press took interest in Burma, especially during the Anglo-Burmese conflicts in the 1850s and 1885. The *Englishman* and the *Friend of India*, in particular, clearly aligned themselves with those harbouring imperialist intentions, namely the mercantile community and missionaries. As this thesis will demonstrate, wider groups of people who were interested in or involved in the operation of the press – from news informants to financial supporters and subscribers – played a critical role in shaping the politics of the news reporting.

Another reason for selecting Calcutta newspapers as a case study is the political context or power dynamics of the Second and Third Burmese Wars in which the Government of India played a crucial role in decision making. Before Crown rule in India (1858–1947), the administration of the subcontinent was vested in the Governor General of India. Although the Governor General of India theoretically was expected to abide by instructions from the authorities in London, John S. Galbraith argues that the role of the Government of India in decision-making, particularly on the expansion of the power of British India, was almost without interruption from London throughout the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> Faced with growing demands to make urgent decisions and the slow communication between India and Britain, which could take months for instructions from London to reach Calcutta, many Governor Generals proceeded with the policy they deemed necessary rather than waiting for an approval from London.<sup>8</sup>

The Second Anglo-Burmese War is a great example of how Calcutta played crucial roles in the decision making process, while London played a rather marginal role. At the start of the war in 1852, Britain had just gotten a new government led by the Conservatives, whose foreign policy was strictly non-interventionism. This was a shift in foreign policy from the previous Whigs government of Lord Russell (1842–52), in which Lord Palmerston, the head of the Foreign Office, was well-known for his interventionist policy.

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<sup>7</sup> John S. Galbraith, 'The "Turbulent Frontier" as a Factor in British Expansion,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 2 (1960): 155.

<sup>8</sup> Galbraith, 'The "Turbulent Frontier",' 154.

Palmerston's handling of the Don Pacifico affair of 1850 – when Britain sent gunboats to blockade Greece after Pacifico, a Gibraltar-born Jewish merchant and a British subject<sup>9</sup>, claimed to have been mistreated by the Greek government – became the benchmark of his ministership.<sup>10</sup> However, Lord Derby's Conservative government, after taking power in February 1852, abandoned Palmerston's rhetoric on the foreign affair entirely. This became evident after news about the Anglo-Burmese conflict in the early 1850s reached Britain. While acknowledging reports about the Burmese hostilities towards the British, the Earl of Derby, speaking to the House of Lords on 5 April 1852, remarked that his government was greatly anxious to avoid getting involved in the war and annexation of Burma, which, as he contended, would give Britain nothing but 'an inconvenience and disaster'.<sup>11</sup>

Despite opposition from London, the Second Anglo-Burmese War broke out eventually, without the consensus of the British government. This is due to the fact that during this period the handling of the Burmese affair was practically in the hand of Lord Dalhousie, the Governor General of India (1848–56). With mails from Calcutta usually taking more than six weeks to arrive London<sup>12</sup>, India could not wait for decisions to be made in the metropole, and emergency steps had to be resorted to for breaking the impasse in local affairs. This is evident in Earl of Derby's speech to the House of Lords on 25 March 1852, in which he admitted that the latest intelligence obtained from Burma was of two-month old, while all his government could do was to express opinions on the event. He strongly believed that Dalhousie would be able to find a way to avoid the war.<sup>13</sup> On 5 April 1852, while the Parliament continued their debate about the justification for British intervention in Burma,

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<sup>9</sup> In 1847, Pacifico sought protection from the British Government after his house and property in Athens were robbed and demolished by a mob of nearly four hundred people, whom he alleged to include Greek soldiers and policemen See Albert M. Hyamson, 'Don Pacifico,' *Transactions (Jewish Historical Society of England)* 18 (1953): 2; Dolphus Whitten, 'The Don Pacifico Affair,' *The Historian* 48 (1986): 256.

<sup>10</sup> Although Pacifico's claim seemed to be exaggerated, Palmerston, considering Pacifico a British subject, ordered a naval blockade of Athens in 1849 and demanded a redress and compensation from the Greek government. See David Brown, *Palmerston: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 319.

<sup>11</sup> 'Parliamentary Intelligence – House of Lords, April 5.,' *The Times*, 6 April 1852, 2.

<sup>12</sup> Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tentacles of Progress: Technology Transfer in the Age of Imperialism, 1850-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 130.

<sup>13</sup> 'Parliamentary Intelligence – House of Lords, March 25.,' *The Times*, 26 March 1852, 2.

the war, however, had already been declared by the Government of India.<sup>14</sup> The power dynamics of the Second Burmese War, where Calcutta took the lead, was reflected in the newspaper coverage of the event. As this thesis shows, Calcutta newspapers had the privilege of obtaining intelligence regarding the affairs in Burma with greater speed than their counterparts in London, which, like the British government, was disturbed by the slow communication.

The political context of the Third Anglo-Burmese War of 1885 was entirely different, particularly given the improved mode of communication – namely, the telegraph – and the increased role of London in the decision making process. Following the Indian Rebellion of 1857, the British government imposed direct rule on India. A decade later, several attempts were made to develop and expand a speedy and more efficient telegraph system to link India with Britain. By the time of the Third Anglo-Burmese War of 1885, the telegraph had already changed the communication landscape between Britain and her overseas empire to a matter of hours. This enabled the government in London to exercise more control over the policy on colonial affairs.

Prior to the outbreak of the Third Burmese War in November 1885, Britain had just inaugurated a new government when Lord Salisbury of the Conservative took office in June, succeeding Gladstone who resigned from his second premiership. The India Office also had its new secretary, Lord Randolph Churchill, who shifted the policy on Burma to interventionist. Churchill's telegraphic communication with Lord Dufferin, the Governor General of India (1884–88), regarding the Anglo-Burmese conflict of 1885 suggests that London greatly benefitted from the improved communication technology. Churchill was regularly informed about the situation in Burma by Dufferin and ultimately decided on the extent of the intervention.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The Parliamentary Intelligence of *The Times of London* shows that while the Parliament in early April 1852 was still debating whether Britain should intervene in Burma, Dalhousie had already declared war with Burma. See 'Parliamentary Intelligence – House of Lords, April 5,' *The Times*, 6 April 1852, 2.

<sup>15</sup> *Papers of Lord Randolph Churchill*, Add MS 9248/9–11 (Cambridge University Library, hereafter CUL)

Not only that the authorities in London could benefit from the telegraph, several interest groups in Britain were also able to make contributions to British intervention in Burma, as is evident in a lobby from the Bombay-Burmah Trading and Co. and the Chambers of Commerce in Britain in pressing the government to intervene in Burma.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, several newspapers in Britain could made use of the Indo-European telegraph network to closely follow the development of the Anglo-Burmese conflict at the same speed as their counterparts in India. As this thesis shows, the telegraph eliminated the communication and coordination gaps between India and Britain, which was once apparent during the Second Burmese War, while enabling wide-ranging actors to get involved in the pretext leading to the war and the conquest of Burma in 1885.

The unique political situation of Burma enabled the press to play a crucial role in the making of imperialist politics through the news reporting. Following the First Anglo-Burmese war of 1824–26, the British appointed an official Resident at the Burmese Court to represent and protect the interests of the British. However, two important incidents occurred in 1840 and 1879 which prompted a decision to withdraw the British Residency from Burma. This resulted in the termination of diplomatic relations between the Burmese Court and the British. The withdrawal of the Residency in 1840 came after the accession of King Tharrawaddy (1837–46), who allegedly had a hostile attitude towards the British, particularly Henry Burney, the Resident, whose interference in Tharrawaddy's palace revolt of 1837, worsened the relationship between the new king and the Resident. Tharrawaddy's growing animosity with the British Resident is evident in the relocation of the Residency to a swamp area, which became the main reasons for the government of India to terminate diplomatic relationships with Burma.<sup>17</sup> The British Residency was

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<sup>16</sup> Telegrams from the Bombay-Burmah Trading Corporation to Messrs. Wallace Brothers, 11 August and 17 August 1885, *Relations between France and Burmah*, FO 425/148 (The National Archives, hereafter TNA); A telegram from Mr Symes to Mr Durand with a statement from the Rangoon Chamber of Commerce, 24 September 1885, *Affairs in Burmah*, FO 422/15 (TNA).

<sup>17</sup> After his accession, Tharrawaddy transferred the capital city from Ava to Amarapura. It meant that the British Residency had to be relocated as well. See Oliver B. Pollak, *Empires in Collision: Anglo-Burmese Relations in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980), 20–23.



re-established again in the aftermath of the Second Burmese War of 1852. However, a conflict arose again following a dispute over ‘the shoe question’ in 1875 after the Calcutta authorities ordered all British officials not to remove their shoes when attending the King’s audience and the British Resident’s involvement in King Thibaw’s succession in 1878 by providing protections to Thibaw’s opponents, which further exacerbated the relationship with the Burmese Court.<sup>18</sup> Following this rupture in relationships, the Government of India then decided to withdraw the Residency from Upper Burma in 1879.

A brief period between the two withdrawals of the Residency and the Second and Third Anglo-Burmese war of 1852 and 1885, respectively, opened the way for the press to become a vital medium of information for British residents in Burma and Calcutta. Commercial conflicts between British traders and the Burmese authorities during the two gap periods laid a foundation for the merchant’s advocacy for British imperial expansion in Burma. Historians such as Oliver B. Pollak, Anthony Webster and Sudha Shah have already underlined how British mercantile groups in Burma actively campaigned for intervention through the supply of information to the British authorities and wider public – with a hope that it could pressurise the government to interfere.<sup>19</sup> This thesis further examines the impact of intelligence coming out of Burma on British imperial expansion not only by examining its content, but also the way in which it was created and reproduced by the press – one of the receivers of intelligence. In this thesis, ‘intelligence’ will be used when referring to reports, stories and news written or obtained by the press, the government and the mercantile interests, which accentuates the value and credibility of that piece of report. According to the Oxford Dictionary, intelligence means ‘secret information that is collected, for example about a foreign country, especially one that is an enemy’ and ‘the gathering of information of military or political value’ as well as ‘information gathered in

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<sup>18</sup> It was the Burmese custom that required all attendees to the King’s audience to take off their shoes. However, the British authorities saw this practice as inappropriate to the diplomatic protocol accepted by the Western standard. See John Nisbet, *Burma Under British Rule and Before*, vol. 1 (Westminster: A. Constable, 1901), 41; Thant Myint-U, *The Making of Modern Burma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 141–42.

<sup>19</sup> Pollak, *Empires in Collision*, 52–54; Webster, *Gentleman Capitalists*, 222; Sudha Shah, *The King in Exile: The Fall of the Royal Family of Burma* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2012), 37.

this way'.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, information will be used to refer to existing or general knowledge, which does not indicate the value of its content. Overall, a closer look at how the news coverage of Burma was carried out provides increased understanding of a complex interplay of multiple imperial actors through one single institution such as the press.

### Newspapers as an Imperial Agent: The press and the 'men on the spot' in Burma

Recent historiographies have highlighted a multiplicity of imperial players involved in the making of the British Empire, which not only consisted of the authorities and policy-makers, but could also come from any sector ranging from merchants, missionaries as well as news correspondents.<sup>21</sup> This is also the case of British imperial expansion in Burma where there was a network of collaboration among several imperial advocates in either metropolitan Britain or peripheral Burma – as well as intermediate India – with the press being one of them. Thus, my thesis will throw new light on British imperial expansion in Burma by elevating the role of the press as one of the dynamic imperial actors.

From the 1980s onwards, P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins's 'Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Expansion Overseas' and *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion 1688–1914* generated a stimulating discussion among historians on the relationship between metropolitan capitalist interests and imperial expansion.<sup>22</sup> The two scholars highlight a significant contribution from economic interests in metropolitan London to British imperial expansion.

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<sup>20</sup> Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, eds., *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 738; Diana Lea et al., eds., *Oxford Learner's Dictionary of Academic English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 432.

<sup>21</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, 'Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent,' *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985): 166–203; Roger T. Stern, 'War Correspondents and Colonial War, C.1870–1900,' in John M. MacKenzie, ed., *Popular Imperialism and the Military, 1850–1950* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 139–61.

<sup>22</sup> P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, 'Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Expansion Overseas I: The Old Colonial System, 1688–1850,' *Economic History Review* 39 (1986): 501–25; P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, 'Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Expansion Overseas II: New Imperialism, 1850–1945,' *Economic History Review* 40 (1987): 1–26; P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion, 1688–1914* (London: Longman, 1993).

For them, the London-based financiers took a driving seat in leading Britain to expand its overseas territories.<sup>23</sup> While acknowledging the importance of geopolitical and economic developments at the periphery, Cain and Hopkins contend that an explanation of imperialism could only come through a study of the metropolitan economy.<sup>24</sup> Arguably, their concept of ‘metropole-and-periphery’ did at the time broaden our understanding of the complexity of British imperialism, but have since been superseded by more persuasive arguments.

While acknowledging Cain and Hopkins’s contribution in highlighting contributions from metropolitan Britain, other historians argue that British imperialism was too complex and diverse and could not possibly be explained by the ‘oversimplified’ metropole-and-periphery concept. In ‘Imperial Circuits and Networks’, Alan Lester highlights the sphere of a multiplicity of trajectories where layers of colonial interests created a complex network of trans-imperial discourse of colonialism. He argues that the metropole-and-periphery concept was just one component of an extensive network connecting multiple factors in the colony and metropole together. This network was constructed and developed by colonial interests ‘in tension with one another as well as with indigenous people’.<sup>25</sup> Working on transnational history, Tony Ballantyne also suggests that the study of national history should be located in larger political and economic networks and interactions. He underlines the necessity of exploring a complex interplay between people from within and beyond actual territories.<sup>26</sup>

The pressure from colonies has been, in fact, highlighted, particularly the role of men on the spot in leading Britain to expand its overseas involvement. In an article on gentlemanly capitalism, Andrew Porter argues that the London-based capitalists were by no means the only architects of Britain’s global expansion. Ambitions and pressures from ‘interested parties

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<sup>23</sup> Cain and Hopkins, ‘Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Expansion Overseas II,’ 10–11.

<sup>24</sup> Cain and Hopkins, ‘Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Expansion Overseas II,’ 17–18.

<sup>25</sup> Alan Lester, ‘Imperial Circuits and Networks: Geographies of the British Empire: Imperial Circuits and Networks,’ *History Compass* 4 (2006): 133.

<sup>26</sup> Tony Ballantyne, ‘Putting the nation in its place?: world history and C. A. Bayly’s *The Birth of the Modern World*,’ in Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake, eds., *Connected Worlds: History in Transnational Perspective* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2005), 32.

thousands of miles from London’ could equally produce a significant drive for political and economic development in the colony.<sup>27</sup> Examining the dynamics behind the territorial expansion of the British Empire, John Darwin highlights contributions from a network of collaborators, or local ‘bridgeheads’, which could come from ‘a commercial [sector], settler, missionary or proconsular presence or a combination of all four’.<sup>28</sup> They were, as he argues, rather active and skilful in making the case for intervention – which the British authorities could not always resist.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Malcolm Yapp points to the role of the political men on the spot – or what he calls the ‘Politicals’ such as ministers, envoys, residents and political agents – in providing the British authorities in India with ‘information, recommendations, and strategic theories’, which derived from their privilege of holding a monopoly of information and from their ability to interpret that information.<sup>30</sup>

This thesis is enriched by these discussions. The case of the Second and Third Anglo-Burmese Wars of 1852 and 1885 saw a significant contribution from local residents in Burma, in particular during the absence of official British representatives prior to the outbreak of the two wars. However, prior to going straight to the discussion on historiographies of Burma, it would be better first to lay down the pretext leading to the Second and Third Burmese Wars. The pretext for the Second Burmese War of 1852 came after two British merchants, Captain Sheppard and Captain Lewis, were put on trial by Maung Ok, the ‘*myo-wun*’ or the governor of Rangoon, in 1851. Sheppard was charged with throwing a native pilot overboard, while Lewis was accused of the murder of one of his seamen, a Burmese subject. Both dismissed the allegations against them and began to demand intervention from the Calcutta authorities – through complaints and petitions. Moving to the Third Burmese War of 1885, it was the Burmese Court’s accusation against the Bombay-Burmah Trading and Co. (BBTC), one of Britain’s largest enterprises in

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<sup>27</sup> Andrew Porter, “‘Gentlemanly Capitalism’ and Empire: The British Experience since 1750?,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 18 (1990): 278–79.

<sup>28</sup> John Darwin, ‘Imperialism and the Victorians: The Dynamics of Territorial Expansion,’ *The English Historical Review* 112 (1997): 629.

<sup>29</sup> Darwin, ‘Imperialism and the Victorians,’ 639.

<sup>30</sup> Malcolm Yapp, *Strategies of British India: Britain, Iran, and Afghanistan, 1798–1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 9–10.

Burma at that time, over the teak logging in August 1885 that became the main course for the war.<sup>31</sup> Considering the event to be a sign of Burmese hostilities towards British enterprises, the company's agent in Upper Burma reported directly to Wallace Brothers, its owner in London, who then passed that information to the British government – triggering a movement which eventually led to intervention. This occurrence gives us a glimpse of the dynamics of economic factors and, at the same time, the role of information in leading Britain to wars with Burma, which this thesis will show later.

Beginning with a close examination of the two seminal works by SarDesai and Webster on British imperial expansion in Southeast Asia, despite agreeing on the economic motivation behind British intervention in Burma, they clearly have different views on who was the real driving force. Focusing on contributions from peripheral Burma, SarDesai believes that the motivation for the Second and Third Burmese Wars mainly came from the advocacy of the British mercantile community in Burma. Local merchants, as he argues, had played with 'imperial sensitivity', particularly the idea of the Burmese hostilities against the British, in order to pressurise the British authorities to adopt an interventionist policy on Burma.<sup>32</sup>

This line of argument of SarDesai is in contrast to Webster, who clearly downplayed contributions from the periphery in Burma. He directly challenges the work of SarDesai which, as he argues, overestimated the ability of the periphery in leading Britain to the war with Burma. Rather, the main motivating force for the Burmese Wars, as he asserts, came mainly from the mercantile groups in Calcutta and London, not from local British merchants in peripheral Burma. Regarding the Second Burmese War, Webster believes that the mercantile community in Calcutta, a community whose interests in Burma were paramount, took a driving seat in British intervention in Burma in 1852–53.<sup>33</sup> For the Third Burmese War, his view seemed to be in line with that of

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<sup>31</sup> In July 1885, the Burmese Court found out that the BBTC had exported 80,000 logs of timber from Upper Burma, but their accounts only showed an export of 30,000 logs. See Tin Hla Thaw, 'The Anglo-Burmese Wars: A New Look,' in Kay Kim Khoo, ed., *The History of South-East, South and East Asia: Essays and Documents* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1977), 199.

<sup>32</sup> SarDesai, *British Trade and Expansion in Southeast Asia*, 116, 217.

<sup>33</sup> Webster, *Gentleman Capitalists*, 152–55.

Cain and Hopkins, particularly his emphasis on the role of economic and financial sectors in London in pressurising the British government to intervene in Burma. Referring to the BBTC case in 1885, Webster argues that the lobby from the owner of the BBTC in London was impactful in convincing the British government of the necessity of imperial expansion.<sup>34</sup>

My thesis finds both frameworks rather problematic in explaining the complexity of the British imperial expansion in Burma as they focused on just one specific player, namely the merchants. As this thesis shows, there were other actors who played an important role in the merchant's campaign for intervention, principally through their supply and representation of crucial intelligence. With the Residency withdrawn from Burma, the situation had become particularly difficult for local groups and individuals who were left to fend for themselves and had to deal directly with the Burmese Court, which was alleged to harbour a hostile attitude towards foreigners. As will be shown in Chapter 2, their local knowledge and residency in independent Burma gave the 'men on the spot' the privilege of monopolising sensitive information, which they then strategically used to drive their advocacy forward.

The two withdrawals of the British Residency in 1840 and 1879 opened the way for the men on the spot in independent Burma to make the case for intervention. Prior to the Second Burmese War, the mercantile interests in Rangoon, as Oliver B. Pollak and Aparna Mukherjee put it, actively sent complaints and stories of their difficulties with the Burmese administration to the Government of India to demand a protection and political intervention.<sup>35</sup> They were joined by local missionaries, principally of the American Baptist Mission which had begun their works in Burma since the beginning of the nineteenth century<sup>36</sup> and had allied themselves with the

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<sup>34</sup> Webster, *Gentleman Capitalists*, 225–27.

<sup>35</sup> Pollak, *Empires in Collision*, 52–56; Aparna Mukherjee, *British Colonial Policy in Burma: An Aspect of Colonialism in South-East Asia, 1840-1885* (New Delhi: Abhinav, 1988), 72–75.

<sup>36</sup> In his letter to the Government of India dated 24th November 1854, Arthur Phayre, Chief Commissioner of Burma, acknowledged the role of the American Baptist Missionaries in educating the Karen Christians, inspiring them with 'a respect for a desire for education and improvement'. See Mandy Sadan, *A Guide to Colonial Sources on Burma: Ethnic & Minority Histories of Burma in the India Office Records, British Library* (Bangkok: Orchid Press, 2008), 61–62.

British mercantile interests, according to Maung Htin Aung.<sup>37</sup> Reverend Eugenio Kincaid, in particular, played crucial role in the Anglo-Burmese conflict of the early 1850s when he joined with the merchants in their campaign for intervention. Having started his mission in Burma since the 1830s, Kincaid gained experience and a vast knowledge of the country and its people. This enabled him to act as an active informant to the official representatives of the Government of India in 1851–52 where most of his reports conveyed stories of Burmese hostility towards Western subjects in Burma<sup>38</sup>, which thereby emphasised the need for immediate intervention.

Contributions from the men on the spot in Burma can also be seen during an intermediate period between the withdrawal of the British Residency from Upper Burma in 1879 and the Third Anglo-Burmese War of 1885. The commercial treaties of 1862 and 1867 with the Burmese Court, which saw a relaxation of the Burmese monopolies and restrictions on trade, had encouraged several British firms to establish their business in Upper Burma, one of them including the BBTC whose timber business in Upper Burma was rapidly expanded. They were later acting as ‘unofficial informants’ to the British authorities in Rangoon, Calcutta and London, principally after the withdrawal of the Residency in 1879.

Non-mercantile groups also made crucial contributions to the merchants’ campaign for intervention in 1885. The European maids of honour for Queen Supayalat, King Thibaw’s wife, had, according to Sudha Shah, used their position in the Mandalay Palace to gather information about internal affairs to the British trading firms and the authorities in Rangoon.<sup>39</sup> They worked together with other local residents in Mandalay, namely Andreino, an Italian consul, in supplying the British mercantile interests and government with exclusive intelligence about the Burmese Court, principally stories of the alleged Franco-Burmese treaty which would see France establishing its political and economic interests in Upper Burma – a considerable threat to the British presence in Burma. As Alister MacCrae and Alan Prentice highlight, it

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<sup>37</sup> Maung Htin Aung, *A History of Burma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 224.

<sup>38</sup> Mukherjee, *British Colonial Policy in Burma*, 98.

<sup>39</sup> Shah, *The King in Exile*, 52.

was one of the maids of honour who first obtained this report and sent it to Andrieno, who later forwarded to the British firms and authorities in Rangoon.<sup>40</sup> This piece of intelligence caused an alarm among the British mercantile interests in Rangoon and it was used to stimulate the campaign for immediate intervention in Upper Burma.

Thus, it can be argued that the political context of Burma, with the absence of the British official representative prior to the Second and Third Anglo-Burmese Wars, enabled diverse men on the spot to make contributions to the British intervention in Burma. As this thesis shows, the news reporting of the two Burmese wars reveals the complexity and multiplicity of interests in the imperial expansion. As one of the most prominent institutions of the empire during this period, the press, particularly the expansionist papers, also joined with the men on the spot in Burma and used their news coverage to promote the right of Britain in the wars and the annexation of Burma. Although the selected newspapers for this thesis were printed in India and Britain, their scope of interest was not entirely limited to the interest of British mercantile classes in Calcutta and London as Webster has suggested. Rather, it went beyond the border as Chapter 2 will discuss the collaboration among the press in Calcutta and the men on the spot in Burma – principally through the sharing of information, which was the foundation of the press' advocacy for British imperial expansion.

There are two issues that this thesis investigates: first, pressure from local residents in Burma submitted to newspapers in Calcutta and Britain and covered by these papers; and, secondly, the impact of the collaboration between the press and its network of informants on British imperial expansion in Burma. According to Pollak and Shah, the absence of the British Residency during a period leading to the two wars provided local informants in Burma with an opportunity to supply information to the British authorities, economic interests and the press. Complaints, petitions and biased intelligence became instruments used by local informants in Burma to make the case for

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<sup>40</sup> Alister MacCrae and Alan Prentice, *Irrawaddy Flotilla* (Paisley: James Paton, 1978), 89–90.



intervention.<sup>41</sup> My thesis will furthermore demonstrate that the men on the spot in Burma also looked for collaboration with the press, another vocal advocate of British imperial expansion, in bringing their stories of the situation in Burma to wider audiences, including the authorities. As one of the recipients of intelligence coming out of Burma, the press provided local informants with a platform to campaign for intervention. Simultaneously, expansionist newspapers, such as the *Englishman* and the *Friend of India*, made use of intelligence from local informants in Burma to generate their own advocacy for the war and annexation of Burma.

As will be discussed in Chapter 2, the Second and Third Anglo-Burmese Wars had brought the press and the men on the spot to work together in persuading the British government to intervene in Burma. Similar to the British authorities and commercial houses in Calcutta and London that required contributions from local men on the spot in Burma, the press was also in close collaboration with these imperial agents. Left without official British representatives in Burma, local British residents regarded the press as a vital medium to present stories about their difficulties with the Burmese authorities to the public and the British authorities in India and Britain. Their information became the foundation of the press' coverage of the Burmese Wars – arguably the main instrument for the press to campaign for British intervention in Burma. Understanding this collaboration between the press and its network of informants will provide us with a new aspect of British imperial expansion in Burma, in which every agent of the empire played a crucial role.

#### News as Opinion: The role of newspapers in the British imperial politics

The role of newspapers in advocating for British imperial expansion have been discussed by several historians. However, there is a tendency for some scholars to overlook an agenda or political motivation that the news writers and editors had deployed in the coverage. This is the case of the Anglo-Burmese wars in which available historiographies, particularly the

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<sup>41</sup> Pollak, *Empires in Collision*, 52–54; Shah, *The King in Exile*, 37.

works of Pollak, SarDesai and Webster, have shown how the events were reported by the press, albeit very briefly. They used the news coverage just to show how affairs in Burma presented to the British public. Pollak and Webster, for instance, suggest that most of the newspapers in Calcutta, such as the *Englishman*, the *Friend of India* and the *Hurkaru* agreed on the necessity of the British intervention in Burma during the Second Burmese war of 1852.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, SarDesai noticed how the press in metropolitan Britain, principally *The Times of London*, was concerned about British economic interests in Burma and became a vocal advocate of the Third Burmese War of 1885.<sup>43</sup>

Subsequent works on the British imperialist press remain confined within the same perspective. Chandrika Kaul's *Reporting the Raj* and Stephen Vella's article, 'In an Indian Net: China and British Imperial War News (1839–1842)' give us an impression of how imperial events in India and China were viewed by the press and how the news coverage could possibly shape public opinion on the empire. However, what seems to be problematic is the fact that they simply classify newspapers in general categories such as conservative, liberal, labour oriented and radical without further examining what constituted the tone of the press news reporting.<sup>44</sup>

As this section will show, there are always shifting political dynamics behind news reporting. A number of historians have taken a more critical approach to the study of the nature of news – in which they come across how the producer's political motivation and 'cultural roots' played out during the creation of news pieces. In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson uncovers the 'novelistic format' of the press news reporting in which political and cultural factors prominently came into play during the production of news, particularly during the selection process. Anderson sees news as a plot in which a news-writer laid down the purpose of the news, which in turn

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<sup>42</sup> Pollak, *Empires in Collision*, 92; Webster, *Gentleman Capitalists*, 152.

<sup>43</sup> SarDesai, *British Trade and Expansion in Southeast Asia*, 209–10.

<sup>44</sup> Chandrika Kaul, *Reporting the Raj: The British Press and India, C.1880–1922* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 55–57; Peter Putnis, Chandrika Kaul, and Jürgen Wilke, eds., *International Communication and Global News Networks: Historical Perspectives* (New York: Hampton Press, 2011), 102–4.

contributed to an overall narrative or direction of the newspaper.<sup>45</sup> The political thrust in the making of news has also been discussed by Kevin G. Barnhurst and John Nerone in *The Form of News: A History*. In their view, the newspaper was a political enterprise where editors and proprietors have real control over the selection of information and the style in which news was presented.<sup>46</sup>

Other works have established how the press presents the news in accordance with the interest of its specific readership. For example, Alan Lester, in referring to Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, elaborates that the newspaper not only created a collective identity of settlers in a particular site of the colony, but also bound settlers from different sites into a 'broader collective imagination based on the idea of a trans-global British settler identity'.<sup>47</sup> Focusing on how the British involvement in Africa during the 1830s was reported by the press in New South Wales, Lester argues that local newspapers represented the event in ways that resonated profoundly with their own settler readership.<sup>48</sup> In other words, the press created a colonial discourse by which events occurring in a faraway land were interpreted and presented in the manner that its readership could easily be familiar with – in his case, the definition of the respectable imperial Britishness.

Furthermore, Bryan S. Glass highlights that the tone and direction of the news reporting were shaped by the press' position within the British community as well as its relationship with the readers. He takes the news coverage of the Mau Mau insurgency in 1952 in three Scottish newspapers – *The Glasgow Herald*, *The Scotsman* and the *Daily Record* – as an example.<sup>49</sup> Since the three newspapers had their own specific readership – either

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<sup>45</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2016), 33.

<sup>46</sup> Kevin G. Barnhurst and John C. Nerone, *The Form of News: A History* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2001), 8–9.

<sup>47</sup> Alan Lester, 'British Settler Discourse and the Circuits of Empire,' *History Workshop Journal* 54 (2002): 30–31.

<sup>48</sup> Lester, 'British Settler Discourse,' 35.

<sup>49</sup> The Mau Mau Uprising in Kenya occurred after the Kikuya tribe, a nationalist armed peasant, launched a revolt against the British colonists. The British authorities declared a state of emergency; and the police force was deployed to suppress the insurrection. See Bryan S. Glass, 'Newspapers and Empire: Bringing Africa to the Scottish Public,' in Bryan S. Glass and John M. MacKenzie, eds., *Scotland, Empire and Decolonisation in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 161–62.

businessmen or working classes – it became the job of newspaper editors to reflect the interests of their readers while also guiding their thought at the same time.<sup>50</sup> Despite agreeing on the British use of force to maintain law and order, there was a degree of difference in the news reporting of each paper. For example, the *Daily Record*, which was popular among the working classes, entirely supported the suppression of the Mau Mau, whom it referred to as evil, in order to restore peace in this region. This approach was contrary to *The Scotsman*, which was mainly read by businessmen and was critical about the impact of the use of force on the long-term position of the British in this region. The paper feared that the harsh suppression of the rebels would alienate the British from other Africans.<sup>51</sup> The works of Glass and Lester underline the necessity to locate the press in a broader picture of the British community in which it socially and culturally positioned itself. Opinions of people involved in the operation of the press, such as the editors, proprietors, readers and financial supporters, need to be taken into account when studying news reporting.

The role of editors in directing the tone of news reporting has been regarded as vital by many historians who suggest how the political stance of the newspaper could fluctuate depending on the person at the helm. Mrinal Kanti Chanda, for example, highlights that the nature of the English press in Bengal had been associated closely with personal opinions of editors – which made it rather variable. He refers to the ‘transformation’ in character of the *Englishman* from a liberal newspaper to an advocate of ‘indigo planters’ after a number of editorial changes in 1842 (William Cobb Hurry, a merchant) and the late 1850s (J.O’B. Saunders, a veteran indigo planter).<sup>52</sup> Similarly, David Ayerst, in *The Guardian Omnibus*, and Oliver Woods and James Bishop, in *The Story of The Times*, shed light on the impact of the editors’ personal opinions on the formation of the newspapers’ characters. Focusing on the

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<sup>50</sup> Glass, ‘Newspapers and Empire,’ in Glass and MacKenzie, eds., *Scotland, Empire and Decolonisation*, 157.

<sup>51</sup> Glass, ‘Newspapers and Empire,’ in Glass and MacKenzie, eds., *Scotland, Empire and Decolonisation*, 163–65.

<sup>52</sup> Mrinal Kanti Chanda, *History of the English Press in Bengal, 1780–1857* (Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi & Co., 1987), 171–72; Mrinal Kanti Chanda, *History of the English Press in Bengal, 1858–1880* (Calcutta: K P Bagchi & Company, 2008), 10.

cases of *The Times of London* and the *Manchester Guardian*, they illustrate how changes of editors could dramatically transform the newspapers' politics.<sup>53</sup> This thesis would like to broaden this dialogue by exploring the political and cultural thrust of news reporting. As will be discussed in Chapter 1, apart from the editors' personal opinions, shared interests and beliefs among the newspapers and particular communities they belonged to could shape the manner in which the Anglo-Burmese conflict was presented.

Focusing on the news coverage of the Second and Third Anglo-Burmese Wars in the *Englishman* and the *Friend of India*, my thesis will shed light on the politics played by the press during British imperial expansion in Burma. As mentioned earlier, there are a number of works highlighting how these papers supported British intervention in Burma – none, however, has looked deeply into factors contributing to the formation of the newspapers' political stance on imperial events. A closer examination of their structure reveals that they were run by and greatly associated with advocates of the British imperial power in India – principally, the mercantile classes and the missionaries.

Merchants, as Andrew Pettegree points out, have been one of the largest consumers of news, and are also deeply associated with the operation of the press either in the form of financial support or information supply.<sup>54</sup> With the fate of their enterprises depending on the amount of information they received, the merchants were forced to seek out a reliable network of news – which later led them to become involved in the operation of the press.<sup>55</sup> For the case of the *Englishman*, Mrinal Kanti Chanda, in his two volumes on the history of the English newspapers in Bengal, has highlighted how the paper became popular among the 'pro-planter and anti-native' British mercantile classes.<sup>56</sup> As will be show in Chapter 1, the *Englishman* acted in the interests of the mercantile community, particularly in supplying information that

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<sup>53</sup> David Ayerst, *The Guardian Omnibus, 1821–1971: An Anthology of 150 Years of Guardian Writing* (London: Collins, 1973), 100, 152; Oliver Woods and James Bishop, *The Story of The Times* (London: Joseph, 1983), 115, 135.

<sup>54</sup> Andrew Pettegree, *The Invention of News: How the World Came to Know about Itself* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2015), 3.

<sup>55</sup> Pettegree, *The Invention of News*, 46–47.

<sup>56</sup> Chanda, *History of the English Press in Bengal, 1858–1880*, 10–11.

mattered to the trading enterprise such as shipping news and market prices. Its news reporting of the Anglo-Burmese Wars was also a platform where British economic interests in Burma were presented and advocated.

Missionaries were another group that were involved in the press' news reporting as in the case of the *Friend of India*. As shown in Scott and Co.'s *Bengal Directory and Register for 1849*, the paper was significantly 'engaged in printing religious works, [and] connected with the Mission'.<sup>57</sup> Founded in 1818 and operated by the Serampore Baptist Mission, the *Friend of India* became an organ of the Christian missionary in Bengal. The Marshman family, particularly Reverend Joshua and Reverend John, his son, were active missionaries. John Marshman, in particular, turned the paper into a tool for mission in advocating for humanitarianism and enlightenment of Indians by means of education.<sup>58</sup> Apart from his contributions to the development of Indian education, John Marshman was a firm believer in the British rule in India.<sup>59</sup>

This sentiment of the *Friend of India* was, in fact, shared by other missionaries in different parts of the British Empire, with Patrick Brantlinger highlighting how the British missionaries in Africa saw the benefit of the British rule in bringing civilisation to the indigenous people in this particularly 'dark continent'.<sup>60</sup> Western missionaries were also active in Burma during the nineteenth century and, as Jörg Schendel puts it, became advocates of the British 'annexationist solutions'.<sup>61</sup> Their perception was shaped by their own experience with the Burmese kings and authorities who were Buddhist devotees and could, sometimes, be hostile to the Christian mission in Burma.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Scott and Co., *Bengal Directory and Register, with Almanac and Appendix for 1849* (Calcutta: Scott and Co., 1848), 365.

<sup>58</sup> George Smith, *The Life of William Carey: Shoe-Maker and Missionary* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 227.

<sup>59</sup> G. C. Boase, 'Marshman, John Clark (1794–1877), journalist and historian,' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 25 May 2006, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-18162> (accessed 8 July 2018).

<sup>60</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, 'Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent,' *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985): 178–80.

<sup>61</sup> Jörg Schendel, 'Christian Missionaries in Upper Burma, 1853–85,' *South East Asia Research* 7 (1999): 63.

<sup>62</sup> Schendel, 'Christian Missionaries in Upper Burma,' 88.

In this sense, we can see that the ‘cultural roots’ of each newspaper had come into play significantly during the formation of the news coverage of the Second and Third Anglo-Burmese Wars. Furthermore, this thesis contends that the format of the news coverage of the two events also enabled the press to get involved in the British play for power. The editorials, where editors and news columnists voiced their opinions on any particular events, usually took the lead – preceding the actual news. It suggests that the emphasis of news reporting was put at the opinion-based editorial. The *Friend of India* even began every issue with the editorial – a different format compared to other newspapers in general, which normally began each issue with list of commercial intelligence and advertisements. Figure 2 shows that the paper’s coverage on the Second Burmese War Burma could, in some cases, take up an entire front page. This style of news reporting provided the newspapers – or, to be precise, editors and columnists – with a platform to assert their opinions on the affairs in Burma. As will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, pieces of intelligence obtained from local men on the spot in Burma were meticulously selected in order to reinforce the editors’ stances on the Burmese question. This approach suggests that news had been treated as opinion pieces where principal or thrust in the newspapers’ campaign for intervention was presented.

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THE Government of Bombay having appointed the 3d of the ensuing month of January for the departure of the next Steamer therefrom, with a Mail for Suez.—Notice accordingly is hereby given, for general information, that the latest safe date, for the transmission of letters and papers from Calcutta, which may be intended for conveyance by that opportunity, will be Monday, the 22d Proximo, and that the first set of the Overland Packets will be closed at, and despatched from this Office, on Saturday, the 20th Idem.

J. R. BURLTON BENNETT,  
Deputy Post Master General in Charge.  
Genl. Post Office, the 28th November, 1851.

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Capt. Maitland, Brigade Major, ... " 10  
The Officers of the 21st Regt. N. I., ... " 56  
Major F. Lloyd, ... " 16  
Lieut. Lester, ... " 19  
Asst. Surgeon H. B. Hinton, ... " 20

**RANGOON AND BURMESE AFFAIRS.**—The *Proserpine* Steamer has returned from Rangoon with despatches brought by Captain Latter, the interpreter to the Commodore, and full particulars have appeared of the progress of the expedition in our local journals, but more particularly in the *Englishman*, from which the following narrative is drawn:—Her Majesty's ship *Fox*, and the *Tenasserim* and *Proserpine* steamers anchored off Rangoon, on Tuesday, the 25th of November. The next morning a message was sent on board by the Governor of Rangoon, desiring that the vessels might be removed to another position, to which it was replied, that Her Majesty's vessels of war chose the positions that best suited them. At nine A. M., Captain Latter was sent on shore to ascertain why none of the British Residents had been on board. He returned in about two hours with the Rev. Mr. Kincaid and Mr. Birrell, who informed the Commodore that the Governor had threatened to behead any of the Europeans who attempted to hold communication with the vessels of war. On Thursday, the Europeans came on board and had an interview with the Commodore, in which they represented in strong colors the character and proceedings of the present Governor, and shewed that the outrages committed on Captains Shepherd and Lewis, were mild compared with the oppression inflicted on others. The Commodore had previously prepared a letter to the Governor, demanding the sum of 10,000 Rupees, by way of indemnity, and also a letter of apology. He now wrote another in its stead, stating that he had come to demand satisfaction for the injuries and insults committed on British subjects, but since his arrival they had represented the conduct of the Burmese authorities in so much more aggravated a light, that he should refer the matter to the Government of India. At 11 A. M. on that day, Captain Tarleton, the commander of the *Fox*, with Captain Latter, Mr. Elliot, 1st Lieut. of Marines, and Mr. Southey, Secretary, landed with the letter, and were received by some Burmese officers and a guard; they then mounted the four ponies which had been prepared for them, and rode out about two miles to the Governor's residence. The road was lined with about 3,500 armed men, 150 of whom might have been regular troops, the rest being a rabble impressed

for the occasion. They were all ushered into the hall of audience, handsomely decorated and filled with armed men, who were gaudily dressed, and all the Governors of the surrounding districts. Capt. Tarleton and his party refused to be seated, but remained standing till the Governor entered, when Capt. Latter read the Commodore's letter, first in English and then in Burmese. It was listened to with mute astonishment. The Governor, it is said, was so astounded that he could make no reply, and trembled so violently as to be unable to shake off the ashes from his segar. He shook hands with Captain Tarleton, and asked him to be seated, but he declined the honour, stating that his mission was completed; and with these words walked out of the room. On Friday, the Deputy Governor of Rangoon came on board, accompanied by several officers in full costume, with a message from the Governor to ask of what, and by whom, he was accused. The Commodore returned for answer that he had nothing more to say to him, and handed him the letter which had been written in Calcutta for the King, and desired that it might be forwarded to Ava, adding, that unless an answer was received in five weeks, he should take other steps. Here the matter rests. The petition of the oppressed merchants and residents to the number of One hundred has been forwarded to the Governor General, and may possibly hasten his return to Calcutta, as it is advisable he should be here when the Ava ultimatum arrives.

The future is all conjecture. One man thinks this Burmese will submit, pay the indemnity, and apologize. It would be strange indeed if others, guided possibly by their wishes, did not think that the King would be disposed to throw down the gauntlet to us, more especially as the force sent to Rangoon is so very limited. The map of India has been opened by them—the last edition of Allen,—and the gap between the two patches of red which mark our territories in Arracan on the one side, and in Moulmein on the other, has not failed to arrest the eye, and an involuntary wish has arisen, we do not say in our own mind, that the intermediate space, now misgoverned by the Burmese, might also become red. It contains the Delta of the Irrawaddy, the rich teak forests of Pegu, and the magnificent port of Rangoon, evidently destined one day to become the emporium of a large commerce. The future destiny of this province now trembles in the balance. If the King of Ava is obstreperous, it must become British, in spite of our most pacific intentions. We are disposed to think, that the matter will not, after all, be hushed up so quietly as some suppose. The Memorial to Commodore Lambert concludes with these memorable words. "We feel every confidence that the determination you may come to, will be one becoming your rank and position, but we earnestly pray, that you will bear in mind, that the privilege you now concede to us, as British subjects, of making our complaints known to you, will, on your departure, if continued protection is not afforded us, be visited on us with ten-fold cruelty and outrage." It is impossible not to feel the truth of this assertion; and it must become the basis of action. After the demonstration we have made, and the irritation we have inflicted on the Burmese

Court, we must plant a Consular Agent at Rangoon, for the protection of our merchants and our trade, or give up the commerce of that port altogether. But the establishment of a foreign and independent agent—a 'barbarian eye,' as the Chinese so admirably designate him—in the Burmese dominions, is the concession which the Court of Ava will be disposed above all things to refuse; and the course of future events will evidently turn upon this one point, on which we must insist with a pertinacity, exactly proportioned to the resistance it may encounter.

**ARRANGEMENTS OF THE P. AND O. COMPANY.**  
—The Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company's Steam Ship *Erin*, which vessel it will be recollected took the place of the *Proserpine* on the accident occurring to the latter vessel at Cowoolly during the late Hurricane, may be expected here on the 14th instant, or possibly a day earlier. She will bring news from England down to the 3d November, and it is very probable that she will anticipate the arrival of the London Mail of the 7th November via Marseilles and Bombay, as the earliest arrival of the Bi-monthly in the month of December was in 1846 on the 15th, whereas last year it only reached here on the 18th. This Company's new Screw Steam Ship *Shanghai* started from Southampton for Calcutta on the 22d October, touching at the Cape with important Government despatches. The *Bentuck* having undergone extensive repairs and alterations, is to start from Southampton for Alexandria on the 20th November, with the Overland Passengers for India and China.

The P. and O. Company's Flag were hoisted half mast high on Saturday last, in consequence of intelligence having that morning reached the Agents of the death of Captain Richard Bourne, B.N., one of the Directors of the Company.

**THE NEW BRITISH INDIA ASSOCIATION AND THE POLICE.**—The New British India Association, the establishment of which we announced a week ago, have commenced operations by an attack on the law for the further repression of Dacoity and other crimes in the Lower Provinces, which is now under consideration. In thus directing their first manifesto against an enactment, for which the country has been so long importunate, and the sole object of which is to promote the welfare of the people, we cannot but think that they have committed a serious error, from the effect of which they will not speedily recover. They oppose the Act chiefly on the ground that it may possibly affect the individuals of the class,—that of landholders—of which the Association is principally composed, and, in our humble judgment, they have acted indiscreetly in thus placing their own class interests in opposition to those of the community at large.

It is of course well known, and universally acknowledged, that the crime of dacoity has increased within the last eight or ten years in the Lower Provinces to such an extent, as to render life and property utterly insecure. The remark made by one of the Magistrates, that no man with property of the value of 2 or 300 Rs. retires to rest within a hundred miles of

Figure 2: Front page of the *Friend of India* dated 11th December 1851. The paper's interest in the Anglo-Burmese conflict is evident. In this issue, the editorial with a title 'Rangoon and Burmese affairs' took nearly an entire front page.



So far, we can see the elements and mechanics of the news reporting where opinions of the people working in the newsroom could constitute the politics and, particularly, the views of the newspaper. This thesis views the press in Calcutta as a voice of particular sector of the British community in Bengal. Its views on the Burmese question mainly reflected the notion of the editorial team as well as the interests of the readers and financial supporters that the newspaper aligned itself to. This made the press, as my thesis will demonstrate, an institution of opinion and a representative of diverse British interest groups. It was run by and associated with diverse imperial actors, while, at the same time, being deeply engaged with the right of Britain to expand its sphere of influence into Burma. Thus, it is necessary to investigate the political and cultural factors in the newsroom in order to highlight the subjectivity of news and the role of the press in the British ‘expansionist’ community – the vital element leading to the campaign for intervention via news reporting.

#### Bypassing the Press?: Telegraphy and the growing importance of circulation of official intelligence in the empire

One of the prevalent debates in the literature related to press news reporting is how the telegraph accelerated and energised communication for the newspapers, such as Lucy Brown’s *Victorian News and Newspapers* and Roland Wenzlhuemer’s *Connecting the Nineteenth-Century World: The Telegraph and Globalization*. However, as shown in my thesis, the period of the Third Anglo-Burmese War of 1885 saw the telegraph opening up avenues of speedy communication not just for the press, but also other key players such as officials and merchants. In fact, to a certain extent, it is possible to argue that the increasing reliance on the telegraph even led to a fracture in a nexus between the press and the men on the spot in Burma – as well as the British authorities, particularly in the sharing of information. Such a perspective provides us with a fresh view into British imperial expansion in Burma in 1885, where it is possible to show that it was no longer only the news reporting of the press, but also the private telegraphic communication between

the men on the spot in Burma and the British government in London that created a significant impact on the outcome of events in Burma.

One of the most significant achievements of the technological change was the introduction of the Indo-European telegraph cable in the 1860s and 70s that accelerated the speed of communication between Europe and Asia, while changing the geopolitics of the imperial expansion. Communication time between India and Europe was significantly reduced from weeks and months to a matter of hours. This is a sharp contrast to the pre-telegraph age when the communication between Britain and India was fraught with delays – usually more than six weeks – which prevented the metropole from getting involved in overseas affairs. As Webster argues, the slowness of communication during the first half of the nineteenth century made it impossible for the trading houses in Britain to efficiently control their agents in India.<sup>63</sup> Galbraith and Yapp, as discussed earlier, also highlight how the decision making regarding the affairs of the subcontinent was carried out by the men on the spot with little or no involvement from London.<sup>64</sup>

The uncertainty in colonial affairs became a drive for European governments to develop swift communication that linked them with their overseas dominions. This desire led to the development and extension of the telegraph network in the 1860s and 70s. According to Daniel Headrick, many of the world's telegraph networks were built to 'satisfy the imperialist's demand for improved communication'.<sup>65</sup> Charles Jeurgens also argues that 'time and distance' were the main challenges to the colonial government and they were the main motivations for the improvement of the efficient mode of communication.<sup>66</sup> Thus, it can be argued that the telegraph aided the empire by

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<sup>63</sup> Anthony Webster, 'The Strategies and Limits of Gentlemanly Capitalism: The London East India Agency Houses, Provincial Commercial Interests, and the Evolution of British Economic Policy in South and South East Asia 1800–50,' *Economic History Review* 59 (2006): 760.

<sup>64</sup> Galbraith, 'The "Turbulent Frontier",' 155; Yapp, *Strategies of British India*, 19, 182.

<sup>65</sup> Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tentacles of Progress: Technology Transfer in the Age of Imperialism, 1850–1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 98.

<sup>66</sup> Charles Jeurgens, 'Network of Information: The Dutch East Indies,' in Catia Antunes and Jos Gommans, eds., *Exploring the Dutch Empire: Agents, Networks and Institutions, 1600–2000* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 106.

enabling the authorities and economic interests in the metropole to take control of affairs in the colony more swiftly and efficiently.

The Third Anglo-Burmese War of 1885 is a great example of how the telegraph, when became fully functional, could significantly change the geopolitics of imperial expansion, which saw London taking more control of the decision making. Htin Aung and A. T. Q. Stewart point to the increasing role of the British government in London, principally Lord Randolph Churchill of the India Office, in the Third Burmese War. With the availability of the telegraph, Churchill was regularly informed of the development of the situation in Burma and could direct the policy leading to British intervention and annexation of Upper Burma.<sup>67</sup> Webster also highlights that there were several discussions among the mercantile groups, in particular the Chambers of Commerce throughout Britain, prior to the war. Most communications were carried out using the telegraph, enabling them to make a case for intervention quickly and efficiently.<sup>68</sup> Although the tariff for sending telegrams was expensive – costing 5s per word to send a message from England to India in 1865, though this was reduced to 4s per word in 1886<sup>69</sup>, many business firms and newspapers were willing pay for the service as is evident in the case of the BBTC, the *Englishman* and *The Times of London*.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, the government, commercial firms and newspapers usually received a special rate from the telegraph company.<sup>71</sup>

The majority of the historiography on the news reporting in the age of the telegraph was focused on the state intervention in the flow of information. Many works argue that the financial tie between the authorities and the telegraph company could open ways for the state to monitor and control the flow of telegraphic information. Donald Read and Chandrika Kaul, for

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<sup>67</sup> Maung Htin Aung, *The Stricken Peacock: Anglo-Burmese Relations, 1752-1948* (The Hague: Nijoff, 1965), 160–85; A. T. Q. Stewart, *The Pagoda War: Lord Dufferin and the Fall of the Kingdom of Ava, 1885-6* (London: Faber, 1972), 110–17.

<sup>68</sup> Anthony Webster, 'Business and Empire: A Reassessment of the British Conquest of Burma in 1885,' *The Historical Journal* 43 (2000): 1016–19.

<sup>69</sup> Kaul, *Reporting the Raj*, 34.

<sup>70</sup> *The Times of London*, for example, spent £20,000 every six months on foreign news during the 1870s and 1880s. The number could rise to £33,000 during the wartime. See Lucy Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 233.

<sup>71</sup> Amelia Bonea, 'Telegraphy and Journalism in Colonial India, c.1830s to 1900s: Telegraphy and Journalism in India,' *History Compass* 12 (2014): 393.

example, examine the role of Reuters, the British news agency, in providing telegraphic news to the press and the authorities. Both scholars argue that the receipt of subsidies from the British government transformed Reuters into an institution of the empire.<sup>72</sup> Press censorship and state distribution of official news were another means to control the attitude of the press. In case of India, the Vernacular Press Act of 1878 was passed to control relevant vernacular newspapers. This reflected the interests of the Government of India in monitoring the attitude of the Indian press.<sup>73</sup> Terence Blackburn also notes the censorship imposed by the commander of the expedition forces during the Third Anglo-Burmese War of 1885. All news reports and press telegrams were required to pass through censorship before sending to publication – although news correspondents could still evade this restriction and send full reports to their newspapers, as was the case of *The Times of London*'s coverage of an unrest after the British occupation of Mandalay in 1885.<sup>74</sup>

Seeing minimal impact of state censorship on the news reporting of the Third Burmese War, my thesis will not participate in this debate, but will rather shed light on another significant impact of the telegraph on press' news reporting – the fracture of the press-politics nexus, a factor that had surprisingly escaped the attention of extant literature. As will be shown, it was not just the speed of communication that changed the situation in the Third Anglo-Burmese War, but also the direct communication which enabled critical informants on the spot to communicate directly and swiftly with the government and other imperial actors in London. On the other hand, the press, while enjoying the speed of communication, could found itself disadvantaged because of it. The press was not the only sector which benefitted from the speedy telegraphic communication. The authorities and other sectors, in particular, the mercantile interests, equally enjoyed this mode of

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<sup>72</sup> Donald Read, *The Power of News: The History of Reuters, 1849-1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 40; Kaul, *Reporting the Raj*, 45.

<sup>73</sup> Amelia Bonea, *The News of Empire: Telegraphy, Journalism, and the Politics of Reporting in Colonial India C. 1830-1900* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016), 215.

<sup>74</sup> The report criticised the British military for its inefficiency in suppressing looters and thieves roaming around the town of Mandalay after the British occupation, which greatly angered the commander of the expedition force and resulted in the deportation of *The Times*' correspondent from Upper Burma. See Terence R. Blackburn, *An Ill-Conditioned Cad, Mr. Moylan of The Times* (New Delhi: A.P.H. Pub. Corp, 2002), 22–23.

communication, and could bypass the press with critical information. According to Geoffrey Jones, the telegraph enabled British merchants and trading houses in several cities to communicate directly – reducing, if not eliminating, the role of intermediaries such as the newspapers from the communication.<sup>75</sup> This was a shift in geopolitics from the pre-telegraph age when decision making on either political or economic matters was largely carried out by local men on the spot, while those in the metropole were entirely excluded.

The most significant case of the impact of the telegraph on the geopolitics of British imperial expansion in Burma is the BBTC case in August 1885, in which the mercantile firm used the telegraph to lobby the authorities in London for intervention directly and swiftly. As shown in a collection of telegrams of the Foreign Office, the telegraph enabled the company's agent in Upper Burma to communicate with its owner in London directly. On 11th August and 17th August 1885, the BBTC agents and Wallace Brothers, its owner, telegraphed to the authorities in London, informing them about the threatening decree of the Burmese Court which had accused the company of illegal teak logging. The telegrams highlighted possible damage to the BBTC's business and the British economic interests in Burma as a whole if no action from the British authorities were to be taken.<sup>76</sup> The British authorities in London, Calcutta and Rangoon were able to make use of the telegraph to swiftly lay down the policy on intervention in Upper Burma – leaving the press with little scope of news to manipulate. Following a submission of complaints from the BBTC in August 1885, there were communications within the British authorities in London, Calcutta and Rangoon, which eventually resulted in intervention a few months later.<sup>77</sup>

In many ways, it can be argued that the advent of telegraphy resulted in a relative decline in the press' ability to shape the politics in regard to British

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<sup>75</sup> Geoffrey Jones, *Merchants to Multinationals: British Trading Companies in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 50.

<sup>76</sup> Telegrams from the Bombay-Burmah Trading Corporation to Messrs. Wallace Brothers, 11 August and 17 August 1885, *Relations between France and Burmah*, FO 425/148 (TNA).

<sup>77</sup> A telegram from the Viceroy of India to Lord Randolph Churchill, 24 August 1885, *Relations between France and Burmah*, FO 425/148 (TNA).

imperial expansion in Burma in 1885. As will be shown in the thesis, the telegraph had brought diverse imperial actors from both the periphery and the metropole into a collaboration – paving the way for British intervention. While the British authorities in London, Calcutta and Rangoon were discussing the severity of the BBTC case via the telegraph, these state communications were not in the knowledge of the press. The earliest coverage of the BBTC was published by the press around mid-September 1885, a month after the incident occurred.<sup>78</sup> Looking at the official telegrams, we can see that the British authorities seemed to be concerned about the sensitivity of the Anglo-Burmese conflict following the BBTC case and wished to keep their communications regarding of the government's handling of the event out of public attention. The Marquess of Dufferin, the Viceroy of India (1884–88), even made a remark that he hoped to complete the preparation for military intervention in Burma swiftly 'before public attention was called to the matter'.<sup>79</sup> As will be shown in Chapter 5, the preferred swiftness in the process of decision making was made possible by the telegraph. The complexity of official communication in the age of the telegraph, where the intermediate sectors, in particular the newspapers, could easily be bypassed will be brought into the spotlight in this thesis.

The telegraph did not only enable the authorities and mercantile interests in Britain to participate in British intervention in Upper Burma in 1885, but it also opened up wider avenues of communications to metropolitan newspapers, changing the geopolitics of news reporting. With the modern mode of communication becoming fully functional by the time of the Burmese war of 1885, newspapers in Britain, like the British government, were, as will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 5, able to gain access to latest news about Burma, which enabled them to swiftly and efficiently get involved in the campaign for British intervention in Upper Burma – the privilege that was

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<sup>78</sup> 'Latest Telegrams – An Alleged Franco-Burmese Treaty,' *Englishman*, 21 September 1885, 4; 'Latest Telegrams – Upper Burma and the Government of India,' *Englishman*, 22 September 1885, 4.

<sup>79</sup> A telegram from the Viceroy of India to Lord Randolph Churchill, 1 November 1885, *Papers of Lord Randolph Churchill*, Add MS 9248/9 (CUL).

once held by the Calcutta press at the time of the Second Burmese War of 1852.

At the time of the Third Burmese War, metropolitan newspapers such as *The Times of London*, the *Graphic*, the *Illustrated London News (ILN)* and the *Manchester Guardian* could use the telegraph network that linked Burma and India with Britain to receive direct communication from Burma. As will be shown in Chapter 3, these newspapers, particularly the *Graphic* and the *ILN* were able to join their counterparts in Calcutta in producing instant coverage of the Anglo-Burmese conflict of 1885 as well as expressing their advocacy for British intervention.

What had changed since the telegraph came into operation was that the British authorities in various locations could be connected directly via the wire. The case of the Third Burmese War suggests that geographical distances were eliminated because intelligence from local informants in Burma could now be transmitted directly to receivers with not regard to their location. Access to local news sources in Burma was also increased, as can be seen from the ability of the metropolitan authorities in receiving direct and speedy communication from the imperial agent in peripheral Burma. This change greatly enabled the authorities to lay down the policy on Burma more efficiently than before, with it taking only three months from the BBTC case in August 1885 to the conclusion of the war in late November the same year.

In conclusion, my thesis highlights the complexity of the British imperial expansion in Burma which involved several actors, including the press and its network of information. It will emphasise the dynamics in the news reporting in which the press' editor and local informants in Burma had made use of news to promote and legitimate the Anglo-Burmese Wars in 1852 and 1885. By examining how the press conducted the news reporting of Burma, we can see that the making of Burma's news was a significantly multilateral affair. The role of the press in being a platform for intelligence from local British residents in Burma ensured that their information was able to reach wider audiences beyond Burma. Crucially, contributions from local informants in supplying information significantly enabled the press to carry

out and escalate its campaign for British intervention. The approach therefore suggests that while there was no monolithic force in British imperial expansion, the press should be regarded as one of the key actors in the making of the British Empire in Burma.

### Structure of the thesis

In the five chapters, my thesis will examine three particular issues relating to the news reporting of the Second and Third Burmese Wars: first, the role of the press and its network of information that made it an active imperial agent; secondly, the politics played out by the press in its campaign for intervention; and thirdly, the impact of technology of communication on the press' news reporting – particularly, its campaign for British imperial expansion in Burma.

My thesis begins with an examination of the role of the press as an institution of opinion. Chapter 1 takes six newspapers – four Bengal-based papers: the *Englishman*, the *Friend of India*, the *Hurkaru* and the *Statesman*; and two Britain-based papers: *The Times of London* and the *Manchester Guardian* – into investigation. It will shed light on the diversity of the newspapers' opinions on the imperial affairs which were shaped to a significant degree by political stances of the people in the newsroom and the community that the papers represented. Despite giving my main emphasis on newspapers in Bengal and Britain, local newspapers in Burma also find a place in this study through their presence in the Calcutta press. During the 1850s copies of English newspapers operating in Burma were usually shipped to India, while extracts of news articles were also republished by the press in Calcutta. By examining the coverage of Burma in the Calcutta press, it is still possible for us to gain a glimpse of how the Burmese question was reported locally in Burma. This is particularly useful because the available collection of Burma-based newspapers at the British Library – for example, the *Maulmain Chronicles* and the *Rangoon Times* – does not cover the period of study.

Chapter 2 looks further into the collaboration between the press and the British mercantile community in the news reporting of the Anglo-Burmese



Wars. Following the withdrawal of the British Residency from the Burmese Court in 1840 and 1879, the press became the medium for local British merchants in Burma for the pushing of British mercantile interests in Burma. The supply of intelligence from the merchant to the press, as my thesis contends, provided the newspapers with crucial information to campaign for British intervention.

Chapter 3 focuses on newspapers' representation of the 'despotic' Burmese rulers and their capability to find the justification for British imperial expansion in Burma. The investigation will uncover the cultural representation of Burma and the Burmese authorities against the British heroism and civilising mission. This will shed light on the subjectivity of the news reporting of the Anglo-Burmese Wars where each newspaper offered its own interpretation of the Burmese despotism, which resulted in the constructed duality of a 'barbarian' Burmese and 'civilised' British. As will be shown, this rhetoric became the main thrust for the press' campaign for the Second and Third Burmese Wars.

The remaining two chapters focus on the making of Burma's news. This analysis will determine how crucial elements of news reporting, principally the opinions of the press and the availability of information related to the affairs in Burma, could constitute the press' political campaign for British intervention. Focusing on the Second Burmese War of 1852, Chapter 4 investigates how news became a political platform for the press to advocate British imperial expansion in Burma. With the supply of intelligence from local informants in Burma, the press, particularly the expansionist papers, obtained substantial evidence that could be used in support of the campaign for intervention.

Chapter 5 will demonstrate two particular issues in the news reporting of Burma in the age of the telegraph. First, while some literature, such as Brown's *Victorian News and Newspapers* and Deep Kanta Lahiri Choudhury's *Telegraphic Imperialism*, contend that the telegraph modernised the news-making process by filtering out sensational opinions from actual

news<sup>80</sup>, this chapter argues that the news coverage on the Third Burmese War of 1885 is an exception. As will be shown, the telegraph did not change the nature of news and information, which still primarily originated from local mercantile communities in Burma who had long campaigned for British intervention. Secondly, this chapter will examine the impact of telegraphy on the fracture of the press-politics nexus during the Third Burmese War. Direct communication created by the telegraph enabled the British authorities in various locations, such as London, Calcutta, and Rangoon, to work together in leading Britain to the conquest of Burma. However, the press found itself excluded from this internal official discussion, which leaving it with little scope of news to manipulate – and to influence politics of British imperial expansion in Burma.

### Sources

In terms of the primary sources, my thesis is based on the collections of English newspapers printed in Bengal during 1851–53 and 1885. The main Calcutta newspapers that my thesis heavily focuses on are the *Englishman*, the *Friend of India*, the *Hurkaru* and the *Statesman*. This is due to their significant interests in the Anglo-Burmese conflicts and their diverse and contrasting background, which, as this thesis will demonstrate, shaped their outlook on the Burmese question. Moreover, in order to highlight how the Burmese question was considered by the metropole, my thesis also brings in an analysis of selected newspapers in Britain such as the *Manchester Guardian*, the *Graphic* and the *Illustrated London News* – although the main focus will be placed on *The Times of London*, which was able to provide a substantial coverage on the two Burmese wars in 1852 and 1885.

Official documents are another crucial category that this thesis has closely examined, including important collections of telegrams belonging to the Foreign Office and the War Offices. The *Papers of Lord Randolph*

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<sup>80</sup> Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers*, 228; Deep Kanta Lahiri Choudhury, *Telegraphic Imperialism: Crisis and Panic in the Indian Empire, c.1830* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 113.

*Churchill* collected at the Cambridge University Library (CUL) offered crucial insights into the consultation occurring between the metropolitan government and the authorities in India British Burma prior to the Third Burmese War. Accounts of the BBTC's business in Upper Burma – collected at the Guildhall Library, but can be consulted via the London Metropolitan Archives (LMA) – helped explain why the BBTC was so concerned about the Burmese legal case against it in August 1885.

At the Liverpool Central Library, I gained an opportunity to consult a copy of the private minute of Lord Dalhousie, the Governor General of India (1848–56), which provides increased understanding of the government of India's perception on the Second Burmese War. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, this document offers quite a different perspective when compared to what had been reported in the press at the time. The online archive of the *Parliamentary Papers and Correspondence* also provides us with a broader picture of how the Anglo-Burmese conflicts in the early 1850s and 1885 were considered by policy-makers in Britain.

## **Chapter 1: An Institution of Opinion: The Press and the Second and Third Anglo-Burmese Wars**

The press news reporting, as this chapter demonstrates, represents the political motivations and cultural roots of the newspapers – or, to be precise, of the people involved in the production of news, particularly news editors, columnists and proprietors. These internal factors play a crucial role in shaping the direction and tone of news reporting, while also establishing a unique voice or political stance of their papers. The variety of newspapers' opinions and well as the dynamics in news reporting are evident in the press coverage of the Anglo-Burmese Wars of 1852 and 1885. Of all the newspapers selected for analysis in this chapter, each of them had reported the relevant news in distinctly different manners and angles, reflecting opinions and interests of particular interest groups such as missionaries, merchants and Indian philanthropists. The dynamics in news reporting where news can be regarded as an opinion piece will be highlighted.

The operation of the press is rather complex because it not only publishes the news piece, but also, at the very same time, has to make itself saleable. Historians have highlighted the volatile environment that a newspaper press operated in mainly due to stiff competition and high operational costs for materials, such as papers, inks and printing machines. In his multi-volume book on the history of the English newspapers in Bengal from the late eighteenth century onwards, Mrinal Kanti Chanda highlights the press' reliance on external financial support from advertisers and subscribers, which was unpredictable and could change over time. This circumstance, as he shows, forced several papers out of business.<sup>1</sup> To operate successfully, Ulrike Stark suggests the three crucial pillars of the press' operation: first, state patronage, notably by government subscriptions; secondly, incomes from subscribers and advertisers; and thirdly, a strong editorial team to lead the

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<sup>1</sup> Mrinal Kanti Chanda, *History of the English Press in Bengal, 1780–1857* (Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi & Co., 1987), 465–66.

paper's point of view.<sup>2</sup> Stark's statement points to contributions from 'the people' both from within the newsroom and external factors in the running of the newspaper.

Taking from Stark's work, this chapter proposes a new three-pillar structure of the press' operation during the Anglo-Burmese Wars. It will demonstrate that the press' news reporting required: first, the editorial team to shape the direction of the news; secondly, loyal readerships and advertisers; and thirdly, the ability to obtain information to fill the columns. This approach would provide us with a more complex picture of the news reporting with an interplay of diverse factors, both internal and external. The editorial team undoubtedly holds responsibility in the formation of the press' political view. Personal opinions of editors could shape the way in which the news was presented. However, to be financially sustainable, the press was also required to seek loyal customers, either subscribers or advertisers, who ideally shared identical political and economic views. The capability to back up opinion and stance on any particular event with evidence and information was also crucial in order to form a constructive and convincing news coverage. Bringing every factor together, this chapter argues that the press should be considered to be a public functionary for particular interest groups within the diverse British community. In the case of the news coverage of the Anglo-Burmese Wars, the newspapers, in particular the expansionist ones, had unofficially proclaimed themselves active imperial agents, while using news to represent a vested interest of their imperialist readers and supporters in British imperial expansion in Burma.

Historians have pointed out how personal opinions of editors could shape the character and political stance of individual newspapers. The role of editors in shaping the politics of the news reporting has been mentioned by Dorothy O. Helly and Helen Callaway in the case of Flora Shaw, a 'colonial editor' for *The Times of London*, during the South African War of 1899–1902. Shaw was a firm believer of the British rule in Egypt and her role as the colonial editor for *The Times* enabled her to become an active political

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<sup>2</sup> Ulrike Stark, *An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2009), 353–54.

advocate of the British imperial expansion in South Africa.<sup>3</sup> Helly and Callaway give us an impression of how Shaw infused her political attitude into her news piece. Not only did she emphasise British supremacy in the region, but she also politically attacked the Dutch-controlled South African Republic (or Transvaal), particularly for its hostile attitude towards the Uitlanders – foreign migrant workers, mainly the British. This became the main point in her coverage in which she supported the British political intervention in Transvaal.<sup>4</sup> This suggests that the news reporting was not simply a summary of the event, but rather a political agenda generated and stimulated by those who wrote it.

Another aspect in the news reporting that this chapter will elaborate on is the role of the press in being a news platform for their financial supporters – in particular subscribers and advertisers. Since financial support from external parties was vital to the operation of the press – although it was unpredictable and could be changeable at any time – it became a challenge to the editorial team and proprietors in representing and reinforcing the interests of their supporters through news reporting. In *Social Ideas and Social Change in Bengal, 1818–1835*, A. F. Salahuddin Ahmed shows us a diverse list of newspaper subscribers in Bengal ranging from civil servants, mercantile classes, military and religious groups.<sup>5</sup> They gave their support for the press, expecting that it would, in return, provide news and views that were suitable to their interests.<sup>6</sup> Examining the business side of the newspapers in England during 1760–1820, Victoria E. M. Gardner contends that the influence from the community the press positioned itself in could cumulatively shape the scope of the news. The editors and proprietors of the newspapers, as she highlights, acted as mediators in the ‘communication circuits’ in bringing news and information to their readers. At the same time, the supporters of the press, in particular, readers and advertisers, were also allowed to offer

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<sup>3</sup> Dorothy O. Helly and Helen Callaway, ‘Journalism as active politics: Flora Shaw, *The Times* and South Africa,’ in Donal Lowry, ed., *The South African War Reappraised* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 51.

<sup>4</sup> Helly and Callaway, ‘Journalism as active politics,’ in Lowry, ed., *The South African War Reappraised*, 60–61.

<sup>5</sup> A. F. Salahuddin, Ahmed, *Social Ideas and Social Change in Bengal 1818–1835*, (Calcutta: Rddhi, 1976), 83.

<sup>6</sup> Ahmed, *Social Ideas and Social Change in Bengal*, 8, 68.

feedback, which could potentially influence future editions.<sup>7</sup> By considering the press as a platform for specific interest groups, this chapter will investigate the role of the newspapers in catering news and views that represented the interests of its supporters.

The ability to obtain information was also crucial in the formation of news reporting, particularly in the case of news coverage of the Anglo-Burmese Wars. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, a lack of official sources of information in Burma prior to the Second and Third Burmese Wars became a challenge to newspapers in Bengal and Britain. They were forced to rely on intelligence which mainly originated from local British mercantile classes in Burma, who actively advocated for British intervention. This activity made that kind of intelligence questionable in nature. For example, C. A. Bayly is concerned that the overreliance on non-official sources could result in a misjudgement of the situation in Burma.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, this chapter argues that the press took advantage of this situation and made the most of the kind of news being obtainable. It depended on how the editors could make use of the scarce intelligence to reinforce their opinions on the Burmese question. As will be discussed in the fourth section of this chapter on the news coverage of the Anglo-Burmese Wars in the metropolitan press, despite their difficulties in obtaining news and information of the Anglo-Burmese conflict in the early 1850s, newspapers in Britain were able to bring in alternative information – either an old knowledge of Burma or extracts from other newspapers – to form the coverage as well as their stance on the event.

This chapter is divided into four sections, and will take the news coverage of the Anglo-Burmese Wars in six newspapers in both Bengal and Britain into investigation. First, the chapter examines the politics behind news reporting in which personal opinions of editors and proprietors significantly contributed to the constitution of news. This investigation will be conducted through the analysis of the *Englishman* and the *Friend of India*, both of which represented and were run by different interest groups in the British community

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<sup>7</sup> Victoria E. M. Gardner, *The Business of News in England, 1760–1820* (Berkshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 5–6.

<sup>8</sup> C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 127.

in Bengal, particularly the mercantile classes and the missionaries. Secondly, this chapter examines more closely the operation of the *Englishman* in order to illustrate how the newspaper acted as a platform for specific readerships and supporters – in this case, the mercantile community. Thirdly, this chapter will shift its focus to the operation of the *Hurkaru* and the *Statesman*, daily newspapers in Calcutta and direct competitors to the *Englishman*. Both papers were run by English editors who had a close tie with Indian aristocrats and merchants, while also having interests in local affairs of India, in particular, the social and educational reform. This section will investigate the position of these two newspapers in imperial politics, in particular the case of the Anglo-Burmese Wars. As we shall see later, their political stance on the Burmese question was different from other dominant British-run newspapers that advocated for British intervention. The extent to which their politics impacted their subsequent news reporting will be investigated as well. Finally, the last section focuses on Burma's news in the Britain-based newspapers: *The Times of London* and the *Manchester Guardian*. It will examine the manner in which the press in the metropole conducted news reporting on the affair on the opposite side of the world, particularly the way it used intelligence related to Burma to make news coverage. Overall, this chapter aims to show that news about Burma during this period can and should essentially be read as opinion pieces.

#### Tastes and Interests: The role of editors in the constitution of news and opinions

In making the news attractive and saleable, each newspaper put significant effort into not only the publication of the news per se, but also offered interpretations and discussions of the matters at hand. Apart from the news column, the newspaper also had a specific section – the editorial – where the editorial team could voice their opinions or make comment regarding any particular event. Crucially, this particular section became where the political stance of the newspaper was constructed, setting the tone and direction of news reporting. Focusing on the news coverage of the Second Anglo-Burmese



War of 1852 in the *Englishman*, and the *Friend of India*, the section will demonstrate that the editor of each newspaper had full capacity in establishing the direction and tone of the news reporting. In doing so, this section will shed light on the diversity in the newspapers' nature – which was significantly shaped by the political and cultural 'roots' of the people involved in the production of news.

As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, a number of historians have worked on how expansionist newspapers campaigned for British intervention in Burma. Focusing on the Second Burmese War of 1852, Oliver B. Pollak names several English newspapers in Bengal, namely the *Englishman*, the *Friend of India* and the *Hurkaru*, all of which were interested in the idea of British intervention in Burma and became advocates for it.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Anthony Webster contends that most of the press in Calcutta, principally the *Friend of India*, joined with the British mercantile classes in pressuring the authorities to adopt an interventionist policy with respect to Burma.<sup>10</sup> However, what this chapter found problematic is the fact that none of these works have explored how the politics behind press news reporting actually worked. In this section, the main focus will be placed onto how newspapers' opinions were formed and the crucial role that the editorial team played in the constitution of news – and views.

Beginning with the cases of the *Englishman* and the *Friend of India* – which have been labelled as being pro-British and expansionist papers, this section contends that their contrasting background and position in society crucially made their coverage on Burma distinctly different. Julie F. Codell contends that the newspapers in India represented a complex and wide-ranging 'spectrum of voices', and were not politically and ideologically monolithic.<sup>11</sup> Returning to the *Englishman* and the *Friend of India*, both papers have, as mentioned previously, been considered by historians to be vocal advocates of

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<sup>9</sup> Oliver B. Pollak, *Empires in Collision: Anglo-Burmese Relations in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980), 92.

<sup>10</sup> Anthony Webster, *Gentleman Capitalists: British Imperialism in Southeast Asia, 1770-1890* (New York: I.B.Tauris, 1998), 152.

<sup>11</sup> Julie F. Codell, 'Introduction: The Nineteenth-Century News from India,' *Victorian Periodicals Review* 37 (2004): 107.

British imperial expansion in Burma. However, as we shall see below, each of them represented and were run by two distinct interests group within the British society in India.

The case of the *Friend of India* provides evidence of how the personal background of editors crucially came into play during news reporting. Its history was closely associated with the Serampore Baptist Mission – which apparently shaped the way the news was reported. The paper was founded as a monthly magazine in 1818 – then functioning as a weekly newspaper from 1835 onwards – by Reverend Joshua Marshman and Reverend John Clark Marshman, his son. According to Thomas Hamilton, the *Friend of India* became a tool which the Serampore missionaries used in promoting humanitarian works of the Mission and introducing Western learning to the Indians.<sup>12</sup> John Marshman, who acted as the editor from 1835 to 1852 was, as G. C. Boase put it, significantly devoted to the idea of educational reform, which he regarded as a forerunner of Christianity. In this sense, he strongly considered the British rule in India to be providential, particularly to the benefit of the Indians.<sup>13</sup>

By examining the format of the *Friend of India* during the early 1850s, the paper significantly placed more emphasis on the editorial, where the opinions and views of the paper were combined with the actual news per se. Operating as a weekly newspaper during the period of study, each issue of the *Friend of India* contained 16 pages, and costing two rupees per month.<sup>14</sup> The role of the *Friend of India* seemed not to be a simple news sheet similar to its contemporary daily newspapers. It was impossible for the paper to provide its readers with the instant news coverage that other daily papers did. Rather, it provided the readership with more intensely critical news reporting, mainly in

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas Hamilton, 'Marshman, Joshua (1768–1837), orientalist and missionary,' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-18163?rskey=wKVWwy&result=5> (accessed 8 July 2018).

<sup>13</sup> G. C. Boase, 'Marshman, John Clark (1794–1877), journalist and historian,' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 25 May 2006, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e18162?rskey=wKVWwy&result=4> (accessed 8 July 2018).

<sup>14</sup> Robertson and Co., *Bengal Almanac, Companions, and the Book of Direction for 1853* (Calcutta: N. Robertson and Co., 1853), 167.

the form of a critique and analytical investigation. Thus, the selling point of the *Friend of India* was not limited only to the news it reported, but also included the opinions, interpretations and analysis of that news provided by the editorial team. This structure enabled the *Friend of India* to fulfil its role as a missionary organ in promoting social reform, education and, particularly, its views on British rule.

As shown in the introduction to this thesis, the *Friend of India* would, in every issue, begin with a lengthy editorial – a different format of news reporting compared to other newspapers selected for this study, as we shall see below. Normally, approximately six to seven pages were devoted to the editorial, providing the editor with sufficient space to publish news, while also making comments on any particular event. In some cases, particularly in its news coverage of the Second Burmese War, one article in the editorial could take nearly two pages, a considerably large proportion of the entire newspaper (See Figure 2).<sup>15</sup> For example, after receiving reports in regard to the Rangoon governor's alleged mistreatment of Captain Harold Lewis, the *Friend of India* published a full-page editorial on the event on 13 November 1851, attacking the Burmese authorities for their violation of the Treaty of Yandabo (1826) that ensured the safety of the British subjects. The same article also criticised the government of India for its non-interventionist policy, while arguing that the war with Burma would be finished quicker than the previous one, but would give Britain 'ten times more advantages'.<sup>16</sup> Thus, within a single report, the *Friend of India* made a firm stance on the event – that the British had a right to intervene in Burma and that Britain would receive valuable benefits if the occupation of Burma was pursued.

Following the editorial section the *Friend of India* would, then, publish a series of intelligence sections, such as the 'Weekly Epitome News', where extracts of news articles – either editorials or intelligence – from the contemporary papers were printed, 'Original Correspondence', 'Government

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<sup>15</sup> For example, accounts by military officers on the British expedition to Burma were published at length – in some cases, spanning for nearly two pages. See 'Fall of Martaban and Rangoon,' *Friend of India*, 29 April 1852, 273–75.

<sup>16</sup> 'The Conduct of the Burmese Governor at Rangoon,' *Friend of India*, 13 November 1851, 721–22.

Notification’ and a designated section for extracts of news from the press in Europe. This format of news reporting in placing the editorial at the beginning of every issue enabled the *Friend of India* to state its stance on any particular event firmly since news and opinions of the editorial team were entirely intermingled.

Moving to the *Englishman*, the paper’s principle and operation were completely different to that of the *Friend of India*. Operated as a daily newspaper – with a rate of subscription of eight rupees per month – the *Englishman* deeply positioned itself in the British mercantile community in Calcutta. There are few records mentioning the name of the editors of *The Englishman*, a practice which seemed to be common for the newspapers during this period for keeping information and names of editors and proprietors undisclosed.<sup>17</sup> However, we know that the editorship of the *Englishman* during the Second Burmese War of 1852 was at the hand of William Cobb Hurry, a merchant and trading agent, who took the position in 1842.<sup>18</sup> According to Chanda, Hurry had transformed the politics of the paper to be more pro-British, while also drawing readerships and subscribers from the mercantile classes, such as merchants, clerks, indigo planters and brokers.<sup>19</sup>

Apart from the background of W. C. Hurry which was admittedly scarce, the investigation of the news content and the format of the *Englishman* can still provide us with a hint of the paper’s popularity among the dominant mercantile community in Calcutta. Considering newspapers, in general, to be political enterprises, Kevin G. Barnhurst and John Nerone argue that the content of news and every printed piece of information, either intelligence or advertisements, was carefully ‘tailored’ for target readerships, an approach which may indicate the political motivation of that particular newspaper.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Englishman* once had a dispute with its contemporary, the *Hurkaru*, after revealing the name of its proprietor. See Editorial, *Englishman*, 24 January 1852, 2. See also Chanda, *History of the English Press in Bengal, 1858–1880*, 233.

<sup>18</sup> Francis Watts, *The London Gazette for Year 1843*, Part 2 (London: Francis Watts, 1843), 1747.

<sup>19</sup> Chanda, *History of the English Press in Bengal, 1780–1857*, 171–72; Chanda, *History of the English Press in Bengal, 1858–1880*, 10.

<sup>20</sup> Kevin G. Barnhurst and John C. Nerone, *The Form of News: A History* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2001), 68, 106.

This statement can be applied to the analysis of the *Englishman*, which, as this chapter contends, was significantly trade-oriented. In the 1850s, each issue of the *Englishman* contained four pages, with one page – or two, in some cases – being reserved specifically for advertisements by commercial houses and intelligence related to commerce and banking, such as the movement of ships, market prices and insurance rates. As we shall see in the next section, the *Englishman* presented itself as a news platform for economic interests in Calcutta in which news and data were specially catered for them.

Despite their different background, both newspapers became strong advocates for British imperial expansion in Burma at the middle of the nineteenth century. The incident at Rangoon in the summer of 1851, when two British merchants, Captain Sheppard and Captain Lewis, were involved in disputes with the governor of Rangoon, intensified the conflict between British traders and the Burmese authorities. The event became the starting point of the newspapers' advocacy for British intervention in which the *Englishman* and the *Friend of India* took the lead. The economic benefits of imperial expansion were advocated by both papers. For example, the *Englishman* considered the annexation of Burma to be a crucial policy which would give Britain a new productive field and hub of commerce.<sup>21</sup> This idea was also shared by the *Friend of India*, which saw the rich natural resources in Burma beneficial to the growing British commerce in Asia.<sup>22</sup>

What made the news coverage in *Friend of India* stand out from the *Englishman* is the idea of the British civilising mission to liberate local inhabitants in Burma from the 'despotic' Burmese rule. Evidently from April 1852 onwards, the *Friend of India* argued that as a leading nation 'in arts, in civilisation, and in every religious privilege,' it was the responsibility of the British to introduce Western civilisation to the people of Burma.<sup>23</sup> The paper contended that the population of Pegu or Lower Burma had shown their desire to be under British rule.<sup>24</sup> The rapid success of the British occupation of

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<sup>21</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 4 June 1852, 2.

<sup>22</sup> 'Rangoon and the Burmese Affairs,' *Friend of India*, 11 December 1851, 785.

<sup>23</sup> 'The Factory Swelled to a Kingdom; The Kingdom Swelled to an Empire,' *Friend of India*, 6 January 1853, 1–3.

<sup>24</sup> 'Burmese Affairs,' *Friend of India*, 1 April 1852, 209.

Martaban and Rangoon after the commencement of the Second Burmese War in April 1852 was presented as a proof of this desire. On 3 June 1852, the editorial made a claim that there was ‘no country which we have ever entered before have the inhabitants been so ready to receive us, and so eager to transfer their allegiance to us, and to obtain our protection.’<sup>25</sup> The ‘mild and equitable’ British rule would definitely attract a large ‘industrious population’ of Burma, transforming the country into a new market of commerce.<sup>26</sup>

The politics of news reporting presented by of the *Englishman* and the *Friend of India* was mainly connected with political and cultural roots of the editorial team and the diverse communities they represented, mercantile classes and missionaries, respectively. Although they were vocal advocates for British intervention in Burma, my examination highlights that the two papers presented news in different ways – and from a contrasting angle. Being run by and associated with distinct interest groups, the news reporting in each newspaper rather reflected the politics and shared ideas between the people working in the newsroom and the communities that the papers positioned themselves in. In the next section, this chapter will further explore the role of the *Englishman* in being the news platform for the British mercantile community in Calcutta. This investigation will shed light on one prominent example of a complex set of external and internal factors that shaped the direction of news reporting – and the politics of the newspaper.

#### News as a Business: The role of the *Englishman* as a platform of news for British economic interests

One issue that arose from the examination of the *Englishman*’s news coverage of the Anglo-Burmese is the paper’s interest in the growing British economy and commerce in India and the surrounding region. As mentioned previously, the paper’s content and format of news suggest that the paper was deeply embedded in the mercantile community in Calcutta. The *Englishman*,

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<sup>25</sup> ‘Burmah,’ *Friend of India*, 3 June 1852, 353–54.

<sup>26</sup> ‘Burmah,’ *Friend of India*, 13 May 1852, 305; ‘Burmah,’ *Friend of India*, 3 June 1852, 353–54.

as this section demonstrates, was read among merchants and mercantile groups, while it could also draw advertisements from them. This circumstance significantly shaped the direction of news reporting in the *Englishman*. Thus, apart from being run by the mercantile interests – W. C. Hurry and J.O'B. Saunders, its editors during the 1840s–50s, were merchants themselves – the paper also positioned itself as a platform of news where the interests of this particular group were presented and elaborated upon.

The nexus between the press and the merchant has been identified by historians. In *The Invention of News: How the World Came to Know about Itself*, Andrew Pettegree highlights that the merchants had been one of the first consumers of news, even prior to print culture being developed in the fifteenth century.<sup>27</sup> Because of the unpredictable nature of their business, it was critical for them to obtain crucial and reliable pieces of information, which became the decisive factor in determining the fate of their businesses.<sup>28</sup> This scenario became the foundation of close ties between merchants and newspapers – principally in the form of subscriptions and advertisements.

Advertising, in particular, was crucial to the development of provincial newspapers since it provided the press with a substantial income, allowing the news publication to be viable. Chanda claims that the income from the selling of advertorial space enabled the nineteenth-century newspapers in India to operate sustainably. He refers to the remark of the *Calcutta Star* in 1846 which notes that no newspaper in India 'could possibly pay its own expense even, much less, make a profit' unless it got support from the advertisers.<sup>29</sup> Victoria E.M. Gardner, in her work on the provincial newspaper in Britain, shared similar views. She highlights that the selling of spaces to advertisers became the priority of editors and proprietors because this approach could ensure the survival of their papers.<sup>30</sup> In return, the newspapers, as Pettegree contends, sought to impress the advertisers by their wider circulation and readerships. At the same time, it became a practice for the press since the eighteenth century

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<sup>27</sup> Andrew Pettegree, *The Invention of News: How the World Came to Know about Itself* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2015), 42–43.

<sup>28</sup> Pettegree, *The Invention of News*, 46–47.

<sup>29</sup> Chanda, *History of the English Press in Bengal, 1780–1857*, 465–66.

<sup>30</sup> Gardner, *The Business of News in England, 1760–1820*, 47–67.

to place advertisements at the front pages, instead of at the end, to ensure that their information could reach a wider clientele.<sup>31</sup>

Taking cue from Pettegree's statement, this chapter will demonstrate that apart from ensuring advertisers of wider circulations and readerships, the news coverage and intelligence were another platform where the press could impress their external supporters. A closer examination of the *Englishman*'s operation in the early 1850s and 1885 reveals how the paper placed the interests of the mercantile groups at the heart of its operation. Like many nineteenth-century newspapers, the *Englishman* reserved its front pages for lists of advertisements and commercial intelligence. According to Amelia Bonea, it was common for the nineteenth century newspapers to publish 'Shipping Intelligence' and advertisements on the front page, highlighting the role of the newspapers as a conveyor of not just news but also crucial information, principally of commercial importance, to their readership.<sup>32</sup> However, what distinguished the *Englishman* from others selected newspapers for this study is the content of intelligence as well as groups of advertisers which dominantly represented the mercantile interests.

Being a daily newspaper, the role of the *Englishman* was to provide its readership with crucial and latest information, particularly intelligence related to commerce – not purely the weekly summary of news and afterthought as was being reported in the *Friend of India*. Having four pages per issue in the 1850s, the *Englishman* reserved the entire front page for lists of departing and arriving ships to and from various places, such as London and Moulmein, announcements from banking and insurance companies, market prices of important goods and, also, advertisements (See Figure 3). In some events, this kind of information could expand into page two. From mid-1883 onwards, the *Englishman* enlarged each issue to eight pages, while also increasing the number of pages reserved for advertisements and commercial intelligence to, at least, three.

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<sup>31</sup> Pettegree, *The Invention of News*, 304–6.

<sup>32</sup> Amelia Bonea, *The News of Empire: Telegraphy, Journalism, and the Politics of Reporting in Colonial India C. 1830-1900* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016), 275–76.



A closer examination of the advertisers suggests that many of them were trading enterprises, in particular steamship operators and banking companies – some of them had interests in Burma. For example, the *Englishman* received an advertisement from the British India Steam Navigation Co. (BISN) which operated regular steamships to Rangoon and Moulmein since the 1860s (See Figure 4). This evidence reinforces the fact that the *Englishman* was a platform for British economic interests in India and the surrounding region.

In contrast to the *Friend of India*, which, as mentioned earlier, entirely infused the news with opinion-based editorial, the *Englishman* had a designated section of both editorial and intelligence. News regarding internal affairs of India as well as overseas intelligence were reported by the *Englishman* with significant enthusiasm. Taking a look at the paper's intelligence section, it is possible to see how it had another task in monitoring British interests in not only Calcutta, but also in various places, such as Madras, Bombay and Burma. This interest of the *Englishman* coincided with the rapid expansion of the British political and economic position in this region. In the early 1850s and 1885, the paper regularly published intelligence from Burma, narrating the development of the Anglo-Burmese conflicts during the two periods (See Figure 5).

Figure 3: Advertisements and commercial intelligence printed on the front page of the *Englishman* on 1st January 1852

**BRITISH INDIA STEAM  
NAVIGATION CO., Ltd.**

**T**HE following are the movements of the Company's  
Steamers during December 1885:—

**From Calcutta**

For Rangoon and Moulmein, returning *via* Ran-  
goon, 8rd, 10th, 17th and 24th December.  
For Chittagong, Akyab, Kyouk Phyoo, Sandoway and  
Rangoon, returning *via* same ports, 8rd, 10th, 17th,  
and 24th December.

**For Coast Ports and Bombay.**

The Company occasionally despatches steamers to  
such ports as may be agreed upon. Intended dates of  
departure and particulars can be ascertained on applica-  
tion to the undersigned.

**From Madras**

For Rangoon, calling at Masulipatam, Cocoonada,  
Vizagapatam and Bimlipatam, returning *via* same ports,  
2nd, 10th and 20th December.

**From Rangoon**

For Moulmein, Tavoy River and Mergui, 1st, 15th and  
19th December.

**From Bombay**

For Kurrachee direct, 7th, 14th, 21st and 28th De-  
cember.

For Kurrachee *via* Coast Ports, 4th, 11th, 18th and  
25th December.

For Kurrachee, Gwadar, Muscat, Jask, Bunder Ab-  
bas, Linga, Busheer, Fao, and Busreh, 14th and 28th  
December.

For Kurrachee, Bunder Abbas, Linga, Bahrein,  
Busheer, Fao, and Busreh, 7th and 21st December.

For Mozambique, calling at Aden, Lamoo, Mombassa,  
Zanzibar, Kilwakivinjee, Lindi, and Ibo, returning *via*  
same ports, 7th December.

**From Busreh**

For Bombay, calling at same ports as the Steamers  
from Bombay, 4th, 12th, 19th and 26th December.

**MACKINNON, MACKENZIE & Co.,**  
*Managing Agents, Calcutta.*

*Agents at Bombay—Messrs. MACKINNON, MACKEN-  
ZIE & Co.*

*Agents at Madras—Messrs. BINNY & Co.*

*Agents at Kurrachee—Messrs. MACKINNON, MACKEN-  
ZIE & Co.*

*Agents at Rangoon—Messrs. BULLOCK BROTHERS & Co.*  
1885

Figure 4: An advertisement from the British India Steam Navigation Co. (BISN) in the *Englishman* (1 December 1885, 1)

Figure 5: Part of intelligence section in the *Englishman* (1 January 1852, 3)

The case of the Anglo-Burmese Wars provides evidence of the *Englishman*'s role in providing critical information regarding the development of the conflicts to its readerships, whose vested interests in Burma were paramount. Not only was the paper able to print a large quantity of intelligence related to Burma, but it also strove to provide its readers with urgent and latest news. In many instances, pieces of intelligence arriving from Burma were printed immediately. Following the Sheppard and Lewis incidents in 1851, the government of India dispatched an expedition to Rangoon to demand a redress from the Burmese authorities. This event caused a great deal of anxiety to the British communities in Calcutta because they were speculating the outcome of the mission. On 17 January 1852, the evening issue of the *Englishman* published a piece of intelligence with the title 'War with Burmah', disclosing that the conflict had intensified, and the war with the Burmese Court was likely to occur. The report blamed the Rangoon authorities for refusing to meet with the British delegation to settle the affair peacefully.<sup>33</sup> This event was considered to be urgent news to the public in Calcutta, leading the *Englishman* to publish this piece of information immediately after it arrived in Calcutta on that day. The ability of the *Englishman* to print a large amount of information about Burma also transformed the paper into a hub of news in which its news reports were frequently extracted and reprinted by its contemporaries in Calcutta and beyond, such as the *Friend of India* and the *Bombay Times*.<sup>34</sup>

During the Third Burmese War of 1885, in particular, the *Englishman* enlarged the intelligence section. Since the transmission of news was then happening through telegraph, it enabled the paper to issue a large volume of instant news regularly. Figure 6 illustrates the manner in which the regular arrival of news from Burma also led the *Englishman* to launch a new service in providing the latest telegrams related to the situation in Burma in 1885 to subscribers, particularly after the Third Burmese War officially began in late November. The introduction of this extra service can be seen a response to the specific interests of the mercantile community in Calcutta, which was

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<sup>33</sup> Editorial, 'War with Burmah,' *Englishman*, 17 January 1852 (Evening), 3.

<sup>34</sup> 'Bengal,' *Bombay Times and Journal of Commerce*, 13 August 1851, 530; 'Progress of Events in Regard to Burmah,' *Friend of India*, 19 February 1852, 114–15.

undoubtedly anxious to know the extent to which the conflict would affect their commercial interests in this particular region.

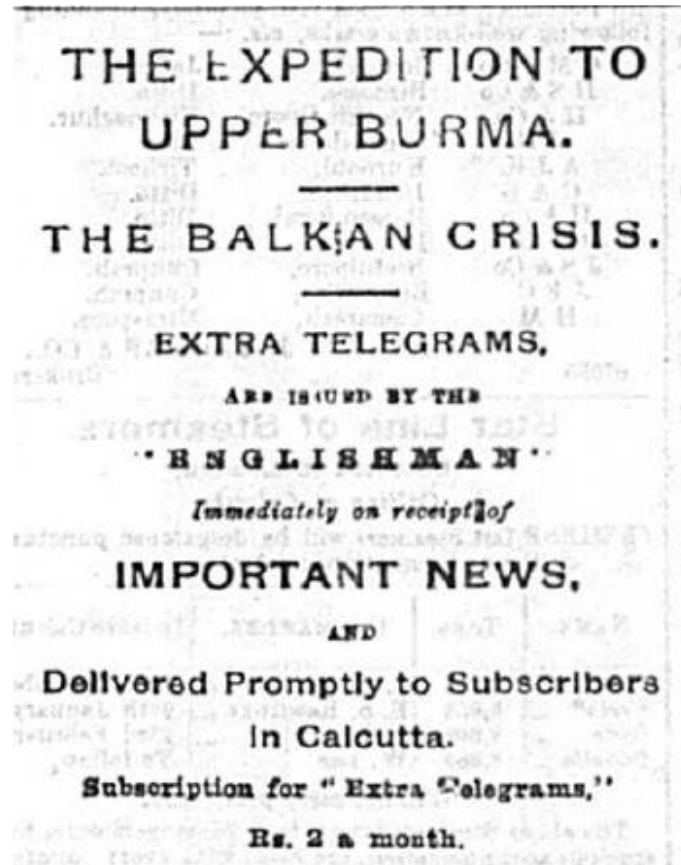


Figure 6: A new service in providing the latest telegrams related to the development of the Anglo-Burmese conflict in 1885 to subscribers [Source: *Englishman*, 1 December 1885, 2.]

Positioning itself deeply within the mercantile community, the *Englishman* thus produced a format of news reporting that could enable it to perform as a news platform for this particular interest group. This chapter will return to the connection between the press and the mercantile community in Chapter 2 to discuss the role of British merchants themselves in supplying information to the press.

The Burma's News in the *Hurkaru* and the *Statesman*: A voice of the opponents

This section will shift the focus to the *Hurkaru* and the *Statesman*, which had more Indian elite clientele and patronage, to see how their close ties with the Indian supporters and readers shaped their politics of news reporting, particularly during the Anglo-Burmese Wars of the early 1850s and 1885. Indian elites have been regarded by historians as another important contributor to the development of the newspapers in India, principally an Indian and vernacular press. In an article on the history of the Indian newspaper during the nineteenth century, Codell contends that the Indian press, printed in either English or the vernacular, grew in relation to the improvement of the educational system and literacy in India. Many periodicals and newspapers were run by social organisations, wealthy Indian elites, and businessmen who wished to use newspapers to inspire social reform in India.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Ahmed highlights that Bengali merchants also saw newspapers as a platform where they could express and advocate social and economic reforms in India.<sup>36</sup> Similar to other British-run periodicals, the Indian press also played politics through news. However, due to the partnership with local supporters, the Indian press, particularly the *Hurkaru* and the *Statesman*, had more significant interests in Indian matters – which could sometimes put them in opposition to the British-run papers, as is evident in their news reporting of the Burmese Wars.

Similar to many Indian newspapers, the *Hurkaru* and the *Statesman* were both edited by Englishmen – although they financially relied on support from the Indian elites and patronages. Beginning with the *Hurkaru*, which was operating at the time of the Second Burmese War of 1852, the paper was under the proprietorship of Samuel Smith who had a close connection with Dwarkanath Tagore (1794–1846), an Indian businessman and philanthropist. According to Ahmed, Tagore, who had business and interests in commerce and the indigo plantation, had provided substantial financial aid to a number of English newspapers with the hope that they would become an organ of the

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<sup>35</sup> Codell, 'Introduction: The Nineteenth-Century News from India,' 113–14.

<sup>36</sup> Ahmed, *Social Ideas and Social Change in Bengal 1818–1835*, 10–11.

progressive Indian social reform movement, such as the press freedom, the abolition of Sati and the education for Indians.<sup>37</sup> He befriended Smith, the sole proprietor of the *Hurkaru* from 1821 to 1854, while also investing substantially in the paper. Although information about the editorship and proprietorship of the *Hurkaru* is scarce, we know from Chanda that Smith possessed a liberal view on India, in particular the idea of social reforms and his constant advocacy for the rights of the Indians.<sup>38</sup> Tagore's investment in the *Hurkaru* seemed to arise from his belief that the paper and Smith's liberal stance would be a platform where the interests of the Indians were presented and advocated for.<sup>39</sup> This steer from both Tagore and Smith differentiated the *Hurkaru* from other dominant British-owned newspapers in Calcutta. As we shall see below, the difference is evident in the news reporting of British imperial expansion in Burma, in which the *Hurkaru* was strongly against the interventionist policy.

Moving to the *Statesman* which was active at the time of the Third Burmese War of 1885, its foundation and operation were mainly tied to the financial support from Indian economic interests. In his works on the history of the *Statesman*, Edwin Hirschmann tells us that Robert Knight, the founder and editor of the *Statesman*, was known for being one of the first Englishmen who advocated for and defended the rights and interests of the Indians. Before running the *Statesman*, he edited the *Bombay Times*, particularly during the Indian Rebellion of 1857 when he called for 'calm and common sense' in relations between the British and the Indians. At the same time, he was also a critic of the British Raj, principally on the reform effort which he criticised for being blundering and futile.<sup>40</sup> His view on the British Empire was on the

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<sup>37</sup> Tagore also gave financial aid to J. H. Stocqueler, the editor of the *Englishman* – a predecessor of W. C. Hurry – after his purchase of the paper in 1832. With his liberal view, Stocqueler had transformed the *Englishman* into a liberal journal. See Ahmed, *Social Ideas and Social Change in Bengal*, 80.

<sup>38</sup> Chanda, *History of the English Press in Bengal, 1858–1880*, 233.

<sup>39</sup> Chanda, *History of the English Press in Bengal, 1858–1880*, 236.

<sup>40</sup> Edwin Hirschmann, 'Knight, Robert (1825–1890), newspaper editor in India,' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 25 May 2006, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-74329?rskey=PK9SiK&result=5> (accessed 8 July 2018).



liberal side because he considered the war and territorial aggrandisement to be a crime.<sup>41</sup>

Knight's views on the Indian matters drew him a significant amount of support from the Indian elites and merchants, which can be seen from his tenure at the *Statesman* (of Calcutta) since the early days. According to Hirschmann, Knight received substantial support from Bengali 'backers' – most of whom were politicians and merchants, such as Kristodas Pal and Manmohan Ghose.<sup>42</sup> Another important backer was Salar Jung I, Sir Mir Turab Ali Khan (1829–83), Diwan or Prime Minister of Hyderabad. His contribution, which came in the form of funding and subscriptions, helped Knight enormously in establishing the *Statesman* in Calcutta.<sup>43</sup> The cases of the *Hurkaru* and the *Statesman* suggest that the Indian supporters specifically chose to provide aid to both Smith and Knight mainly because of their interests in the Indian affairs. Although there is no direct evidence suggesting how these ties could have impacted upon the two papers' coverage of British imperial expansion in Burma, it is possible to see how such close links with colonised subjects might have influenced on their reporting of the Anglo-Burmese conflict.

Being daily English newspapers, the *Hurkaru* and the *Statesman* were in direct competition with the British-owned papers, principally the *Englishman*. As is evident in their coverage of the Anglo-Burmese Wars, both papers were confronted with newspapers promoting expansion, such as the *Englishman* and the *Friend of India*, which, in many instances, became a critic of their anti-expansionist rhetoric. This scenario created a challenge to both newspapers, particularly when expressing their stances on the Burmese question. The *Hurkaru*, in particular, was attacked by the *Englishman* for its opposition to British intervention in Burma in 1852.<sup>44</sup> This became a reason

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<sup>41</sup> Edwin Hirschmann, *Robert Knight: Reforming Editor in Victorian India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008), 214.

<sup>42</sup> Edwin Hirschmann, 'The Hidden Roots of a Great Newspaper: Calcutta's *Statesman*,' *Victorian Periodicals Review* 37 (2004): 146.

<sup>43</sup> Knight could even establish his short-lived London-based *Statesman* in 1879 because of Salar Jung's financial support. He sent a letter to Salar Jung, in December 1878, asking for an initial loan to start up the paper in London. In January 1880, he also asked for more funds in which Salar Jung sent him a draft of £280. See Hirschmann, *Robert Knight*, 170–74.

<sup>44</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 3 March 1852, 2.

why both the *Hurkaru* and the *Statesman*, as this section argues, had to take a cautious step when expressing their views on the conflict in Burma. As we shall see below, the *Hurkaru* even abandoned its anti-expansionist stance regarding the Burmese question.

Both the *Hurkaru* and the *Statesman* shared the view that the British merchants had no justification in demanding intervention from the government of India. This notion was evident in their criticism of reports coming out of Burma, which predominantly originated from the British traders and mercantile communities there. The *Hurkaru* openly questioned the reliability of reports and stories obtained from Burma because it believed that local British mercantile interests were trying to fabricate the story to make the case for intervention – a prospect that the paper was strongly against. On 12 December 1851, the paper warned its readers not to rely on ‘the exaggerated statements from parties in Rangoon’ because they had an intention to prevent any peaceful settlement between the British authorities and the Burmese Court.<sup>45</sup> The same rhetoric can also be found in the *Statesman*’s coverage on the Third Burmese War of 1885. The paper complained that most of the intelligence from Upper Burma was questionable in nature because they were rumours rather than official reports.<sup>46</sup> Similar to the *Hurkaru*, it saw the merchant’s demand for intervention as being unjustified.<sup>47</sup>

Despite their disapproval of British imperial expansion, the *Hurkaru* and the *Statesman* were apparently cautious when expressing their anti-expansionism during the Anglo-Burmese conflicts in the 1850s and 1885. A closer examination of the *Hurkaru* reveals that the paper had far less coverage of the Anglo-Burmese conflicts in the 1850s than its contemporary expansionist papers. In contrast to *The Englishman* and the *Friend of India*, both of which actively conveyed news on the development of the war, the *Hurkaru* rarely mentioned the conflict. Instead, the paper only provided information and intelligence regarding the movement of the British troops.

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<sup>45</sup> Editorial, *Hurkaru*, 12 December 1851, 654.

<sup>46</sup> Editorial, *Statesman*, 15 October 1885, 2.

<sup>47</sup> Editorial, *Statesman*, 29 October 1885, 2.

Although the editorial of the *Hurkaru* became significantly silent on the Burmese question after the war was officially commenced in April 1852, the paper continued to remain cautious on the Burmese question. On 27 May 1852, the paper published a correspondence under the title ‘An Advocate for the Burmese’ which urged for a moderation in the handling of the Anglo-Burmese conflict. The author of this article wrote that the war could have been averted if both sides were willing to reconcile.<sup>48</sup> Only when the war was nearly at an end in late 1852 did the *Hurkaru* capitulate to the prevailing position on the Burmese question. On 1 December, the paper stressed that in order to prevent further conflict with the Burmese authorities, the government of India should consider the conversion of ‘the whole kingdom of Burmah into a British province’.<sup>49</sup>

There is no conclusive explanation for this sudden change in the *Hurkaru*’s rhetoric, but the fact that the war was irreversible at this point may potentially have contributed. In addition, the editor had to take public pressure into consideration. In an article on the operation of the Bengal press during the British campaign against the Thugs in the 1830s, Máire Ní Fhlathúin observes a difference in the news coverage of the campaign printed in the British and Indian newspapers. She contends that the majority of the British newspapers in Bengal had ‘functioned and recognised themselves as the voice of the British community’ (*Italic in original*). Many took up the British cause against the robber gangs.<sup>50</sup> Ní Fhlathúin concluded that dissenting voices, where they existed in newspapers in India, were strongly contested by those who supported the government’s action.<sup>51</sup>

For expressing its opposition to the prospect of British intervention in 1852, the *Hurkaru* inevitably became a target of criticism from the contemporary expansionist newspapers – namely the *Englishman*, its direct competitor. Apparently, they were not on good terms.<sup>52</sup> The *Hurkaru*’s anti-

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<sup>48</sup> An Enquiree, ‘An Advocate for the Burmese,’ *Hurkaru*, 27 May 1852, 586.

<sup>49</sup> Editorial, *Hurkaru*, 1 December 1852, 614.

<sup>50</sup> Máire Ní Fhlathúin, ‘The Campaign against Thugs in the Bengal Press of the 1830s,’ *Victorian Periodicals Review* 37 (2004): 135–36.

<sup>51</sup> Ní Fhlathúin, ‘The Campaign against Thugs,’ 131.

<sup>52</sup> For instance, Samuel Smith openly – and angrily – dismissed the claim made by W.C. Hurry, the editor of *The Englishman*, that the *Hurkaru* was about to be sold to him. On 27

expansionist rhetoric drew criticisms from the *Englishman*, which questioned its credibility. For example, the *Hurkaru*, at the beginning of the conflict in 1851, contended that the Burmese had no intention to open hostilities against the British. The paper suggested that instead of deploying a full-scale force in Burma, only a single gun-boat would easily force the Burmese to come to terms with the British.<sup>53</sup> However, on 3 March 1852, the *Englishman* published two articles, a correspondence and an editorial, attacking the *Hurkaru* for having no real understanding of the Burmese nature. Both articles emphasised that to deal with the Burmese, a strong measure was deemed necessary.<sup>54</sup> The editorial also wrote that '[T]he way to negotiate with such people is to say – Thieves and robbers, we come for redress; the alternative is punishment, take your choice!'<sup>55</sup> It was when the war came to an end in late 1852 that the *Hurkaru* admitted its wrong judgement on the Burmese nature. On 1 January 1853, the editorial team accepted that they were 'very much mistaken [about] the character of the barbarian and his advisers.'<sup>56</sup>

The *Statesman*'s reporting of the conflict in Burma in 1885 reveals that the paper slowly but steadily developed its stance on the event. Although Hirschmann highlights that the *Statesman*'s editor, Robert Knight, was a critic of the British Raj, the case of the Anglo-Burmese conflict in 1885 suggests that the paper did not make a stance on the event straightforwardly. Rather, the editorial team took cautious steps by inviting its readership to express their opinions first. On 18 September, the editorial asked its readers to write essays discussing their views on the future of the Anglo-Burmese relations, the possibility of the diplomatic and military intervention as well as the idea of annexation. The editor wished that these questions would be:

...fairly faced and discussed, not a lot of Jingoese, but by reasonable and sober men who have looked at the matter from every possible point of view. The requirement of morality, and of international law,

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January 1852, *The Englishman* had a special column calling Smith's article 'ridiculous' and that there was no reason for Smith to be inappropriate and 'indelicate' in his mood. See 'The Hurkaru,' *Englishman*, 27 January 1852, 3.

<sup>53</sup> Editorial, *Hurkaru*, 21 October 1851, 450.

<sup>54</sup> Philo-Horatio, 'Rangoon and Pegue,' *Englishman*, 3 March 1852, 2.

<sup>55</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 3 March 1852, 2.

<sup>56</sup> Editorial, *Hurkaru*, 1 January 1853, 2.

must be carefully considered. [This should include...] The right of King Theebaw himself, of his subjects, and of his neighbours, and the interests of humanity.<sup>57</sup>

The *Statesman*'s stance on Burma could be described as moderate. It did not take sides on either the British economic interests or the Burmese authorities. Despite its criticism of the merchants' complaint, the *Statesman* did not fail to recognise the difficulty in dealing with the Burmese Court whose attitude towards the British was allegedly hostile, principally its growing ties with France, Britain's imperial rival. The *Statesman* agreed with British merchants on one thing – that political intervention in Upper Burma was inevitable – although it strongly opposed the idea of the total conquest of Burma. Instead, it advocated for the appointment of the British Resident at the Burmese Court to supervise the Burmese government.<sup>58</sup> This policy, as the paper believed, would prevent an unnecessary territorial aggrandisement.

To be an English paper but, at the same time, a critic of the British interests in India and the neighbouring region, the operation of the *Hurkaru* and the *Statesman* became more complicated. Their readerships and advertisers came from both educated Indians and British communities, forcing them to bear several factors in mind when addressing their political stances. In the case of the *Hurkaru*, its divergence from mainstream opinions on the Burmese question drew a great deal of criticism from advocates of British intervention, such as the *Englishman*. This same pressure can explain why the *Statesman* was significantly cautious in making a statement on the Anglo-Burmese conflict in 1885. It chose to test the water first by allowing its readerships to express their views on the event – which was never an approach that occurred to or was required by the *Englishman* in its campaign for the Anglo-Burmese Wars.

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<sup>57</sup> Editorial, *Statesman*, 18 September 1885, 2.

<sup>58</sup> Editorial, *Statesman*, 20 October 1885, 2.

Networks and the Making of the Burma's News in Metropolitan Newspapers:  
A case of *The Times of London* and the *Manchester Guardian*

This section takes the news coverage of the Anglo-Burmese Wars in two major newspapers in Britain – *The Times of London* and the *Manchester Guardian* – into examination to determine how they compiled the news and views on the events. They have been chosen for having a particularly strong and consistent interest in British imperial affairs.<sup>59</sup> However, both newspapers, as this chapter contends, conducted news reporting on foreign affairs in different circumstances. Operating in London, *The Times* was able to access crucial sources of information related to both internal and external affairs. Regarding foreign news, *The Times* invested a significant sum of money on its extensive system of foreign correspondents. In the case of India, the paper spent £10,000 a year for this network of reports during the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>60</sup> Differently, provincial newspapers, such as the *Guardian*, found it more challenging to report on foreign affairs. Most of its coverage of overseas events were mainly based on extracts of news articles from London-based newspapers.<sup>61</sup>

Historians have discussed whether such a reliance on London-based newspapers could have brought the provincial press under an undue metropolitan influence. In *Victorian News and Newspapers*, Lucy Brown suggests that ideas and political thoughts being circulated in London had a chance for being adopted and repeated by provincial newspapers.<sup>62</sup> However, many scholars have emphasised the ability of editors in using intelligence – in an exploitative manner – to support the politics of their paper, even though the content of intelligence contradicted their views. H. R. Fox Bourne's work on the history of English newspapers claims that the provincial press was able to make its own judgement on any particular event, and that its view was 'more

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<sup>59</sup> Chandrika Kaul, *Reporting the Raj: The British Press and India, c.1880–1922* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 54.

<sup>60</sup> This coverage was further expanded, particularly since the beginning of the British Raj in 1858. See Kaul, *Reporting the Raj*, 59.

<sup>61</sup> The 'India and China' section on the *Guardian* was clearly shown that the intelligence was copied from the London newspapers. See 'India and China,' *Guardian*, 16 April 1853, 6.

<sup>62</sup> Lucy Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 193.

or less modified by local considerations'.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, Tim Pratt's article on the fluidity of news shed light to the ability of the newspaper's editors in exploiting information to support the politics of the paper. Focusing on the Britain-based *People's Paper's* coverage on the Indian Rebellion of 1857, Pratt focuses on how Ernest Jones, the paper's editor and the leader of the Chartist movement, skilfully re-interpreted *The Times's* coverage on the Indian Rebellion to justify the Chartist demand for democracy.<sup>64</sup>

As we shall see below, *The Times* and the *Guardian* were always disagreeing on the prospect of British overseas involvement. This section will explore, first, how personal opinions of their editors shaped the manner in which the coverage of Burma was constituted, and, secondly, what kinds of information they used to construct the news reporting and how it was carried out. My argument is that despite relying on extracts of news from the London-based newspapers, the *Guardian* was able to use available information to constitute its own views on overseas affairs. Opinions of editors, as this section reinforces, could shape the direction of news reporting – even though the content of information might suggest the other way round.

General public attitude towards British foreign affairs in the early 1850s had been influenced by Lord Palmerston's interventionist policy on the Don Pacifico affair of 1850, which created a division among politicians and the public. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Palmerston's high-handed treatment of Greece received criticisms from politicians at home, particularly the Conservatives who considered Palmerston's interventionist policy as a threat to the stability of Europe because the British intervention was opposed by other European nations – Russia strongly condemned Palmerston's intervention, while France even recalled its London ambassador.<sup>65</sup> Palmerston, however, survived the opposition from the Conservative, while receiving praises from the public after his *Civis Romanus*

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<sup>63</sup> H. R. Fox. Bourne, *English Newspapers: Chapters in the History of Journalism*, vol. II (London: Chatto & Windus, 1887), 328..

<sup>64</sup> Tim Pratt, 'Ernest Jones' Mutiny: *The People's Paper*, English Popular Politics and the Indian Rebellion 1857-58,' in Chandrika Kaul, ed., *Media and the British Empire* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 88–103.

<sup>65</sup> Geoffrey Hicks, *Peace, War and Party Politics: The Conservatives and Europe, 1846-59* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 42–45.

*sum* speech in 1850, in which he asserted that ‘a British subject, in whatever land he may be, shall feel confident that the watchful eye and the strong arm of England, will protect him against injustice and wrong’.<sup>66</sup> His statement became a benchmark and ‘ethos’ adopted by all clerks at the Foreign Office and some diplomatic agents.<sup>67</sup> Although Palmerston resigned in December 1851, his interventionist policy and the success of the Don Pacifico affair were still fresh to British politicians and public, which greatly influenced the debate on the Second Anglo-Burmese War of 1852.

The debate between *The Times of London* and the *Manchester Guardian* regarding British involvement in Burma in 1852 represented political division created by Palmerston’s interventionist policy. *The Times*, for example, strongly detested Palmerston’s unlimited intervention and characterised him as a quarrelsome and provocative figure.<sup>68</sup> The non-interventionist attitude of *The Times* is evident in its opposition to the prospect of war and the annexation of Burma in early 1852. This attitude of the paper, as this section argues, is linked to John Thadeus Delane, *The Times*’ edition from 1840 to 1877. According to Geoffrey Hamilton, during this period, *The Times* can be loosely identified with Liberalism, while its position on foreign affairs was on the anti-interventionist side.<sup>69</sup> *The Times* was critical of the British government’s foreign policy, principally Palmerston’s unlimited involvement in international conflicts.<sup>70</sup> The paper took the Don Pacifico affair to attack Palmerston, in which it criticised Palmerston’s demand for £8,500 from the Greek government untenable.<sup>71</sup> Palmerston seemed to be well-aware of *The Times*’ campaign against him, as is evident in his communication with Queen Victoria in 1885 when he remarked that ‘[F]rom the time when I first went to the Foreign Office, for some reason or other which I never could

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<sup>66</sup> David Brown, *Palmerston: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 320.

<sup>67</sup> Brown, *Palmerston*, 320–21.

<sup>68</sup> Brown, *Palmerston*, 322.

<sup>69</sup> Geoffrey Hamilton, ‘Delane, John Thadeus (1817–1879), newspaper editor,’ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 3 October 2013, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-7440> (accessed 27 September 2018).

<sup>70</sup> Bourne, *English Newspapers*, vol. II, 169; Woods and Bishop, *The Story of The Times*, 115.

<sup>71</sup> The Times of London, *The History of the Times. Vol.2, The Tradition Established, 1841-1884* (London: The Times, 1939), 241.



discover, *The Times* has been animated by undeviating hostility, personal and political, towards me'.<sup>72</sup>

Delane's non-interventionist stance seemingly shaped the way *The Times* conducted the news coverage on the Second Burmese War. The newspaper disagreed with claims made by British merchants in Burma that their disputes with the Burmese authorities should be the reason for British interference. *The Times* feared that the war, if it occurred, would cost the British Treasury a huge sum of money and human resources. Prior to the outbreak of the war, the paper made clear that the government of India must avoid getting involved in the event, and rather should only focus on improving the security of British India without extending its territory eastwards into Burma.<sup>73</sup>

From 1844 to 1861, the *Guardian* was under the editorship of Jeremiah Garnett who was, in contrast to his counterpart at *The Times*, supportive of British overseas involvements.<sup>74</sup> Despite his support for liberal movements such as the Anti-Corn Law and the Divorce Bill of 1851, Garnett's view on foreign affairs echoed Palmerston's interventionist policy, according to Richard Garnett. The *Guardian*'s support for the Crimean War (1853–56) was a clear evidence of Garnett's expansionist stance.<sup>75</sup> David Brown also notes that the *Guardian* defended Palmerston's policy during the Don Pacifico affair of 1850, in which the paper claimed that 'the right of individuals and of nations are the same'.<sup>76</sup> This political view significantly affected how the *Guardian* constituted the news reporting of the Second Burmese War, in which the paper openly advocated for British intervention in Burma.<sup>77</sup> It also dismissed the moderate opinions of some politicians and newspapers by

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<sup>72</sup> The Times of London, *The History of the Times*. Vol.2, 236.

<sup>73</sup> Editorial, *The Times*, 3 February 1852, 4; Editorial, *The Times*, 9 March 1852, 4.

<sup>74</sup> Richard Garnett, 'Garnett, Jeremiah (1793–1870), journalist,' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 3 October 2013.  
<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-10390> (accessed 27 September 2018).

<sup>75</sup> David Ayerst, *The Guardian Omnibus, 1821-1971: An Anthology of 150 Years of Guardian Writing* (London: Collins, 1973), 100; David Ayerst, *Guardian: Biography of a Newspaper* (London: Collins, 1971), 124–26.

<sup>76</sup> Brown, *Palmerston*, 322.

<sup>77</sup> Editorial, *Guardian*, 20 March 1852, 6.

claiming that their opinions did not reflect the interests of their fellow countrymen.<sup>78</sup>

By examining the intelligence regarding the Anglo-Burmese conflicts published by *The Times* and the *Guardian* between December 1851 and April 1852, most of the news reports can be traced back to the news articles in the Calcutta press, principally the *Englishman* and the *Friend of India*. *The Times* and the *Guardian* operated under a far more challenging circumstance since information gathered from India normally arrived in a shortened and brief form – in contrast to the Calcutta press which could receive full reports. In most cases, pieces of intelligence received by the press in Britain reflected the expansionist attitude of the Calcutta newspapers – for example, an idea of annexation of Lower Burma, which became a challenge for *The Times*, particularly for its anti-expansionism. Moreover, the slow communication between India and Britain, which normally took more than six weeks. Thus, when reports of the Anglo-Burmese conflict reached Britain in late 1851, all *The Times* could do was to bring in an old knowledge of Burma, principally experiences of the First Anglo-Burmese Wars 1824–26, to justify its opposition to another war with Burma, which, as the paper predicted, would be costly and destructive like the previous one.<sup>79</sup> *The Times*'s attitude towards the Second Anglo-Burmese War will be further discussed in Chapter 4.

Despite its reliance on extracts of news articles from the expansionist papers in Calcutta, *The Times* could still produce the news coverage that stood against the idea of British intervention in Burma. In many instances, the editor of *The Times* brought in alternative information to justify its opposition to the war. For example, the paper frequently mentioned the First Anglo-Burmese War of 1824–26 which, it claimed, led to enormous casualties, while the annexed territories in Arakan and Tenasserim could not give Britain any significant benefit.<sup>80</sup> For *The Times*, the experience from the last war was proof that another war with Burma would be 'a losing game'.<sup>81</sup> This notion of *The Times* was carried until the end of the Second Burmese War because the

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<sup>78</sup> Editorial, *Guardian*, 19 February 1853, 6; Editorial, *Guardian*, 16 March 1853, 4.

<sup>79</sup> Editorial, *The Times*, 3 February 1852, 4.

<sup>80</sup> *The Times*, 3 February 1852.

<sup>81</sup> Editorial, *The Times*, 30 June 1852, 5.

paper was unconvinced that the annexation would produce any benefits for Britain, either politically or economically.<sup>82</sup>

Apart from reports obtained from India, *The Times*, with its status of being a leading and influential newspaper in London, would have access to political correspondence as well. According to *The History of The Times*, Delance acknowledged the importance of having a good relationships with policy-makers, particularly those at the Foreign Office which ‘had been of such news-value that all editors eagerly sought the good will of the Foreign Secretary’.<sup>83</sup> Delane himself also had a good relationship with the fourth Earl of Aberdeen, Foreign Minister, and Sir Robert Peel, Prime Minister (1841–46), who regularly supplied exclusive information to the paper – though this does not mean that *The Times* had become a Conservative organ since the paper could sometimes be a critic of their ministerships.<sup>84</sup> However, during the period examined in this thesis – between December 1851 and April 1852 – *The Times* mainly based its coverage of the Anglo-Burmese conflicts on available information about Burma, pieces of news obtained from India and the Parliamentary Intelligence from both Houses.

Looking at the *Guardian*, the paper’s coverage of the Burmese question in 1852 mainly relied on extracts of news from *The Times*. Still, the paper could produce a contrasting coverage of the event. The *Guardian*, like many newspaper in Britain, could not afford to have an extensive network of correspondents as that of *The Times*, which stationed correspondents and news agents at important ports and cities such as Dover, Boulogne, Marseilles, and all the way to Alexandria, while also having its own cross-channel steamer for faster transmission of news.<sup>85</sup> This put *The Times* in a better position compared to the *Guardian*, which had to rely mainly on extracts of news related to eastern affairs from London newspapers.

The *Guardian*’s coverage of the Second Burmese War, however, suggests the fluidity in the flow of information, where provincial newspapers

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<sup>82</sup> Editorial, *The Times*, 27 October 1852, 4.

<sup>83</sup> The Times of London, *The History of the Times*. Vol.2, 92.

<sup>84</sup> The Times of London, *The History of the Times*. Vol.2, 93–95.

<sup>85</sup> The Times of London, *The History of the Times*. Vol.2, 68–70.

could obtain intelligence from other alternative sources. Apart from extracts of news from *The Times*, particularly its 'India and China' intelligence section, the *Guardian* also had access to other sources of information, such as commercial houses in Britain which received regular communication from their branches and agents in India. On 20 March 1852, the *Guardian* published a report confirming alleged stories about the Burmese hostile attitude against the British merchants in Burma. This intelligence had been forwarded to *The Times* by one London-based commercial house.<sup>86</sup> In the same issue, the *Guardian* also referred to another piece of intelligence – an extract of a news article from the *Friend of India* that discussed the possible route for the British military advance to Burma – suggesting that the second war with Burma would be rapidly and easily completed that the previous one.<sup>87</sup>

It is unclear how the paper obtained the copy of the *Friend of India* but it seems likely that news from India as well as copies of English newspapers in India were regularly circulated among politicians, mercantile groups and the newspapers in Britain. Although that news piece would be about six-week old, it gave the *Guardian* an evidence to support its advocacy for British intervention. In many instances, the *Guardian* echoed similar opinions to the expansionist papers in Calcutta as well as the mercantile communities there. For example, it referred to intelligence related to the suffering of the British merchants from the Burmese hostilities back in 1851 to justify the necessity of the war, given that 'the lives, the liberties, and the property of the Englishman' were under a real threat.<sup>88</sup> On 19 February 1853, the editorial of the *Guardian* pointed to the desire of the local inhabitant of Pegu for the arrival of the British, which is significantly similar to the remark of the *Friend of India*.<sup>89</sup> Thus, the ability of the *Guardian* to produce similar coverage to the expansionist papers in Calcutta suggests that intelligence concerning British interests in Burma had been transmitted to newspapers in Britain. My thesis will return in Chapter 2 to discuss the crucial role played by the British

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<sup>86</sup> Drouhet, Gardner and Co., 'The Burmese War,' *The Times*, 19 March 1852, 8; 'India and China,' *Guardian*, 20 March 1852, 5.

<sup>87</sup> Editorial, *Guardian*, 20 March 1852, 6.

<sup>88</sup> Editorial, *Guardian*, 26 January 1853, 4.

<sup>89</sup> Editorial, *Guardian*, 19 February 1853, 6; 'Burmah,' *Friend of India*, 3 June 1852, 353–54.

mercantile classes in Burma in the supply of information to the press in India and Britain.

Moving forwards to the Third Burmese War of 1885, both *The Times* and the *Guardian* shifted their stances towards imperial affairs. *The Times* became the advocate of the British conquest of Burma, while the *Guardian* opposed the idea of British intervention. Their contrasting opinions seemed to be significantly associated with the change of editors. By late 1884, George Earle Buckle took the helm as the editor of *The Times*, while changing the paper's politics in line with Lord Randolph Churchill's expansionist policy. In *An Ill-Conditioned Cad, Mr. Moylan of The Times*, Terence Blackburn contends that Buckle had a very close friendship with Lord Randolph Churchill, and became a supporter of the government's forward policy on foreign affairs. Churchill, the Secretary of State for India from 1885 to 1886, even recognised *The Times* for its 'most loyal' support of the government policy on Burma.<sup>90</sup> It should be noted that less than a year before the Third Anglo-Burmese War took place Britain had experienced a severe loss in the Battle of Khartoum (1884–85), which resulted in the death of General Gordon, the commander of British troops, along with Frank le Poer Power, a correspondent for *The Times*. As will be further discussed in Chapter 3, *The Times* and Buckle, blamed Gladstone's Liberal government for its reluctance and incompetence in handling the situation. After the event, the paper shifted its stance on imperial affairs to more interventionist leanings as is evident in its coverage of the Third Anglo-Burmese War.

The *Guardian* also appointed a new editor, Charles Prestwick Scott, in 1872, under whom the paper took a new direction by becoming a supporter of Gladstone's Liberal government.<sup>91</sup> According to Trevor Wilson, Scott devoted his paper to social questions, such as women's rights, while also opposing British imperialism in other territories, particularly in South Africa.<sup>92</sup> Focusing

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<sup>90</sup> Terence R. Blackburn, *An Ill-Conditioned Cad, Mr. Moylan of The Times* (New Delhi: A.P.H. Pub. Corp, 2002), 24.

<sup>91</sup> Ayerst, *The Guardian Omnibus, 1821–1971*, 152, 174.

<sup>92</sup> Trevor Wilson, 'Scott, Charles Prestwich (1846–1932), newspaper editor and proprietor,' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 3 January 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-35980> (accessed 27 September 2018).

on Scott's editorship, Mark Hampton highlights that the *Guardian* was not afraid to stand against popular opinions during the Second Boer War of 1899–1902 when it strongly opposed British involvement and the use of armed forces.<sup>93</sup>

The changes in editorships of *The Times* and the *Guardian* significantly shifted both papers' politics on the Anglo-Burmese conflicts, as is evident during the Third Burmese War of 1885. In contrast to his predecessors, Buckle shifted *The Times*' rhetoric on the Anglo-Burmese conflict in 1885 to more expansionism. Considering French imperial expansion in Asia as a threat to the security of the British position, *The Times*, on 16 February 1885, urged the British government to start 'taking measures for the pacification of Upper Burmah, where our trade has to be protected and our influence maintained'.<sup>94</sup> Prior to the outbreak of the war in November that year, *The Times* became bolder in its stance on the Burmese question because it was convinced that the British political and economic interests in Burma was under real threat, particularly from the growing Franco-Burmese ties.<sup>95</sup> This concern led *The Times* to be an advocate of British intervention and, later, the conquest of Burma.

In contrast, the *Guardian* entirely dismissed the demands from the British mercantile classes for total conquest of Burma, claiming that the idea had 'not been shared either by the masses of our people or by manufacturers and traders generally'.<sup>96</sup> The paper stated that 'though the interests of British Burmah or of British merchants at Rangoon are not to be...ignored, it is clear that those interests are not by themselves enough to induce Indian Government to take the extreme measure of annexing independent Burmah [*sic*]'.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, regarding the growing Franco-Burmese relationship, which caused concern from the British mercantilists, the *Guardian* claimed that it had obtained 'similar intelligence' which downplayed, if not dismissed, the fears

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<sup>93</sup> Mark Hampton, 'The Press, Patriotism, and Public Discussion: C. P. Scott, the "Manchester Guardian", and the Boer War, 1899-1902,' *The Historical Journal* 44 (2001): 183–86.

<sup>94</sup> Editorial, *The Times*, 16 February 1885, 9.

<sup>95</sup> Editorial, *The Times*, 15 October 1885, 9.

<sup>96</sup> Editorial, *Guardian*, 24 February 1886, 5.

<sup>97</sup> Editorial, *Guardian*, 14 October 1885, 5.

or concerns about the prospect of French intervention in Burma. According to the *Guardian*, the French authorities in Paris had made clear that they had no intention to establish the French influence in Burma.<sup>98</sup> This view of the *Guardian* was entirely absent from other expansionist papers, which continuously used the possibility of French intervention to campaign for British imperial expansion in Upper Burma.<sup>99</sup>

Although both *The Times* and the *Guardian* had access to similar information about Burma, they were still able to use it to offer contrasting depictions of the event. Their coverage of the Burmese question reveals that they had the ability to use intelligence, albeit in an exploitative way, to either stress or downplay the urgency and necessity of British imperial expansion in Burma. It suggests that there were political and cultural factors contributing to the formation of the news and views, highlighting another aspect of the press news reporting for which information was subjectively selected. The political and cultural factors behind news reporting, particularly the selection and the making of news about Burma will be further discussed in Chapter 4.

### Conclusion

This chapter introduced the complexity in the press' news reporting of Burma where personal opinions of editors took the lead – instead of the news itself. It has also been shown that the press during the period of study was not a monolithic institution. Rather, it was deeply variable, dynamic and unpredictable. From the six newspapers analysed in this chapter, none shared the same position on the affairs in Burma. Nor were they consistent even in their coverage on the Burmese question. This result suggests that the politics of each newspaper was strongly attached to personal opinions of editors in chief – which made news reporting variable. Their background, politics and interests all contributed to the direction of their news reporting. It was the editors' ability in interpreting or exploiting intelligence related to Burma that made the news coverage in each newspaper distinctively different. As seen in

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<sup>98</sup> Editorial, *Guardian*, 22 September 1885, 5.

<sup>99</sup> 'Latest Telegrams – Reuter's Telegrams,' *Englishman*, 28 September 1885, 4.

*The Times'* coverage of the Second Burmese War, despite receiving intelligence that contradicted its opposition of British intervention, the editorial team could find alternative information to support its opinion that the war was unnecessary and unjustifiable.

To be an institution that brought together or represented various sectors, the press also had a commitment to act as the platform of news for its readers and supporters. Expansionist papers, such as the *Englishman* and the *Friend of India*, consciously acted in the interests of those who had an eye on the imperial expansion in Burma. The *Englishman* had close association with mercantile groups and establishments, and went along with them in advocating British intervention in Burma – for the sake of British commercial enterprise. The *Friend of India*, in contrast, considered British intervention as a way to spread Western civilisation. It leads us back to the paper's root in Serampore, a hub for the missionary community in Bengal. By placing this collaboration into a broader context of British imperialism, we can argue that the contemporary press both in India and Britain had significant collaborations with diverse imperial actors. Thus, it is possible to consider the press as an autonomous agent rather than a mouth piece of the British Empire in India.

For some papers, particularly those who stood against the mainstream opinions on British intervention in Burma, the constitution of the news and views was far more complicated. The cases of the *Hurkaru* and the *Statesman* demonstrate the pressure that the Indian newspapers could come under when they stood in conflict with the mainstream British press. As a representatives of the Indian interests – and, at the same time, a critic of the British Raj – they were at risk of facing political reprisals from other British-owned papers. This circumstance forced them to take cautious steps when making any statement that directly opposed popular opinions – as was the case of the *Statesman*. However, the pressure that the *Hurkaru* experienced was enough to gradually silence the paper's opposition to the Second Burmese War.



## Chapter 2: Imperial Partnership: The Press, the British Mercantile Community and the Anglo-Burmese Wars

‘The British merchants...are in concert and connexion with the press in Calcutta, the movement of which I view with anxiety and distrust’. – The Earl of Ellenborough<sup>1</sup>

The previous chapter has highlighted, among other things, the contribution from the British mercantile classes in the operation of the press. Expansionist newspapers were interested in British commerce in the East which was evident from their publication of commercial intelligence and crucial news that mattered to the mercantile classes. In return, the newspapers received financial support, mostly in the form of advertisement and subscription, from these interest groups, enabling them to stay financially healthy. This chapter will investigate another aspect of the merchant-press nexus, particularly the role played by the British mercantile community in supplying information to the press. It argues that the circumstance prior to the Second and Third Anglo-Burmese Wars saw local British merchants acting as main informants to newspapers in both Calcutta and London. The limited amount of knowledge about Burma due to the absence of official British representatives following the withdrawal of the Residency in 1840 and 1879 provided the two sectors with an opportunity to work together in paving the way for British imperial expansion. Understanding this context prior to the two Burmese Wars will shed light on the role of the newspapers in being active imperial actors during the Anglo-Burmese conflict.

Historians have regarded the mercantile classes as one of the most critical contributors to the press’ news reporting, particularly their role as informants. According to Andrew Pettegree, the long-distance commerce had always been a challenge to traders due to its risky and unpredictable nature. This circumstance forced merchants and business houses to develop a network

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Parliamentary Intelligence – House of Lords, Monday, April 5,’ *The Times of London*, 6 April 1852, 2.

of news correspondents ‘in an atmosphere of trust’, in which critical decision making was then based on the information they gathered.<sup>2</sup> The need for a network of trustworthy informants also led merchants to invest and involve in the operation of the press, which they used to convey news and crucial information. The sharing of information was instrumental in the press’ news reporting, particularly on foreign affairs which crucially required a dense network of informants and news suppliers.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Geoffrey Jones remarks that the British trading activities in Asia involved several players ranging from private traders and merchant houses in India to financial firms in metropolitan Britain. They were, in some aspects, in collaboration, particularly on the sharing of information in regard to goods supplies and shipping intelligence.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter contends that the Anglo-Burmese conflicts in the early 1850s and 1885 enabled the British merchants in Burma to make a critical contribution to the press’ news reporting, principally by supplying crucial information in regard to the Burmese question. As referred to in the introduction of this thesis, the withdrawal of the British Residency in 1840 and 1879, respectively, removed all British political and diplomatic functionaries from the region, while also leaving British subjects, most of whom were traders, on their own. At the same time, a lack of official news sources in Burma forced the British authorities in Calcutta to rely on information from local residents, such as European traders and missionaries, according to C.A. Bayly.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Oliver B. Pollak, in his work on the origin of the Second Burmese War of 1852, points out movements from the British mercantile community in Burma, who had actively sent complaints and petitions to the authorities in Calcutta, wishing that stories about their commercial disputes with the Burmese would result in British intervention.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Andrew Pettegree, *The Invention of News: How the World Came to Know about Itself* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2015), 39, 48–49.

<sup>3</sup> Pettegree, *The Invention of News*, 313.

<sup>4</sup> Geoffrey Jones, *Merchants to Multinationals: British Trading Companies in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 33.

<sup>5</sup> C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 117–18.

<sup>6</sup> Oliver B. Pollak, *Empires in Collision: Anglo-Burmese Relations in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980), 55.

With the absence of British official representatives in Burma, the newspapers became another platform for the mercantile classes to convey their information to, in the hope that it would bring the necessity of intervention to the wider public and, importantly, the colonial authorities. As discussed in Chapter 1, the ability to access sources of information related to Burma was vital to the press' news reporting on the Anglo-Burmese conflict. This chapter further examines the coverage of the Burmese question by focusing on contributions from local mercantile communities in supplying intelligence to the press. As will be shown, their sharing of information with the press critically contributed to British imperial expansion in Burma, while also supporting the position of the press as one of the imperial actors.

It should be noted that during the period investigated, the majority of press informants as well as the press' own correspondents did not reveal their true identities and names – many used pseudonym in their reports. However, by looking at political correspondence, recent historiographies and the news report itself, we can loosely identify those active informants in Burma and the interest groups they were part of. Prior to the Second Burmese War of 1852, Rangoon-based mercantile interests were actively supplied reports, mostly in the form of complaints, to British authorities in either British-held Moulmein or Calcutta.<sup>7</sup> This is evident in *Papers Relating to the Hostilities in Burmah* presented to the Parliament in 1852, which highlights the role of local merchants in bringing the severity of the situation in Burma to the British authorities – many also appeared in the press. For example, on 28 November 1851, one hundred merchants in Rangoon signed a petition stating 38 cases of grievances caused by the Rangoon Governor.<sup>8</sup> This was reported in the *Englishman* on 8 December 1851 – considering that mails from Rangoon usually took a week to reach Calcutta.<sup>9</sup> A letter from 'A Merchant' to Mr Young, Under Secretary to the Government of India dated 23 December 1851

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<sup>7</sup> Pollak, *Empires in Collision*, 52–56; Aparna Mukherjee, *British Colonial Policy in Burma: An Aspect of Colonialism in South-East Asia, 1840-1885* (New Delhi: Abhinav, 1988), 89–90.

<sup>8</sup> A letter from merchant residents at Rangoon to Commodore Lambert, 28 November 1851, *Papers Relating to the Hostilities with Burmah*, 4 June 1852 (Parliamentary Papers).

<sup>9</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 8 December 1851, 2–3.

stated that nearly 10,000 armed men had been gathered around Rangoon.<sup>10</sup> The *Friend of India* reported this information on 1 January 1852, claiming that the war with Burma would be inevitable.<sup>11</sup>

Apart from these anonymous merchants – and Captains Sheppard and Lewis – we can also name some merchants who were actively conveying stories of the Burmese hostility to the authorities. For example, H. Potter complained to the British authorities in Moulmein in early 1851 that his shipbuilding business at Rangoon was damaged after the Rangoon governor ‘unfairly’ levied heavy duties upon him.<sup>12</sup> Captain May Flower Crisp, according to Dorothy Woodman, was another active informant who went on board the British expedition vessels in late 1851, giving Commodore Lambert, a commander of the expedition, a first glimpse of the situation. Crisp, who sold weapons to the Rangoon governor, complained that he was refused a payment, causing a damage of Rs 41,490.<sup>13</sup> Following his visit to the expedition fleet, there was a report that the Rangoon governor ‘has offered a reward of 1,000 Rupees for the head of M. F. Crisp’.<sup>14</sup> Thomas Spears, a Scot merchant who had long resided in Burma, was also a crucial figure. He was the man who the British authorities, principally Arthur Phayre, Chief Commissioner of Pegu, turned to for information in the aftermath of the Second Burmese War. Spears was later appointed as ‘unofficial representative’ from 1853 to 1861, and was the focal point for supplying information from independent Burma to the British authorities in Rangoon.<sup>15</sup>

Missionaries, principally American Baptist Mission, had been working in Burma since the beginning of the nineteenth century and became crucial informants to local mercantile interests in Rangoon as well as the British authorities in Moulmein. Although they faced difficulties with the Burmese Court whose policy was sometimes unfriendly to the mission, they frequently

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<sup>10</sup> A letter from ‘A Merchant’ to Mr Young, 23 December 1851, *Papers Relating to the Hostilities with Burmah* (Parliamentary Papers).

<sup>11</sup> ‘War with Burma,’ *Friend of India*, 1 January 1852, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Mukherjee, *British Colonial Policy in Burma*, 86–87.

<sup>13</sup> Dorothy Woodman, *The Making of Burma* (London: Cresset Press, 1962), 125.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Maulmain,’ *Englishman*, 1 January 1852, 3–4.

<sup>15</sup> D. G. E. Hall, *Burma* (London: Hutchinson’s University Library, 1950), 116; Woodman, *The Making of Burma*, 154–55.

played the role of intermediaries between the Burmese Court and the British officials. For example, Messrs. Judson and Rice, founders of the Burma Mission, were used by the Burmese Court as the intermediary in negotiating for the Treaty of Yandabu at the end the First Burmese War in 1826.<sup>16</sup> In 1851, Reverend Eugenio Kincaid, a Burma-based American missionary, also collaborated with local merchants in convincing Commodore Lambert of the Rangoon governor's growing hostility towards European residents in Rangoon. The governor was said to have threatened to behead anyone found communicating with the British expedition fleet.<sup>17</sup> Another rumour was sent out by the missionary, which also emphasised the alleged hostile attitude of the Burmese Court, principally stories of the military preparation.<sup>18</sup> All of these suggest that the missionary, like local mercantile interests, played active roles in bringing stories of the severity of the situation in Burma to wider audiences, including the British authorities and newspapers, hoping it would lead to intervention.

Moving to the period leading to the Third Burmese War of 1885, the withdrawal of the British Residency in 1879 gave way to local residents in Upper Burma, either British or European, to act as informants to British mercantile interests and the British government and officials. Since the 1860s, there were several merchants and commercial firms getting established in Burma, for example, the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company, the Bombay-Burmah Trading Corporation (BBTC), and the Rangoon Oil Company (later the Burmah Oil Company).<sup>19</sup> The list also included the British India Steam Navigation Company (BISN), which expanded their steamship service to Burma.<sup>20</sup> After the withdrawal of the Residency in 1879, these companies continued their business in Upper Burma and became crucial conveyors of information to their owners as well as the British government. For instance,

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<sup>16</sup> John Nisbet, *Burma under British Rule and Before*, vol. 2 (Westminster: A. Constable, 1901), 254–55.

<sup>17</sup> 'Rangoon and Burmese Affairs,' *Friend of India*, 11 December 1851, 785.

<sup>18</sup> 'War with Burmah,' *Friend of India*, 1 January 1852, 5.

<sup>19</sup> Myint-U, *The Making of Modern Burma*, 139.

<sup>20</sup> William Mackinnon, a Glasgow-based capitalist, was advised by the company's manager in Calcutta to expand the business into Burma. See A letter from J.M. Hall to William Mackinnon, *Papers of Sir William Mackinnon*, 2 April 1862, PP MS 1/BISN/1/4/14 (SOAS).

Fred Kennedy, the manager of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company, regularly addressed his concern of the company's security in Upper Burma to the British authorities in Rangoon by showing stories of the Burmese alleged hostility against British traders and firms.<sup>21</sup> In 1885, J. A. Bryce, the manager of the BBTC, sent in a lengthy telegram to its owner in London, Wallace Brothers and Co., reporting the Burmese Court's legal action against the firm. This report was then forwarded to the British government with a demand from the BBTC's owner for immediate intervention.<sup>22</sup>

These mercantile interests did not work alone. In fact, they were in close collaboration with other non-merchant groups who resided in Upper Burma. For example, the Mandalay Palace's *kalamas*, foreign maids of honour, made a significant contribution to the British 'knowledge' of Burma, according to Sudha Shah. She points out that these foreign women, most of whom were Europeans, Armenians and Eurasians, had close relationships with the British trading companies, who wanted to use their presence at the Burmese Court to supply British trading firms with crucial information – increasingly after the British Resident left Mandalay in 1879.<sup>23</sup> On 28 October 1885, the *Englishman* also listed European and foreign residents in Mandalay who came from various places such as France, Germany, Italy, Armenia, Eurasia, Greece and America. The majority of them were agents of trading enterprises. One of these residents was Andreino, an Italian consul and a secret agent of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company and the Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation, who, as will be discussed later, played a crucial role in the presentation of news on the BBTC case, which gave a pretext to the war.<sup>24</sup> As we shall see below, these information was later published by the press, producing a thrust for its campaign for intervention.

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<sup>21</sup> Alister MacCrae and Alan Prentice, *Irrawaddy Flotilla* (Paisley: James Paton, 1978), 86–87.

<sup>22</sup> Telegrams from the Bombay-Burmah Trading Corporation to Messrs. Wallace Brothers, London, 11 August and 17 August 1885, *Relations between France and Burmah*, FO 425/148 (The National Archives, hereafter TNA).

<sup>23</sup> Sudha Shah, *The King in Exile: The Fall of the Royal Family of Burma* (New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers India, 2012), 37.

<sup>24</sup> 'European Residents in Mandalay,' *Englishman*, 28 October 1885, 3.

This chapter is divided into four sections. First, it will begin with a shared perception between the press and the British mercantile community regarding the necessity of British intervention in Burma. This approach is to address concerns from British merchants in Burma over trading difficulties with the Burmese government and how commercial disputes became the foundation of the merchants' advocacy for intervention. This particular section will elaborate on how the importance of Burma to the growing British commerce was picked up and further used by the press to make the case for intervention.

Secondly, this chapter explores the idea of imperial rivalry between Britain and other Western nations, in particular France, which is evident in the news coverage of the Anglo-Burmese conflict. Concerns about intervention from other Western nations were another subject that the press brought in to emphasise the necessity of British imperial expansion in Burma. As will be shown, the press recognised the economic importance of Burma to the British, which was, as it contended, too important to let go. This approach is to underline the role of the press as a guardian and protector of British economic interests in Burma.

Thirdly, the chapter examines the collaboration between the press and Burma-based merchant community during the Second Burmese War. This approach is to highlight how the political and diplomatic vacuum in the aftermath of the withdrawal of the Residency in 1840 brought the two sectors into a close collaboration. Their supply of intelligence was, as will be shown, instrumental in the newspapers' campaign for the Second Burmese War.

The fourth section investigates how the new modes of communication, such as the telegraph, had an impact on the ties between the press and the mercantile community. Historians have highlighted how the telegraph changed the landscape of imperial politics since the British authorities and business groups in metropolitan Britain could now take part in the affairs of a faraway country like Burma. For example, Daniel Headrick highlights that the telegraphic communication had brought European empires closer to their colonies around the world – for the case of Britain, the telegraph became 'the

spinal cord of the British Empire'.<sup>25</sup> Anthony Webster also points to movements from commercial houses and financial sectors in the metropole in lobbying the British government to intervene in Upper Burma in 1885.<sup>26</sup> The change in geopolitics might suggest that the merchant-press nexus in the sharing of information became less significant – since the former could now campaign for British intervention independently. However, that the scarcity of information in the aftermath of the withdrawal of the British Residency from Upper Burma in 1879 continued to compel the press and local mercantile communities into a close collaboration. As we shall see later, the merchant-press nexus remained paramount at the time of the Third Burmese War.

#### Before the British Came: 'Misgoverned Burma' and the economic legitimacy of the Anglo-Burmese Wars

Economic motivations for British intervention in Burma had been a concern of the British mercantile community long before the outbreak of the Second and Third Anglo-Burmese Wars. A decade prior to the Second Burmese War of 1852, the British mercantile community in Burma frequently came into disputes with the Burmese authorities regarding the monopoly on trade and a harsh punishment on merchants who attempted to evade the tax. This initiated the movement from the British merchants in Burma in pressurising the Government of India into intervention.<sup>27</sup> The growing presence of British enterprises in Burma in the second half of the nineteenth century, according to Thant Myint-U, convinced the mercantile community that the peaceful relationships between the Burmese and British authorities should ultimately be maintained.<sup>28</sup> However, the commercial conflicts in 1851 and 1885 saw these economic interests taking a far more radical stance in demanding political and military intervention in Burma. This was when the press, particularly the expansionist newspapers, initiated the campaign for the

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<sup>25</sup> Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tentacles of Progress: Technology Transfer in the Age of Imperialism, 1850-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 101.

<sup>26</sup> Anthony Webster, 'Business and Empire: A Reassessment of the British Conquest of Burma in 1885,' *The Historical Journal* 43 (2000): 1014–16.

<sup>27</sup> Pollak, *Empires in Collision*, 52–56.

<sup>28</sup> Myint-U, *The Making of Modern Burma*, 138–39.



Anglo-Burmese Wars. This section argues that, as one of the imperial actors, the press also had a political interest similar to that of the merchant community. The shared spheres of interest among the press and the mercantile community were prominent, particularly the benefit of British imperial expansion to the prosperity of commerce in the region.

Contemporary narratives of the Anglo-Burmese Wars mostly emphasised how troublesome the Burmese authorities were to the development of Western laissez-faire trade in Burma. Michael Adas refers to the ‘before and after’ concept in historiographies in regard to the British annexation of Lower Burma in 1852. He highlights that many historians were influenced by contemporary accounts of Europeans traders, explorers and missionaries on the underdevelopment of Lower Burma. Many of them carried a theme of the devastated Pegu and the role of the British in bringing economic prosperity to this area. However, Adas argues that some accounts give a contradictory view, stating that the Burmese Court had put a lot of effort into making Lower Burma a granary to the whole kingdom.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, he warns that the reader of these accounts should take the ‘occupations, biases and motivations of these men’ into account.<sup>30</sup>

Arguably, the ‘before and after’ narrative is prominent in the press’ coverage of the Anglo-Burmese Wars. During the Second and Third Burmese Wars, the press presented the contrast between pre-colonial and colonial Burma – making the wars and annexation of Burma justifiable. Despite the fact that the press did not start its advocacy for British intervention until the conflicts between local British merchants and the Burmese Court intensified in 1851 and 1885, when it did, it was completely engaged in the campaign. As this section shows, the conjoined movement between the press and the merchants in paving the way for British imperial expansion in Burma was significant in the news reporting on the two Burmese Wars.

Taking a look at the conflict leading to the Second Burmese War of 1852, we can see that the expansionist papers in Calcutta, such as the

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<sup>29</sup> Michael Adas, ‘Imperialist Rhetoric and Modern Historiography: The Case of Lower Burma before and after Conquest,’ *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 3 (1972): 183–84.

<sup>30</sup> Adas, ‘Imperialist Rhetoric and Modern Historiography,’ 191.

*Englishman* and the *Friend of India*, wholeheartedly became supporters and sympathisers of British merchants. Evidently, the Sheppard and Lewis incidents in the summer of 1851, as mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, attracted the attention from Calcutta newspapers, which then led to further revelations about the misconduct of the governor. Intelligence coming out of Burma suggested that the two captains were wrongfully accused and punished by the Rangoon governor – Sheppard was charged with throwing a seaman overboard, while Lewis was accused of murdering one of his crew. However, despite their rejection of the accusations, both captains were forced to pay a heavy fine to the governor – an act of extortion, in their views. Further reports also narrated similar incidents of British merchants’ sufferings, convincing the expansionist papers that the British authorities should immediately interfere in order to end this ‘unauthorised insult and atrocious *squeezing*’ from the Burmese authorities (*Italic in original*).<sup>31</sup>

Actually, the Sheppard and Lewis incidents were products of the prolonged commercial conflict between British traders and the Burmese authorities since the withdrawal of the British Resident from Burma in 1840. The Burmese teak forest where British merchants had vested interest in since the beginning of the nineteenth century became the hotspots of the conflict. The merchants were able to gain a vast area of teak forest in the aftermath of the First Burmese War of 1824–26, which saw the British annexation of Arakan and Tenasserim. From 1829 to April 1847 alone, there were 121,973 teak trees harvested from the Ataran River in Tenasserim. Some of these extracted teaks were sent to the shipbuilding docks in Moulmein, while many others were exported to Calcutta.<sup>32</sup>

Table 1, however, reveals that the number of logged teaks from the Ataran Forest had dramatically decreased by the late 1840s, after a long period of uncontrolled deforestation. This situation forced the timber merchants to move activities into the interior of Burma and Siam. This was then resulted in frequent disputes between British merchants and the Burmese authorities since

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<sup>31</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 10 October 1851, 2; Editorial, *Englishman*, 27 October 1851, 2; ‘The Conduct of the Burmese Governor at Rangoon,’ *Friend of India*, 13 November 1851, 721–22.

<sup>32</sup> Raymond L. Bryant, *The Political Ecology of Forestry in Burma, 1824–1994* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1997), 26–27.

the logged teak had to be floated along the Salween River, which acted as a border with independent Burma, before reaching British-occupied Moulmein (See Figure 7 for Salwin River and Maulmain). This practice led to a new problem as a river flow could sometimes wash the logged teak up on the Burmese shore. British traders were, then, demanded to pay duties in order to retrieve their logs.<sup>33</sup> This problem seemed to be of great concerns to local mercantile community. In October 1851, one Rangoon-based merchant wrote a letter to the *Maulmain Times*, a local English newspaper in Moulmein, Tenasserim, telling a story of one timber merchant whose entire logged teak was seized by the governor of Rangoon. The same writer also claimed that ‘[V]ery little timber is in the market at present owing to the governor’s tyranny, persecution, and extortion’.<sup>34</sup> It should be noted that the authenticity of this report seems suspicious because the decline of logged teak in the market was rather a result of the British deforestation of Tenasserim. Moreover, the seizure of teak – if it really occurred at the border between Burma and Tenasserim – would be conducted by the governor of Martaban, not that of Rangoon a hundred miles away.

Table 1: Logged Teak from the Ataran Forest, 1829–1858

	Trees harvested	% of total harvest
1829-April 1841	77,704	56.3
May 1841-April 1847	44,269	32.1
May 1847-April 1853	11,682	8.5
May 1853-April 1858	4,292	3.1
Total	137,947	100.0

[Source: D. Brandis, Report on the Attaran Forests for the Year 1860, *Selections from the Records of the Government of India (Foreign Department)*, 32 (1861), 139. Reproduced from Raymond L. Bryant, *The Political Ecology of Forestry in Burma, 1824–1994* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1997), 27.]

<sup>33</sup> Pollak, *Empires in Collision*, 46.

<sup>34</sup> ‘Burmah,’ *Hurkaru*, 3 November 1851, 503.



Figure 7: Map of Lower Burma [Source: Constable, *Lower Burma* [Map], 1893, 'Constable's Hand Atlas of India,' Map of South Asia, <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealc/pritchett/00maplinks/colonial/constable1893/section12.jpg> (accessed Oct. 1, 2018).]

The press and merchants shared the same impression of how the Burmese authorities had become problematic to British trading activities. They were convinced that the British commerce in Burma would prosper if the governor of Rangoon was removed from power. On 8 December 1851, the *Englishman* mentioned a petition signed by one hundred merchants in Rangoon. They demanded protection from the Calcutta authorities after being in dispute with the Rangoon authorities.<sup>35</sup> The paper also considered the removal of the troublesome governor ‘from any further trouble in misgoverning Pegu’.<sup>36</sup> After the Second Burmese War was declared in April 1852, the *Englishman* referred to a correspondent in Moulmein who predicted that the British victory would bring economic prosperity through commerce in the region. The unnamed writer wrote that the decline in the trade prior to the war was a result of ‘the selfish feelings of the monopolist, who has an instinctive aversion of free competition’. The heavy taxation on teak and labour had, as the correspondent put it, become ‘a drawback to all improvement’.<sup>37</sup>

The Second Burmese War saw King Mindon (1853–78) ascend to the throne and end the war unilaterally, bringing temporary stability to Anglo-Burmese relations. Unlike his predecessors, Mindon pursued a friendly relationship with the British. He turned out to be cooperative and friendly to the foreigners – while still protecting of Burma’s independence.<sup>38</sup> Looking at the commercial aspect, the new king had taken a pacifist direction by signing commercial treaties with the British authorities in 1862 and 1867. The two treaties led to an abolition of almost all trading monopolies – except in earth-oil, timber and precious stones – for ten years. British enterprises were also allowed to conduct their business in independent Upper Burma (See Figure 6, shaded in green). As mentioned earlier, there were several British firms established their business in Upper Burma since the 1860s and would later

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<sup>35</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 8 December 1851, 2–3.

<sup>36</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 11 December 1851, 2.

<sup>37</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 5 April 1852, 2.

<sup>38</sup> Myint-U, *The Making of Modern Burma*, 125–26.

become crucial sources of information, principally after the withdrawal of the British Residency from Mandalay in 1879.

This honeymoon period, however, lasted for just 26 years. The conflict over the teak forest in Karenni during the 1870s, 'the shoe question' and the British resident's intervention in the royal succession resulted in the withdrawal of the Residency in 1879. The dispute in the Karenni teak forest in the Burmese interior occurred when the British claimed that this area was independent and sent officials to negotiate with its chieftains in 1875. This action was met by an objection from the Burmese Court, which claimed this area as a tributary state. The conflicts over the boundary had never been resolved and the Calcutta authorities, angered with the Burmese resistance, put further pressure on the Burmese by ordering all British officials to remain fully shod when attending the king's audience.<sup>39</sup> This policy, however, technically meant that British officials were forbidden from conducting diplomacy with the Burmese Court given the Burmese tradition requiring all attendees to the king's audience to take off their shoes.

The ascension to the throne of King Thibaw in 1878 further deteriorated the Anglo-Burmese relations. As one of Mindon's youngest sons, Thibaw was not an heir to the throne. However, a palace intrigue in September 1878 greatly changed the trajectory, when Mindon's senior queen, Hsinbyumashin, started a coup by appointing Thibaw as heir apparent against Mindon's wish.<sup>40</sup> Nyaungyan Prince whom Mindon preferred to appoint as the heir to the throne fled to the British Residency in Mandalay and was later sent to exile in India.<sup>41</sup> The Burmese Court was apprehensive of the Resident's intervention. Moreover, the alleged royal massacre in February 1879, when Thibaw's relatives were executed, caused an alarm among the Residency's officials who feared that they would be the next target.<sup>42</sup> This was followed by

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<sup>39</sup> Myint-U, *The Making of Modern Burma*, 141–42.

<sup>40</sup> Mindon's heir apparent, his brother, was killed in the palace's revolt in 1866. He did not appoint the heir to the throne until the final moment of his reign. See John Nisbet, *Burma Under British Rule and Before*, vol. 1 (Westminster: A. Constable, 1901), 40–41.

<sup>41</sup> Nisbet, *Burma Under British Rule and Before*, vol. 1, 41; Maung Htin Aung, *Lord Randolph Churchill and the Dancing Peacock: British Conquest of Burma, 1885* (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1990), 47.

<sup>42</sup> Nisbet, *Burma Under British Rule and Before*, vol. 1, 43.

the Government of India's decision to withdraw the Residency from Upper Burma, ending the diplomatic relationship with the Burmese Court.

Commercial disputes with British mercantile interests were steadily increasing during Thibaw's reign. The loss of cultivated areas in Lower Burma to the British in 1852 had caused financial stiffness to the Burmese treasury. As Michael Adas points out, the Irrawaddy Delta was the major cultivated area for the Burmese kingdom which supplied rice to the Dry Zone, including Upper Burma, and provided the main revenue for the government.<sup>43</sup> During the reign of Mindon, the Burmese Court had to import an average of 68,000 tons of rice annually from the Delta – now British territory.<sup>44</sup> This forced the Burmese Court to reintroduce the monopoly on trade to increase the revenue, while the commercial treaty with the British was also not renewed.<sup>45</sup> This action was received with complaints from the British economic interests, which feared that their interests were at risk. Moreover, the growing ties between Upper Burma and other European powers, particularly France, caused alarm among British mercantile community. It was concerned that the British interests in Upper Burma would be impacted if other powers could establish their influence there.<sup>46</sup> This concern, then, led to the beginning of merchants' campaign for intervention, in which the press would, later, joined in.

The *Englishman* reviewed the situation in Burma in 1883, by expressing its concern over French imperial expansion in Southeast Asia. At that moment, Saigon, in the south of present Vietnam, fell to the French in 1862, while the 1880s also saw the French ambition in pushing their influence to the north.<sup>47</sup> The success of France in Indochina prompted the *Englishman* to speculate that the French might have a plan to expand their presence to Upper

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<sup>43</sup> Charles Lee Keeton, *King Thebaw and the Ecological Rape of Burma: The Political and Commercial Struggle between British India and French Indo-China in Burma, 1878–1886* (Delhi: Manohar Book Service, 1974), 6; Michael Adas, *The Burma Delta: Economic Development and Social Change on an Asian Rice Frontier, 1852–1941* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2011), 23.

<sup>44</sup> Keeton, *King Thebaw and the Ecological Rape of Burma*, 8.

<sup>45</sup> Myint-U, *The Making of Modern Burma*, 166–67.

<sup>46</sup> Myint-U, *The Making of Modern Burma*, 188.

<sup>47</sup> Annam and Tonkin (present central and northern Vietnam) became a French Protectorate in 1883.

Burma as well.<sup>48</sup> The despatch of the Burmese envoy to France significantly fuelled speculation of the growing Franco-Burmese relations. On 18 July 1885, the *Englishman* published a piece of intelligence from Mandalay suggesting the Burmese intention to establish an official representative in Paris. The paper argued that this story emphasised ‘a desire on the part of Mandalay to have an offensive and defensive alliance with France if possible’.<sup>49</sup>

Table 2: Analysis of Timber Account. Produced by the Bombay-Burmah Trading Corporation at Rangoon

Year	Log converted (tons)	Total square and scantling tonnage	Value of converted
1882/83	42,585	38,008	24,15,175
1883/84	69,081	58,203	34,48,225
1884/85	66,756	52,009	31,90,125
1885/86	64,280	48,394	30,17,470 <sup>50</sup>

[Source: Adapted from ‘Statistics Concerning of Teak Export, Consumption and Stocks in Burmah and Siam,’ 31 May 1891, *Records of Wallace Brothers and Company (Holdings) Limited: Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation Limited*, CLC/B/207/MS40280 (London Metropolitan Archives).]

As referred to in the introduction to this thesis, the BBTC case in August 1885 became a prelude to the Third Burmese War. The company, which was one of Britain’s largest enterprises in Burma, was accused of illegal logging of teak and tax avoidance by the Burmese authorities, which threatened to impose a heavy fine on the company – and to revoke its license

<sup>48</sup> Editorial, ‘The Year 1882,’ *Englishman*, 1 January 1883, 2.

<sup>49</sup> ‘Latest Telegram – News from Mandalay,’ *Englishman*, 18 July 1885, 4.

<sup>50</sup> The number would continue to drop until 1888–89 as a result of the British authorities’ restriction on a teak extraction to prevent overharvesting. See Bryant, *The Political Ecology of Forestry in Burma*, 78–83.



to conduct business in Upper Burma.<sup>51</sup> This dispute with the Burmese Court greatly affected the BBTC's business. Addressing its shareholders a year after the completion of the war, the BBTC admitted that its activity in 1885 produced less profit. The company was also less assured as to whether it could pay any dividend to the shareholder.<sup>52</sup> Table 2 shows the timber account of the BBTC's branch in Rangoon which shows a drop in the amount of teak harvested and in the value of the logs from 1884 onwards.

Following the BBTC case, the press and British mercantile community had started to pressure the British authorities to intervene in Upper Burma. They seemed to be convinced that the decline in British trade in Upper Burma was a result of growing ties between King Thibaw and the French. In August 1885, the Bengal Chamber of Commerce voiced their displeasure of Thibaw's hostile attitude towards the British enterprise. They even started to consider the necessity of the British intervention in Burma.<sup>53</sup> The fear of the French intrigue seemed to be confirmed by the revelation of the BBTC case in September 1885. Based on the news coverage during this period, the British mercantile community in Rangoon interpreted the BBTC dispute as the first movement from the French in establishing their influence in Upper Burma. They were convinced that the Burmese authorities had become more hostile to their interests in Upper Burma.<sup>54</sup> The growing ties between France and Upper Burma were also interpreted as a real threat to British economic interests, convincing the mercantile community in Rangoon of the necessity of intervention.<sup>55</sup>

The expansionist papers like the *Englishman* also joined in the merchants' movement. The paper, which had closely monitored the French

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<sup>51</sup> The Burmese Court imposed a fine of nearly £100,000: £33,333 to the forestry and £36,666 to the king, not including further unpaid taxes. See Anthony Webster, *Gentleman Capitalists: British Imperialism in Southeast Asia, 1770–1890* (New York: I.B.Tauris, 1998), 223.

<sup>52</sup> 'Text of a speech, apparently given at a meeting of shareholders, relating to the business performance of Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation LTD in Burma,' 1886, *Records of Wallace Brothers and Company (Holdings) Limited: Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation Limited*, CLC/B/207/MS40213 (London Metropolitan Archives).

<sup>53</sup> Editorial, *Statesman*, 28 August 1885, 2.

<sup>54</sup> 'Hostility to Foreigners,' *Englishman*, 22 September 1885, 4.

<sup>55</sup> 'The Burma Question,' *Englishman*, 24 September 1885, 4.

imperial expansion in Asia, was concerned that if France could establish its influence in Upper Burma, the whole region was at risk of becoming ‘a feudatory of the French’. It believed that the consequence would ultimately be disastrous to the British enterprise.<sup>56</sup> On 13 October 1885, the paper published a figure showing the decline in the British trade with Upper Burma. The figure showed that the total value of the land imports from April to June 1885:

...amounted to Rs. 50,55,194, as compared with Rs. 54,72,506 in 1884. The trade of Upper Burma alone had decreased in even a larger proportion, the values for the two years being Rs. 25,44,226 [1885], and Rs. 35,13,168 [1884], respectively.<sup>57</sup>

The *Englishman* also urged the British authorities to act boldly and promptly by introducing the free trade in Upper Burma and beyond – particularly the Shan States, which had been allowed ‘to lie dormant too long’. It agreed with the merchants that intervention in this ‘new and promising territory’ would secure the British economic interests in the entire region.<sup>58</sup> Thus, the *Englishman*’s coverage had similar rhetoric to that of the mercantile community – that the Burmese authorities had been an obstacle to the prosperity of the British commerce in this region and should be replaced.

To make the case for British intervention in Burma, the press and the mercantile community put emphasis on the idea of ‘promising’ advantage of the opening up of the region to free commerce. They highlighted that the Burmese unfriendliness to the British enterprises had led to a decline in trade, putting Britain’s economic interests at risk. To further highlight the economic justification for the British imperial expansion in Burma, the next section will explore the idea of imperial rivalry between Britain and other Western nations that the press brought into the news reporting. This is to underline the role of the press in being an advocate and self-proclaimed protector of British economic supremacy in Burma.

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<sup>56</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 28 September 1885, 4.

<sup>57</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 13 October 1885, 4.

<sup>58</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 5 October 1885, 5.

### A Question of 'Free Trade'? : Newspapers as the British imperial guardian

Britain was not the only nation that came into contact with Burma during the nineteenth century. In fact, the Western community in Burma was far more cosmopolitan, consisting of people from various places such as the US, Armenia, Italy, and France – most of whom were part of the mercantile community. Despite the press' recognition of economic importance of Burma to the growing Western commerce, further examination of the English-language newspapers' coverage of the Anglo-Burmese conflict reveals that their definition of 'Western commerce' was rather limited to that of the British, making them far from free-trade advocates. The two Burmese wars became a contesting ground for the newspapers to reflect their attitude towards other imperial powers; and how affairs in Burma were linked to the imperial competition in Asia. As this section shows, not only did the newspapers have an interest in British commerce in Burma, but they also acted as self-appointed guardians of British imperial power in the region.

The presence of other Western nations in Asia was considered to be a threat to British interests in this region while the idea of political and economic intrigue from other imperial powers became the main point of concern to the British policy-makers, mercantile communities and newspapers, particularly during the two Anglo-Burmese Wars. French imperial expansion in Asia in the second half of the nineteenth century has been cited by historians as having a significant impact on British foreign policy. In an article on the making of the French imperial frontier in mainland Southeast Asia, P. J. N. Tuck points to how the French success in establishing its presence in Cochinchina in the early 1880s caused an alarm to British policy makers. They feared that this would be the beginning of France's 'aggressive and expansionist' intrigue in Siam and Upper Burma, which could be a real threat to British interests in Lower Burma.<sup>59</sup> In *Burma: Myth of French Intrigue*, Lipi Ghosh refers to the opinions of British officials in Rangoon and Calcutta that

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<sup>59</sup> P. J. N. Tuck, 'Jules Ferry, Upper Burma and Siam: The Defence of the French Imperial Frontier in Mainland Southeast Asia, 1883–1885,' *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 6 (1978): 228, 230.

the growing ties between France and Upper Burma would ultimately jeopardise the British commerce in the region.<sup>60</sup> Both scholars, however, argue that the prospect of the French intrigue in Upper Burma might not be as serious as had been considered. Ghosh, interestingly, highlights that the expansionist rhetoric was rather a reflection of the anxieties of local men on the spot, such as agents of commercial houses and consuls, instead of the authorities in Paris.<sup>61</sup> Tuck also underlines the fracture in France's policy on Upper Burma, suggesting that the Paris authorities had no clear policy on intervention in Burma.<sup>62</sup> Although these studies, benefitting from hindsight, underplay the French intervention in Burma, this section argues that this matter, at that time, was of real concern, as is evident in the news coverage by the English newspapers.

During the Second Burmese War of 1852, there was no serious threat from other Western powers. However, the expansionist newspapers in Calcutta brought up stories about the possibility of American expansion in Asia to emphasise the necessity of British intervention in Burma. News of the dispatch of the American expedition to Japan in 1852 greatly alarmed both the British authorities and mercantile communities in Calcutta.<sup>63</sup> The British merchants and the expansionist papers in Calcutta seemed apprehensive as they doubted the purpose of the expedition. Their initial thought was that the US government would expand its influence into other Asian states. A correspondent to the *Englishman* wrote about his concerns of American rapid expansion in which he hoped that the British authorities would impose more active measures to ensure that British interests were under the protection of the government.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Lipi Ghosh, *Burma: Myth of French Intrigue* (Calcutta: Naya Udyog, 1994), 88.

<sup>61</sup> Ghosh, *Burma: Myth of French Intrigue*, 102–3.

<sup>62</sup> Tuck, 'Jules Ferry, Upper Burma and Siam,' 248–50.

<sup>63</sup> The American Envoy, under the command of Commodore Matthew C. Perry, departed for Japan with an intention to force the conservative Japanese authorities to open the country to Western trade. Successive Japanese Emperors had maintained a policy of isolation for more than 220 years, which barred all foreigners from entering Japan while also prohibiting the Japanese people from leaving the country. This became an obstacle to the rapid expansion of American economic interests in Asia. See Jeffrey A. Keith, 'Civilization, Race, and the Japan Expedition's Cultural Diplomacy, 1853–1854,' *Diplomatic History* 35 (2011): 181.

<sup>64</sup> A. N. W. Merchant, 'Free Trade versus Protection,' *Englishman*, 1 April 1852, 2.

With the uncertainty about affairs in Burma, the *Friend of India* was convinced that the Americans would take this opportunity to establish its foothold in this region. Although there was no solid evidence suggesting the ambition of the US government to establish a sphere of interest in Burma, the *Friend of India* seemed to be deluded by the fear of American intervention. The newspaper had monitored this matter since early 1852 after it received intelligence from a New York newspaper indicating that the US government was considering establishing a sphere of influence in Burma.<sup>65</sup> It became increasingly alarmed by the news about the American envoy to Japan and started to consider the effect of the American intervention in Asia from June 1852 onwards – even though the expedition would not arrive in Japan until mid-1853. All of the newspaper's reports on the threat from the Americans were entirely based on speculation and fear.

Believing America to be a competitor in the imperial expansion in Asia, the *Friend of India* predicted that if the American mission to Japan went became a success, it would impact considerably on Britain's foothold in Asia. To prevent this from happening, the paper urged the British authorities in Calcutta to act first by annexing Lower Burma. On 3 June 1852, the editorial wrote that:

[The Americans] are now engaged in humbling the empire of Japan, and breaking up its exclusiveness, and opening its commerce to the European world, and we are confident that Commodore Perry [of the American expedition] will gladly undertake the duty...of introducing civilized influence upon the waters of the Irrawaddy, even though it should end in planting [The Star-Spangled Banner] on the wall of Ava.<sup>66</sup>

On 10 June 1852, the *Friend of India*'s editorial reported that the American expedition fleet was 'much larger [than] would be required for any pacific

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<sup>65</sup> 'Progress of Events in Regard to Burmah,' *Friend of India*, 19 February 1852, 114–15.

<sup>66</sup> 'Burmah,' *Friend of India*, 3 June 1852, 353–54.

purpose'.<sup>67</sup> This information convinced the paper that America intended to establish its presence in the East – possibly, as far as Burma.<sup>68</sup>

Although the above statement was entirely based on speculation, when placed with the *Friend of India*'s overall narrative of the event, particularly the British economic interests in Burma, this perception greatly supported the paper's advocacy for the annexation. However, this notion quickly disappeared after the British authorities started to consider the idea of annexation. The certainty in the annexation policy undoubtedly eased the *Friend of India*'s concerns over the American threat. After the area of Pegu, or Lower Burma, was occupied by the British in September 1852, the emphasis on the news coverage then shifted to the idea of further advancing to the Burmese capital of Ava.<sup>69</sup>

During the Anglo-Burmese conflict of 1885, the imperial competition between Britain and France became one of the main themes of news reporting. The British mercantile classes and newspapers had apparently considered Upper Burma to be the British sphere of interest – despite the fact that this area, prior to the British conquest in late 1885, was an independent state in which the Burmese Court had full sovereignty over the administration. The growing ties between France and Upper Burma, particularly during the reign of King Thibaw and the presence of French agents, particularly the consul, at the Burmese Court had been closely monitored by the British mercantile community and the press. The early 1880s saw a dispatching of another Burmese envoy to France and Italy<sup>70</sup>, while there were rumours circulating that the French consul was trying to secure a commercial deal with the Burmese government – a deal which would result in the establishment of French political and economic influence in Upper Burma.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> 'The American Expedition to Japan,' *Friend of India*, 10 June 1852, 370–71.

<sup>68</sup> 'Burmah and Our Projected Movement,' *Friend of India*, 16 September 1852, 593–94.

<sup>69</sup> 'Advance on Prome – and Ava?,' *Friend of India*, 23 September 1852, 609–10; 'Burmah,' *Friend of India*, 7 October 1852, 641–42.

<sup>70</sup> The first mission to Europe took place in 1871 where the Burmese envoy visited Italy, France and UK.

<sup>71</sup> Editorial, 'The Year of 1882,' *Englishman*, 1 January 1883, 2.

The press, particularly the expansionist newspapers, unanimously agreed that French success in Upper Burma would be disruptive to the British political and economic interests in the region. When stories about the BBTC case in 1885 were known to the public, the Burmese delegation was, at the moment, in Paris, awaiting a meeting with the French government.<sup>72</sup> The newspapers quickly linked this story with their concerns about French intervention. They interpreted the BBTC case to be a result of the growing Franco-Burmese relationships, which would eventually put British interests in Upper Burma at a disadvantage. To make matters worse, the revelation of the draft treaty between France and the Burmese Court in September 1885 significantly reinforced a fear of French imperial expansion into Upper Burma. This information gave the expansionist newspapers a crucial evidence to support their campaign for British intervention.

The *Englishman*, for example, was concerned that France would be too close to the British territories in Burma and India and would pose a serious threat to the security of the British administration and trading interests in the region.<sup>73</sup> Similarly, *The Times* predicted that the establishment of French influence in Upper Burma would be disastrous to the British. The paper urged the British government to initiate the intervention in order to prevent other powers from obtaining control over Upper Burma and ‘to stand in the way of our free trading intercourse with the country itself and with the vast Empire beyond it’.<sup>74</sup>

Although the English expansionist newspapers had advocated the opening of Burma to Western commerce, they did not expect the opening of the Burmese economy to any other country apart from Britain. The concern about American and French intervention in Burma was part of the overall coverage of the Anglo-Burmese conflicts, which highlighted what the newspapers asserted as the necessity of British imperial expansion. Despite the fact that their concern over the threat from the two nations was highly

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<sup>72</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 28 September 1885, 4.

<sup>73</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 5 October 1885, 5.

<sup>74</sup> Editorial, *The Times*, 17 October 1885, 9.

speculative, it reinforced the newspapers' position as advocates and guardians of British economic interests in Burma and the surrounding regions.

'The Country will soon Flourish': The voice of Burma-based British merchants in the Calcutta press

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the economic interests had been associated with the operation of newspapers, principally in giving financial support in the form of advertisements and subscriptions. In return, the newspapers devoted a considerably number of pages to crucial information that suited or represented interests of this particular supporter. However, this section highlights another contribution from economic interests to the press' news reporting, principally the supply of information to newspapers, as is evident during the Second Burmese War of 1852. This approach will examine how information gathered from British mercantile communities in Burma played a crucial part in the press' campaign for British imperial expansion in the early 1850s.

Recent historiographical debate on British imperial expansion in Burma has been mostly focused on the question of who were the main driving forces in leading Britain to annex Burma. This is evident in the works of SarDesai and Webster. Despite having similar views on contributions from British economic sectors, they have different views on where the motivation for British intervention in Burma originated from. SarDesai puts emphasis on the movement by the British mercantile communities in Burma in pressurising the Calcutta authorities on the policy of intervention and annexation.<sup>75</sup> Webster acknowledges contributions from British subjects in Burma in bringing stories about their suffering from the Burmese authorities to the wider public and the authorities in Calcutta. However, he argues that it was the mercantile interests in Calcutta, whose interests in Burma were paramount, who picked up on the matter and generated the pressure that eventually led to

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<sup>75</sup> Damodar Ramaja SarDesai, *British Trade and Expansion in Southeast Asia, 1830–1914* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1977), 14–15.



the Second Burmese War.<sup>76</sup> This section will find a middle ground between the two works by showing crucial contributions from local British residents in Burma in bringing the severity of the situation and the necessity of intervention to the newspapers in Calcutta and London. Their supply of information to the press became instrumental in the news reporting on the Burmese question.

The decade before the Second Burmese War of 1852 saw British merchants in Burma actively submitting complaints and petitions to the government of India, demanding protection – or intervention – following their frequent clashes with the Burmese authorities over trading monopolies. In response to their actions, the Calcutta authorities in 1842 dismissed the merchants' demand for intervention, arguing that a private trader 'who thus ventures into an unfriendly port, for his own profit, does so at his own risk, and cannot claim the intervention of his Government as a matter of right'.<sup>77</sup> However, the merchants were persistent in pressurising the authorities. With the absence of official representatives in Burma from the 1840s onwards, local British merchants had the upper hand in acting as the main supplier of information to the British authorities and communities in British-occupied Moulmein, Calcutta and beyond.

In addition to their submission of complaints directly to the British authorities in Calcutta, English newspapers in British-occupied Moulmein and Calcutta were another channel of communication where local merchants in Burma could convey stories of the alleged Burmese hostilities to wider audiences, including the authorities. Since it was common for copies of English newspapers in Burma to be dispatched to Calcutta, the press became a perfect medium for merchants to submit their information in regard to local affairs, with a chance for it to be read and reproduced by newspapers in Calcutta and beyond India. This supply of information became more prominent after the Sheppard and Lewis incidents in 1851, which was followed by an increase in transmissions of intelligence from British

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<sup>76</sup> Webster, *Gentleman Capitalists*, 155.

<sup>77</sup> Pollak, *Empires in Collision*, 54.

merchants in Burma to the press – all of them pointed to the necessity for British intervention.

It should be noted that there was a crucial change in British foreign policy a year earlier following the Don Pacifico Affair of 1850 when Palmerston, the Foreign Minister, sent gunboats to blockade Athens to demand a compensation for Pacifico, a British subject. This event became an inspiration to British merchants in Burma who then began to pressurise the British authorities in Calcutta for intervention in Burma. Palmerston's foreign policy, particularly his *Civis Romanus sum* speech in 1850, had an impact on Lord Dalhousie, the Governor General of India (1848–56), who, in late 1851, sent an expedition to Rangoon to demand a redress from the Burmese government. It is shown in his minute in January 1852 in which he wrote:

Holding to Lord Wellesley's maxim, that an insult offered to the British flag at the mouth of the Ganges should be resented as promptly and as fully as an insult offered at the mouth of the Thames. I should, under any circumstances, have regarded it as sound policy to exact reparation for wrong done to British subjects from any native state.<sup>78</sup>

The influence of the Don Pacifico Affair on the expansionist newspapers in Calcutta and British merchants was evident to contemporaries – many were suspicious of the overlap in interest between the two groups. For example, the *Hurkaru*, as referred to in the previous chapter, clearly expressed its distrust of the British merchant in Rangoon.<sup>79</sup> Speaking to the House of Lords on the Burmese question, the Earl of Ellenborough also contended that the Calcutta press was in concert with the merchants in advocating intervention in Burma. He asserted that his experience as the Governor-General of India during 1844–48 had taught him that British merchants in Rangoon, whom he dubbed 'Don Pacificoes', were using the commercial

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<sup>78</sup> Marquess of Dalhousie, *Private Letters of the Marquess of Dalhousie*, ed. J. G. Baird, Facsimile of 1910 ed edition (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1972), 187; Mukherjee, *British Colonial Policy in Burma*, 120.

<sup>79</sup> Editorial, *Hurkaru*, 12 December 1851, 654.

dispute with the Burmese authorities as a justification for imperial expansion.<sup>80</sup> On 5 April 1852, the Earl of Ellenborough spoke to Parliament, saying that these imperialist merchants were:

...very desirous of possessing the teak forests on the other sides, for the purpose of carrying on and extending their trade by Rangoon, and they are in concert and connexion [*sic*] with the press in Calcutta, the movements of which I view with anxiety and distrust.

Moreover, since the Calcutta press, particularly the expansionist newspapers, strongly advocated intervention, it convinced the Earl of Ellenborough that the press had become a mouthpiece for the merchant.<sup>81</sup> This comment reflected his fear that the joint movement between the press and merchant community would eventually force the Calcutta authorities into what he described as an unnecessary war and occupation of Burma.

Examining the operational side of newspapers, this chapter contends that information in regard to conflicts between British merchants and the Burmese authorities, which mostly originated from local mercantile communities, significantly fuelled the press' campaign for intervention. Local English newspapers in Burma, in particular, the *Maulmain Times*, became hotspots where local residents and merchants could present their own stories of the Burmese hostilities. The *Maulmain Times* itself also became an important source of information to newspapers in India and beyond. A regular steamship service from Moulmein and Rangoon to Calcutta, which took only a week, enabled newspapers in Calcutta to keep up with the development of the conflict in Burma. This regular transmission of news, as will be shown later, greatly contributed to the formation of the press' opinions on the Burmese question.

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<sup>80</sup> The Earl of Ellenborough used the term 'Don Pacificoes' to describe British merchants in Rangoon who were trying to pressurise the authorities to intervene in Burma – like what Pacifico had done in 1847 after coming into disputes with the Greek authorities. See 'Parliamentary Intelligence – House of Lords, Monday, February 16,' *The Times*, 17 February 1852, 2.

<sup>81</sup> 'Parliamentary Intelligence – House of Lords, Monday, April 5,' *The Times*, 6 April 1852, 2.

Expansionist newspapers in Calcutta, such as the *Englishman* and the *Friend of India*, enthusiastically devoted plenty of space to intelligence coming out of Burma. Following the Sheppard and Lewis incidents in 1851, there was a significant increase in transmissions of intelligence from Burma to India. This was the time when the press in Calcutta began to take the Anglo-Burmese conflict more seriously. For example, a letter from Lewis to the *Englishman* took half a page – a great deal of space. The report narrated how the governor of Rangoon used the charge to extort money from him, and it also depicted the ‘madness’ of the governor as he had used ‘every abusive epithet the language contained, and gesticulating in the most violent manner’ throughout the trial.<sup>82</sup> The story prompted the editor of the *Englishman* to call the Rangoon governor’s act ‘the grossest and most disreputable insults to British subjects, and to the power of England’. The incidents greatly convinced the paper of the necessity of immediate intervention.<sup>83</sup>

Further transmissions of intelligence related to the affair in Burma brought more stories of the Burmese aggression, and the availability of information undoubtedly played a significant part in fuelling the press’ advocacy for intervention. The *Englishman* even asserted that every ship arriving from Burma teemed with ‘the report of increased and insulting indignities’.<sup>84</sup> Several reports mentioned a widespread robbery in the British settlement in Burma, and the Rangoon governor was alleged to be behind it.<sup>85</sup> On 27 October 1851, the *Englishman* reported that an Armenian merchant named Carapiet Zachariah was robbed of a chest containing jewels and money. His properties were alleged to be found later at the house of the Rangoon governor.<sup>86</sup> The robbery had occurred at the house of Aga Bukker, an Armenian merchant, and the Rangoon governor was said to be complicit in this event.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Harold Lewis, ‘Violence at Rangoon,’ *Englishman*, 18 October 1851, 2.

<sup>83</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 10 October 1851, 2.

<sup>84</sup> *Englishman*, 10 October 1851.

<sup>85</sup> ‘Maulmain,’ *Englishman*, 3 October 1851, 3.

<sup>86</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 27 October 1851, 4.

<sup>87</sup> ‘The Conduct of the Burmese Governor at Rangoon,’ *Friend of India*, 13 November 1851, 721–22.

The bellicose character of the Burmese authorities, particularly the Rangoon governor, was at the centre of reports of the British mercantile community in Burma. The British expedition to Rangoon in late 1851 demanded a redress from the Burmese authorities regarding merchants' suffering from the misconduct of the governor of Rangoon. This action led to the appointment of a new governor of Rangoon in early January 1852. However, reports from local residents continued to show doubts about the willingness of the Burmese to come to terms with the British. For example, the *Maulmain Times* in January 1852 reported the arrival of the new Rangoon governor, who brought a large number of armed men with him. This was seen as the first sign of the Burmese preparation for war.<sup>88</sup>

The Rangoon incident on 6 January 1852, in which the new Rangoon governor refused to give an audience to the British envoy, confirmed the press' belief that a war with Burma was inevitable. The *Maulmain Times* stated that the new governor, having arrived at Rangoon on 4th January, showed no willingness to reconcile with the British delegation by refusing to meet Commodore Lambert, the commander of the expedition, on every occasion and found 'every disposition in the Burmese to shew fight'.<sup>89</sup> The *Friend of India* also reported that the new governor had threatened to fire at every British naval fleet attempting to pass through the Burmese stockade. With the report suggesting that the Burmese authorities continued to show hostilities towards the British, the *Friend of India* concluded that there was no better policy on Burma than military intervention and the annexation of all Burma's coastal provinces.<sup>90</sup> From this point, information from Burma emphasised military preparation on the Burmese side, suggesting that their authorities were eager to open hostilities with Britain instead of negotiations.<sup>91</sup>

Unlike the British authorities, which, until the outbreak of the war in April 1852, still entertained the idea that military intervention in Burma could

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<sup>88</sup> 'Burmese War or No War,' *Friend of India*, 15 January 1852, 33; Editorial, 'War with Burmah,' *Englishman*, 17 January 1852 (Evening), 3.

<sup>89</sup> *Englishman*, 17 January 1852 (Evening).

<sup>90</sup> 'The Second War with the Burmese Has Commenced,' *Friend of India*, 22 January 1852, 49–51.

<sup>91</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 7 February 1852, 2; 'Burmah,' *Friend of India*, 4 March 1852, 145.

be averted<sup>92</sup>, expansionist newspapers in Calcutta became certain on the inevitability of intervention. They started to publish intelligence obtained from merchants in Burma, addressing the economic potential of the area to British commerce if annexation happened. The purpose of these reports seemed to highlight the ‘maladministration’ of the Burmese authorities, giving their hostile attitude against British merchants, and how the intervention would enable trading activities in the region to prosper. On 3 February 1852, the *Englishman* published a letter urging the Indian Government to annex Lower Burma for the benefit of British free enterprise and that of native inhabitants, who were considered to be ‘trading matter-of-fact people’ who would give Britain enormous advantages.<sup>93</sup> Another correspondent claimed that under the moderate rule of the British:

[Burma] will soon flourish, sooner indeed than imagined, being bounded by the two most populous countries in the world. Its resources are vast, though not yet developed, and in a short space of time it may justly rank with its rich neighbours.<sup>94</sup>

My thesis will return in the next chapter to discuss the press’ perspective on Burma, particularly the importance of the region to British political and economic supremacy in Asia, and why the war and annexation were deemed necessary and inevitable.

Although *The Times of London* in the 1850s, as discussed in the previous chapter, stood against British merchants’ demand for intervention in Burma, the metropolitan paper could not avoid basing its views on the Burmese question on information originated from local men on the spot in Burma. This reliance suggests that *The Times* could still feel the pressure from the British mercantile community in the East. For example, on 19 March 1852, *The Times* published a letter from Drouhet, Gardner, and Co., London-based merchant, who forwarded ‘news from Rangoon’ provided by ‘Mr Tulloch,

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<sup>92</sup> Minute of the Governor General of India, 22 January 1852, ‘Documents relating to the Ava - Rangoon Hostilities,’ *Papers of Edward Geoffrey Stanley 14th Earl of Derby (1799-1869)*, 920 DER 14/147/12/5 (Liverpool Central Library).

<sup>93</sup> Horatio, ‘Correspondence – Maulmain,’ *Englishman*, 3 February 1852, 2.

<sup>94</sup> Well-Wishers, ‘How to Treat the Burmese,’ *Englishman*, 4 March 1852, 2.

purser of the *Oriental*', reporting the Burmese military preparation. The report pointed to the hostile attitude of the Burmese Court towards the British, while also suggested that the war with Burma would be inevitable. The writer clearly stated that his intelligence was an extract of the *Englishman*.<sup>95</sup>

When investigating the origin of *The Times*' reports on Burma, it can be demonstrated that many pieces of intelligence can be traced back to news reports in the Calcutta newspapers, particularly the *Englishman* and the *Friend of India*.<sup>96</sup> Although *The Times* did not see any justification for British intervention in Burma, the newspaper admitted that the Burmese mistreatment of the merchants left the British authorities with no alternative but to interfere by force.<sup>97</sup> The impact of intelligence coming out of Burma can also be seen from the debate in the Parliament. Speaking against the Earl of Ellenborough who, as mentioned above, strongly opposed the idea of the war, the Marquis of Lansdowne and the Earl of Derby used stories about the Sheppard and Lewis incidents and the new Rangoon governor's refusal to meet the British delegation to stress the necessity of intervention. They reasoned that the two incidents clearly showed how hostile the Burmese authorities had become, and it was the government's duty to give protection to British merchants and subjects who had long been under an unjustified oppression.<sup>98</sup> This evidence sheds light on the importance of information from British merchants in Burma to the formation of the press and politicians' opinions on the Anglo-Burmese conflict.

Contributions from local British communities in Burma in supplying intelligence to Calcutta were fundamental to the shaping of the conflict leading to the Second Burmese War. Their information could reach wider readers not only in the community in British-occupied Burma, but also in India and as far away as Britain, creating a considerable impact on

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<sup>95</sup> Drouhet, Gardner, and Co., 'The Burmese War,' *The Times*, 19 March 1852, 8.

<sup>96</sup> *The Times* published intelligence about the conflict between the Rangoon governor and Captain Lewis on December 17, 1851. This intelligence was, in fact, extracted from the *Englishman*. See Editorial, *Englishman*, 10 October 1851, 2; 'India and China,' *The Times*, 17 December 1851, 6.

<sup>97</sup> Editorial, *The Times*, 12 June 1852, 5.

<sup>98</sup> 'The Parliamentary Intelligence – House of Lords, Monday, Feb. 16,' *The Times*, 17 February 1852, 2; 'The Parliamentary Intelligence – House of Lords, Monday, April. 5,' *The Times*, 6 April 1852, 2.

newspapers' and politicians' attitudes towards British involvement in Burma. My thesis will return in Chapter 4 to discuss the consumption of these pieces of intelligence related to the affair in Burma and the way in which the press, particularly expansionist newspapers, used the availability of intelligence to generate the campaign for intervention.

### From Private Correspondence to the 'Latest Telegrams': A change in the geopolitics of news during the Third Burmese War

The second half of the nineteenth century saw changes in the way people communicated, particularly following continuous developments of the telegraph system, making the transmission of information speedier and more efficient. The traditional mode of communication between Asia and Europe, principally the steamship service, was time consuming and far from efficient. However, with newer mode of communication, the transmission of news and information became almost instant. This change is evident in the news coverage of the Third Anglo-Burmese War of 1885 when intelligence coming from Burma could reach readers, namely the press, in both Calcutta and London within a single day – a sharp contrast to the previous period when mails from Burma could take more than six weeks to reach London. Another change can be seen in the nature of intelligence because the news coverage of Burma in 1885 suggests that nearly all reports were written by the newspapers' own correspondents, instead of local residents and merchants. Although these two changes might suggest a separation between the press and British merchants – the ties which were once prominent – the section argues that the scarcity of information related to affairs in Upper Burma still put the press in close collaboration with local mercantile communities.

The availability of telegraphic communication enabled British mercantile communities in different parts of the world to be connected easily and more efficiently. The mercantile communities, as Wenzlhuemer shows, were the main users of the telegraphic communication between Asia and the metropole. He shows how telegrams from British commercial and private sectors formed the bulk of the traffic of communication from India to Britain



during 1888–89.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, the more efficient means of communication, as Jones highlights, also enabled trading houses in metropolitan Britain to gain more control over the strategy and operation of their overseas enterprises.<sup>100</sup>

A series of communications between the BBTC and the London authorities prior to the Third Burmese War is a great example of the mercantile community's reliance on the direct communication via the telegraph. During the BBTC case in August 1885, the company agent in Upper Burma could telegraph its headquarters in Britain directly, without passing the 'intermediaries' like newspapers and middlemen as used to be the case in the traditional mode of communication. After receiving that information, Wallace Brothers, the owner of the company, passed it to the British government. In two pieces of correspondence written by Wallace himself and J. A. Bryce, the manager of the BBTC, they interpreted the legal case against the BBTC as the Burmese intention to force British enterprises out of Upper Burma. They strongly believed that the French agents were behind this incident and that British authorities should immediately intervene to prevent Upper Burma from becoming a French protectorate.<sup>101</sup> This evidence suggests that the merchants could use the telegraphic communication to campaign for British imperial expansion in Burma on their own.

Not only could the mercantile classes in Britain, with the telegraph, have more involvement in the affair in Burma, but the opening up of access to sources of information in Burma also extended to the metropolitan press, as in the case of *The Times*. The increased reliance on the telegraph and the appointment of special correspondents to report foreign news – replacing local residents and merchants as main informants – had turned the operation of the press to more in-house than the previous period. The second half of the nineteenth century saw newspapers starting to appoint or dispatch their own

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<sup>99</sup> Roland Wenzlhuemer, *Connecting the Nineteenth-Century World: The Telegraph and Globalization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 239.

<sup>100</sup> Jones, *Merchants to Multinationals*, 39–42.

<sup>101</sup> Telegrams from the Bombay-Burmah Trading Corporation to Messrs. Wallace Brothers, London, 11 August and 17 August 1885, *Relations between France and Burmah*, FO 425/148 (TNA).

correspondents to conduct the news reporting overseas.<sup>102</sup> In the case of news coverage of affairs in Upper Burma in 1885, this chapter contends that with the availability of the telegraph the press in Britain was now able to gain similar coverage to that its contemporaries in India. This change is apparent in *The Times*' coverage, in which the newspaper could, as shown in Table 3, receive speedy communications from its correspondent in Calcutta and Rangoon and independently construct its own investigation into the Anglo-Burmese conflict.<sup>103</sup>

Table 3: Telegrams related to affairs in Burma published in the *Englishman* and *The Times of London* in 1885

Events	<i>Englishman</i> (Calcutta)	<i>The Times of London</i>
Alleged draft treaty between France and Upper Burma	Sent from Rangoon: 20 Sept. Published: 21 Sept.	Sent from Calcutta: 20 Sept. Published: 21 Sept.
Meeting of the Rangoon Chamber of Commerce on 22 September 1885 – discussing the BBTC case and the alleged draft treaty	Sent from Rangoon: 23 Sept. Published: 24 Sept.	Sent from Calcutta: 23 Sept. Published: 24 Sept.
Preparation for the advancement to Upper Burma		Sent from Rangoon: 24 Oct. Published: 26 Oct.

From this point, it might be suggested that the telegraph and the presence of press correspondents had made the relationship between the

<sup>102</sup> Lucy Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 229; Andrew S. Thompson, *Imperial Britain: The Empire in British Politics, c.1880–1932* (Essex: Longman, 2000), 62–63.

<sup>103</sup> Prior to the commencement of the war in November 1885, *The Times* mainly relied on its correspondent in Calcutta who gathered and telegraphed information to the newsroom in London. Later, when the war was declared, the paper then appointed a special correspondent who joined the British expedition force in a march to Mandalay. See 'Burmah,' *The Times*, 21 September 1885, 5; 'Latest Telegram – Burmah,' *The Times*, 26 October 1885, 5.

newspapers and the British mercantile community redundant. However, this chapter argues that the context of Burma prior to the Third Burmese War still forced the press to rely on intelligence from local residents. Following the withdrawal of the British Residency from Upper Burma in 1879, the British authorities and communities, including the press, had to mainly rely on information supplied by local residents such as private traders, agents of commercial houses, European consuls and, even, the Mandalay Palace's maids of honour.

These informants in Mandalay, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, greatly contributed to the British advocacy for intervention in Upper Burma, principally by supplying reports about the Burmese hostility towards the British. Andreino, an Italian consul in Mandalay, for example, played crucial role in supplying intelligence to the British authorities and trading houses in Rangoon, particularly his revelation of the draft Franco-Burmese treaty in July 1885, has been cited as impactful because of the alarm caused among the British mercantile community in Rangoon and Calcutta. Andreino gathered this information from Mattie Calogreedy, a Greek maid of honour, before he transmitted it to Rangoon.<sup>104</sup> It was alleged that the Burmese Court had given approval to the French to control all royal monopolies and to construct a railway from Mandalay to Toungoo, which acted as one of the frontiers for British Burma (See Figure 7 for Taung-Ngu).<sup>105</sup> The content of the intelligence was considerably 'disturbing', and it led the British authorities, mercantile classes and the press to take the Franco-Burmese relations more seriously.<sup>106</sup>

Apart from the BBTC and its owners in London, who have been regarded as one of the main driving forces in leading Britain into the Third Burmese War, there was also a movement from the Chambers of Commerce in Rangoon and Calcutta. This contests Webster's statement on the role of metropolitan financial sectors in the Anglo-Burmese conflict in 1885, while

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<sup>104</sup> MacCrae and Prentice, *Irrawaddy Flotilla*, 89–90; Shah, *The King in Exile*, 52.

<sup>105</sup> Webster, *Gentleman Capitalists*, 222.

<sup>106</sup> SarDesai, *British Trade and Expansion in Southeast Asia*, 207–8.

downplaying contributions from peripheral players as insignificant.<sup>107</sup> By examining the news coverage of the Burmese question during the period in question, it is possible to appreciate the significance of the campaign led by the Chambers of Commerce in Burma and India in advocating intervention in Burma. Prior to the BBTC case in August 1885, affairs in Upper Burma had been monitored by the mercantile community as well as the newspapers. The Bengal Chamber of Commerce, for example, began considering the intervention in Upper Burma before the BBTC case was revealed to the public. The Chamber stated that, as ‘guardian of the commerce of British Burma’, the British authorities should step in to resolve trading difficulties with Thibaw.<sup>108</sup>

The Rangoon Chamber of Commerce, which represented the British mercantile community in Burma, also moved in to press the British authorities to intervene in Upper Burma. The movement came after stories about the BBTC and the alleged Franco-Burmese treaty were revealed to the public in Rangoon in mid-September 1885, creating a sensation within the British community in Burma, which later developed into the aggressive advocacy for the intervention.<sup>109</sup> The *Englishman* reported on 24 September that the mercantile community in Rangoon had gathered at the Chamber of Commerce to discuss commercial disputes between British enterprises and the Court of Burma as well as the possibility of the French intervention. They were alarmed by the information regarding Thibaw’s intention to give France a concession to build the railway and to establish a bank in Upper Burma. These stories, which are similar to what Andreino conveyed to the British authorities and communities, led the Rangoon Chamber of Commerce to conclude that Britain was at risk of losing Upper Burma to France, which would in the near future lead to a total closure of ‘an extensive and important market’ to British traders and manufacturers.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Webster, *Gentleman Capitalists*, 226–27.

<sup>108</sup> Editorial, *Statesman*, 28 August 1885, 2.

<sup>109</sup> ‘Latest Telegrams – An Alleged Franco-Burmese Treaty,’ *Englishman*, 21 September 1885, 4; ‘Mofussil Letters – Rangoon,’ *Statesman*, 23 September 1885, 3.

<sup>110</sup> ‘Latest Telegrams – The Burma Question,’ *Englishman*, 24 September 1885, 4.

Despite the change in the press' operation in the age of the telegraph, this chapter still sees the collaboration between the press and the merchants in the advocacy for the British intervention as significant. The construction of news coverage in regard to the Burmese affairs continued to be based on intelligence gathered from the mercantile classes. The Rangoon correspondent for the *Englishman*, for example, seemed to be in close relationship with local British mercantile community. This anonymous correspondent supplied the paper with a full report of the Rangoon Chamber of Commerce's meeting in September 1885, where merchants and trading companies were preparing to lobby the British government for intervention.<sup>111</sup> This correspondent would play a great role in transmitting available information from various local sources to the press in India and Britain.

The expansionist papers in Calcutta, like the mercantile groups, regarded Upper Burma as the British sphere of interest. As is evident in the case of the *Englishman*, its main coverage of Burma directly pointed to the hostile attitude of the Burmese Court towards British merchants, particularly after information about the growing Franco-Burmese relations was revealed to the public.<sup>112</sup> The concern over the possibility of French imperial expansion in Upper Burma and the predictable impact on the British interests in the region also dominated the news coverage in regard to Burma. Although the French government dismissed the rumour on the alleged Franco-Burmese treaty, the correspondent for the *Englishman* continued to present information, particularly prevailing opinions of the public in Rangoon, which highlighted that the rumour about the French intrigue in Upper Burma was genuine.<sup>113</sup> It led the editor of the *Englishman* to state that the 'our interests in Upper Burma are paramount, and that we are prepared at any times to act on the defensive'.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> *The Times of London* had the same coverage of the Chamber meeting, but the report was written by the papers correspondent in Calcutta. See 'The Burmese Question,' *The Times* 24 September 1885, 3.

<sup>112</sup> 'Latest Telegrams – An Alleged Franco-Burmese Treaty,' *Englishman*, 21 September 1885, 4; 'Latest Telegrams – Upper Burma and the Government of India,' *Englishman*, 22 September 1885, 4.

<sup>113</sup> 'Latest Telegrams – Reuter's Telegrams,' *Englishman*, 28 September 1885, 4.

<sup>114</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 16 October 1885, 4.

Intelligence from Upper Burma also contributed to the rise of interventionism in the metropolitan press as well. *The Times* referred to intelligence from its Calcutta correspondent reflecting an opinion of local mercantile communities, who saw the French intrigue in Mandalay as a threat to British interests in Burma. The report suggested that if an exclusive concession was granted to the French, it would lead to ‘the destruction of the large English commercial interests in Burmah, eventually cut off British commerce with China by the Irrawaddy route and be the first step towards a French protectorate’ (See Figure 7 for Irawadi).<sup>115</sup> Evidently, the editors of *The Times* were convinced that Burma:

...are our best and our most promising markets, and, if we desire to fill the void created by hostile tariffs and foreign completion, we must exert ourselves to enlarge this field, to bring new countries under our influence, and to develop our trade with them before they have formed exclusive relations with other Powers...<sup>116</sup>

In this sense, the paper claimed that Britain could not lose Upper Burma to France even though this would result in military intervention. This concern from the newspaper signifies that intelligence from local residents in Mandalay played a crucial role in convincing mercantilists in Rangoon of the need of British interference in Mandalay.

The news reporting of the Third Burmese War reflects a complexity in the operation of the press in the age of telegraph. What the telegraph contributed to news reporting on the Third Burmese War was the democratisation of access to sources of information in Burma. The press, the authorities and commercial houses in both London and Calcutta could directly and independently receive transmissions of intelligence from their sources in Burma. Although this increased reliance on the telegraph might suggest the fracture in the press-merchant nexus, the scarcity of intelligence related to affairs in Upper Burma following the withdrawal of the British Residency in 1879 continued to bring the two sectors into close collaboration. What had

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<sup>115</sup> ‘France and Burmah,’ *The Times*, 18 September 1885, 9.

<sup>116</sup> Editorial, *The Times*, 30 September 1885, 9.

changed is that affairs in Burma became a national matter, in which several ‘actors’ in either the metropole or periphery could equally participate in.

### Conclusion

The connection between the press and the mercantile community suggests that there was no sole driving factor in British imperial expansion in Burma. Although recent historiographies have highlighted contributions from British mercantile communities, this particular interest group did not, this chapter argues, work alone. In fact, it had actively sought a collaboration from other sectors in order to convey the need for intervention to the colonial authorities and the wider public, opening the way for the press to make a contribution. The scarcity of information related to affairs in Burma following the withdrawal of the British Residency in 1840 and 1879, respectively, had brought the two sectors to work together in paving the way for intervention. Even in the age of telegraph when some commercial enterprises could pursue their own advocacy campaign separately, without passing information to the press, there were still other economic interests who acknowledged the benefit of supplying information to the newspapers. This tie can be seen as mutual interests between the two sectors. For the mercantile classes, sending reports to the press ensured that stories about their suffering from difficulties with the Burmese authorities were publicised to British communities and authorities beyond Burma. The press, at the same time, was given a great amount of information to generate and stimulate the campaign for intervention. My thesis will return to the manipulation of information related to affairs in Burma in Chapter 4.

The complexity in the communication and operation of the press also highlights another issue on historiographical debate on the concept of the metropole and periphery. Instead of trying to pinpoint the main driving force in the imperial expansion in Burma, the focus should be put on a broader picture in order to see the collaboration and contribution between each imperial actor in both the metropole and periphery. Prior to the Second Burmese War, the press and other British communities in Calcutta could not

appreciate the severity of events in Burma unless briefed by intelligence from local residents there. The British authorities and newspapers in the metropole, at the same time, would not be able to see the necessity of intervention in Burma unless obtaining the supply of intelligence from the press and commercial houses in Asia. Although the availability of the telegraph in the 1880s had brought the metropole closer to affairs in Upper Burma, contributions from local informants still prevailed. The news reporting on the Third Burmese War was made possible by the press' correspondents in Burma who gathered available information and transmitted it back to the newsroom in Calcutta and as far as London. This finding suggests that British imperial expansion in Burma involved several actors, such as the informant in peripheral Burma and the capitalist in London who all played an important part in making British imperial expansion in Burma possible.



### Chapter 3: Oriental Burma and the Heroic British: A Mission against 'Barbarians' and 'Despots'

'Lord Dalhousie, we are certain, will not go to war with the Burmese; but it is not quite so certain that the Burmese will not go to war with him'. – *Friend of India* (12 February 1852)<sup>1</sup>

'The removal of so inhuman a monster should be a matter of common celebration to the people of Burmah and to the world at large'. – *The Times of London* (24 January 1882)<sup>2</sup>

One thing that came out of the analysis of the press' news reporting in Chapters 1 and 2 is the diversity of influences in the operation of the newspapers, with several imperial actors making a significant contribution. Personal opinions of editors could set the tone of the news reporting, while information gathered from imperial actors in peripheral Burma enabled the newspapers to express their political stance on the Anglo-Burmese affairs. Moreover, the press' interaction with other imperial actors, mostly through the supply of information, became the foundation of the newspapers' campaign for British intervention in Burma. This chapter will underline one critical commonality in the diverse opinions of the newspapers towards the Second and Third Anglo-Burmese Wars, principally, their cultural representations of Burma, the Burmese government and its people against that of British heroism and civilisational zeal. It is on the cultural and visual representation of the duality of a 'backward' oriental culture and a 'progressive' imperial one that became the touchstone for the legitimacy of British involvement in Burma.

Central to the argument of this chapter is the thesis forwarded by Edward Said in his seminal work, *Orientalism* (1978), which argues how in Western discourse the Orient was authoritatively produced and structured and was reproduced constantly through scholarly texts, travelogues and literature.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Our Relations with Burmah,' *Friend of India*, 12 February 1852, 97.

<sup>2</sup> 'The Eastern Borders of India,' *The Times*, 24 January 1882, 8.

Because of Orientalism, as Said puts it, the Orient was not a free subject of thought and action, while European cultures, in contrast, ‘gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self’. In short, he sees Orientalism as ‘a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient’.<sup>3</sup> The Saidian position is not without its own trappings and has come under a lot of scrutiny since being published. Critics like Michael Richardson, Rosalind O’Hanlon, David Washbrook and David Scott have criticised Said’s Orientalism for its inconsistency and ambivalence. They argue that representations of the ‘Orient’ were far too complex to be explained through Said’s ‘rigid’ and ‘single analytical framework’.<sup>4</sup>

My thesis appreciates the complex nature of imperialism and the danger in uncritically adopting Said’s model of monolithic representation of the Orient. At the same time, the abiding importance of Said’s framework, with certain repositioning, has continued to fundamentally inform the writing of the history of colonialism in the global south. Lata Mani and Ruth Frankenberg, for example, argue that most of Said’s critiques were marked by ‘specific kinds of selectivity and limitation’ and could not offer any alternative to Said’s implicit framework.<sup>5</sup> Instead of pinpointing the flaws in Said’s framework, attention should rather focus on the understanding of Orientalism that acknowledges ‘the specificity and constructedness of any account’ on the Orient while demonstrating that ‘the Orient is a richly differentiated and complex place’.<sup>6</sup> Gyan Prakash too asserts that Said’s Orientalism should be viewed as an important thrust for scholars in diverse fields such as anthropology, literature and history to reconfigure their speciality by questioning literary discourse ‘in order to reveal its colonial genealogy and disclose other sources of knowledge and agency’.<sup>7</sup> Taking these statements

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<sup>3</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Richardson, ‘Enough Said: Reflections on Orientalism’, *Anthropology Today* 6 (1990): 16–19; Rosalind O’Hanlon and David Washbrook, ‘After Orientalism: Culture, Criticism, and Politics in the Third World’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34 (1992): 141–67; David Scott, ‘Kipling, the Orient, and Orientals: “Orientalism” Reoriented?’, *Journal of World History* 22 (2011): 299–328.

<sup>5</sup> Lata Mani and Ruth Frankenberg, ‘The Challenge of Orientalism’, *Economy and Society* 14 (1985): 179.

<sup>6</sup> Mani and Frankenberg, ‘The Challenge of Orientalism’, 191.

<sup>7</sup> Gyan Prakash, ‘Orientalism Now’, *History and Theory* 34 (1995): 209.

into account, this chapter suggests that Orientalist representation of the Burmese regime was critical to the British expansion in the region.

There have been scholarly debates on the ideological and cultural role of the press in the British imperial expansion, particularly in how the newspaper represented the idea of imperialism and colonialism. John M. MacKenzie, for example, suggests that the imperialist newspapers had their political stance ‘conditioned’ by the dominant ideology of the empire such as ‘militarism, monarchism and Social Darwinism’.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, C. A. Bayly points to how the Calcutta press took up the free-trade rhetoric as a motive for its campaign for British intervention against ‘barbaric Asiatic despotism’. A monopoly on trade, which was customary for Asian states, convinced the press of the necessity of the introduction of free-trade activities – by means of intervention.<sup>9</sup>

It needs to be pointed out that British representations of oriental rulers were complex since they could range from images of cruel or inept despot to the grudging admiration for the “Other”. Michael Curtis has examined the complex mechanism through which European thinkers such as Edmund Burke, Alexis de Tocqueville and James Mill conceived the Orient and its political systems through various lenses – ranging from political, religious and cultural standpoints.<sup>10</sup> In *Ungoverned Imaginings*, Javed Majeed shows how James Mill wrote *The History of British India* (1817) as a critique of Indian culture and civilisation, in which he considered to be in a state of weakness and decline. Since Indian culture had been stationary for a long time, it became, as Mill argued, the British task to create ‘the right environment’ that could remodel Indian society.<sup>11</sup> Patrick Brantlinger asserts that British explorers and adventurers in Africa had the capacity to create their own justification for their

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<sup>8</sup> John M. MacKenzie, ‘The Press and the dominant ideology of empire’, in Simon James Potter, ed., *Newspapers and Empire in Ireland and Britain: Reporting the British Empire, c.1857–1921* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2004), 26–27.

<sup>9</sup> C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 113.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Curtis, *Orientalism and Islam: European Thinkers on Oriental Despotism in the Middle East and India: Thinkers on Muslim Government in the Middle East and India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Javed Majeed, *Ungoverned Imaginings: James Mill’s The History of British India and Orientalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 144–45.

civilising mission to this ‘dark continent’. They were strongly convinced of the right of the British to occupy Africa, and to introduce British civilisation and prosperous commerce to the local inhabitants – which they considered to be the only means to liberate and elevate them from backwardness.<sup>12</sup> In a recent publication, Alex Padamsee has critically examined the concept of Oriental despotism in colonial India. He has shown that it was a deeply complex process through which the British sought to establish their own claim to India territorially by invoking a despotic Mughal past.<sup>13</sup>

One of the major events that shook the British Empire in India, the Revolt of 1857 also elicited various opinions and interpretations of kingship, rule and despotism in the subcontinent from diverse groups ranging from missionaries, military officers and British travellers. According to Rebecca Merritt, several newspapers at that time produced different narratives of the event which reflected a belief and interests of each particular paper – and its footing in the society. Missionary newspapers, for example, used the event to stimulate their advocacy for the spread of Christianity in India which ‘would have civilised India and secured British rule more effectively than any EIC policy’.<sup>14</sup> Some saw the Uprising as a political disruption to the British ‘legitimate’ rule, thereby justifying ‘government coercion against subaltern resistance’.<sup>15</sup> There was yet another interpretation of the revolt from some segments of the society such as the Chartists which viewed it as a ‘civil uprising’ of the ‘oppressed masses of Hindustan’. Overall, the Indian revolt of 1857 crystallised a narrative of British greatness and heroism thereby justifying British rule in India. So, we understand that newspapers played a complex role in representing major political events in the empire and to justify mostly to the British public the need for empire.

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<sup>12</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, ‘Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent,’ *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985): 178–80.

<sup>13</sup> Alex Padamsee, *The Return of the Mughal: Historical Fiction and Despotism in Colonial India, 1863–1908* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

<sup>14</sup> Rebecca Merritt, ‘Public Perceptions of 1857: An Overview of British Press Responses to the Indian Uprising’, in Crispin Bates, *Mutiny at the Margins: Britain and the Indian Uprising*, vol. 2 (New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2013), 7.

<sup>15</sup> Merritt, ‘Public Perceptions of 1857’, in Bates, *Mutiny at the Margins*, vol. 2:12.

In the news coverage of Burma, the stereotypes of the Burmese were inescapably present. However, the press' notion of Burmese 'despotism' seemed not to be purely a product of the popular ideology of the empire. Often the characterisation of the Burmese 'despotic' figures were defined not just by cultural prejudices but by political and military exigencies. Personal experiences of the contributors to newspapers and their interaction with other advocates of imperial expansion in Burma, such as merchants and missionaries, also contributed to the representations of Burma and its people. Therefore, as this chapter will show, those newspapers or agents advocating for aggressive policies towards Burma found in the Governors of Rangoon and King Thibaw the classic model of the Oriental despot, standing for all that was antithetical to Western ideals of free trade and liberal thought. Yet, this stereotyping also held within it a deep anxiety about Britain's position in Burma and the fate of British political and commercial interests – considered to be threatened by the Burmese 'despotism'.

As discussed in previous chapters, newspapers with expansionist stances were greatly associated with – or were part of – the imperialist communities, such as the mercantile classes and missionaries. Moreover, these communities also acted as the main sources of information to newspapers, in which the necessity for intervention were highlighted and conveyed to the press. This chapter will examine how the character of newspapers and their ties with other imperial actors shaped the way the Anglo-Burmese conflicts in the early 1850s and 1885 were presented. In doing so, this chapter will analyse various points and interpretations offered by expansionist newspapers, which all justified and glorified British imperial expansion in Burma. This approach will throw light on the subjectivity of news coverage of the Burmese affairs, in which newspapers were capable of constructing their own ideology of British imperialism in Burma.

This chapter is divided into five sections, which cover three dominant themes in the news coverage of the Anglo-Burmese Wars in the English newspapers in Calcutta and London. The first section begins with the newspapers' representation of the Burmese despotism and 'maladministration', which were considered by expansionist newspapers as a

sufficient grounds to legitimise British imperial expansion in Burma. As will be shown, ideas of the British economic interests in Burma and the necessity of opening up ‘misgoverned’ Burma to Western commerce and civilisation were brought into the news coverage in order to emphasise the urgency and inevitability of British intervention. The second and third sections mainly focus on newspapers’ depiction of Burmese ‘barbarism’ and ‘despotism’ through the two *myo-wuns* or governors of Rangoon during 1851–52 and King Thibaw (1878–85), and how it supported the campaign for intervention. As will be shown, these Burmese figures received special attention from both the press and local informants in Burma whose reports emphasised the Burmese threat to the security of British subjects and interests in Burma – thereby stimulating the press’ campaign for intervention.

The two sections that follow focus on the press’ representation of the British figures in the Anglo-Burmese conflicts where ideas of heroism and militarism were evident in the press’ attempt to glorify the British imperial expansion in Burma. The fourth section explores the press’ opinion of Dalhousie, the Governor General of India during 1848–56, particularly his handling of the Second Burmese War. This particular section will highlight another role of the press in being a critic of the policy in regard to Burma. As will be shown, the press had a certain standard of good imperialists and could sometimes be more expansionist than the British authorities themselves. Finally, the last section focuses on the press’ interest in the British military campaign during the Third Anglo-Burmese War of 1885. The focus will be placed on the press’ enthusiasm for the advance of British troops to Upper Burma and its attempt to glorify the war via news reporting and illustrations. Overall, all of the press’ remarks produced a significant difference between despotic Burmese and heroic British, while providing the latter with a legitimacy to assert its power and influence over the former.

A Mission against Burmese 'Despotism': British commerce and 'misgoverned' Burma

As discussed in the previous chapter, the pretext leading to the Second and Third Anglo-Burmese Wars mainly originated from the commercial dispute between British mercantile classes and the Burmese authorities. The Sheppard and Lewis incidents in 1851, in which two British captains were said to have been mistreated by the Rangoon governor had greatly contributed to the Anglo-Burmese conflict in the early 1850s. The Burmese legal case against the Bombay-Burmah Trading Corporation (BBTC) for the alleged overharvesting of teak in 1885, meaning that the company's lease in Upper Burma would likely be cancelled. The two events intensified the prolonged commercial conflict between British traders and the Burmese authorities, while forcing the British government to take the Burmese question more seriously. At the same time, the two incidents also led to the beginning of newspapers' campaign for intervention.

As this section demonstrates, there was a consensus among the press that the economic advantage of Burma was too important to let go. This shifted the emphasis of the news coverage prior to the outbreak of the Second and Third Burmese Wars from stories of trading disputes between British merchants and the Burmese authorities to the potential of Burma for spearheading British economic growth in Asia. Moreover, the perceived state of Burmese politics, society and culture was also brought into the spotlight to firm up what the press saw as a justification for British imperial expansion.

One of the things that becomes apparent when analysing the news coverage about the Anglo-Burmese Wars is how Burma's monopoly on trade was perceived by the press to be an act of barbarism, making a pretext for British intervention. This rhetoric on the trading monopoly has been highlighted by historians. Bayly, for example, argues that the Calcutta press had taken an aggressive stance against the 'tyranny and barbarism' of Asian states for their monopolies and hostilities to Western free enterprise.<sup>16</sup> Brantlinger also expresses similar views as he highlights how the introduction

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<sup>16</sup> Bayly, *Empire and Information*, 113.

of Western commerce in Africa was considered by British expansionists to be the spread of civilisation. Focusing on the role of David Livingstone, an advocate of the opening up of Africa by 'commerce and Christianity,' Brantlinger points to Livingstone's belief that the African 'was benighted' and that the European was bearer of the 'light' of civilisation and true religion. Despite having rich natural resources, the local populace would not be able to 'raise itself' unless it came into contact with superior races through commerce.<sup>17</sup> This belief seemed to be universally adopted by the imperialists in various forms, including the newspapers.

Starting with the press' coverage of the Second Burmese War, after stories of the Sheppard and Lewis incidents emerged in the summer of 1851, the emphasis on the news coverage quickly shifted to the necessity of imperial expansion. The previous chapter has highlighted that the rich Burmese teak forest had attracted the interest from British mercantile classes in Burma. However, the Burmese monopoly on trade and the strict law enforcement had caused difficulties to the British merchants which led to their campaign for intervention throughout the 1840s.<sup>18</sup> The Burmese unwillingness to cooperate with Western free trade became a target of criticism from the merchant community and the expansionist newspapers, noticeably in the aftermath of the Sheppard and Lewis incidents in 1851. The *Englishman* and the *Friend of India*, in particular, were significant vocal critics of the Burmese despotism. Both papers interpreted the Burmese monopoly on trade as indicative of socioeconomic 'maladministration', which, as they argued, had long left Burma's rich natural resources untapped. However, a closer examination of their news reports reveals a diversity in their viewpoints and interpretations, which reflected their different political and cultural background.

What counted as a protection of its own sources of power for the Burmese Court was read as lack of good governance for the British, which in turn evidently stood in the way of British expansion of commerce in Burma. The arguments acquired force and legitimacy over the years. The missionary

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<sup>17</sup> Brantlinger, 'Victorians and Africans', 178–80.

<sup>18</sup> Oliver B. Pollak, *Empires in Collision: Anglo-Burmese Relations in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980), 52–56.



press like *Friend of India* interpreted the monopoly on trade as a kind of backwardness, which supported its notion that Burma and its valuable resources should be liberated from the Burmese despotic rule. The paper asserted that the gap between British-occupied Arakan and Moulmein ‘has not failed to arrest the eye, and involuntary wish has arisen...that the intermediate space, now misgoverned by the Burmese’ might be added to the British dominions (See Figure 7).<sup>19</sup> The Delta of the Irrawaddy, the rich teak forests of Pegu and the port of Rangoon – an ideal hub of commerce – could, as it argued no longer be excluded from the commercial activity of ‘the civilised world’.<sup>20</sup> The *Englishman* with its trade-oriented rhetoric asserted its justification for British intervention in Burma from an economic perspective. The paper claimed that Pegu or Lower Burma teemed ‘with the elements and fundamentals of a valuable Empire’ and it only required ‘a good government to mature and develop its commercial resources’.<sup>21</sup> Despite their different viewpoints, statements from both the *Englishman* and the *Friend of India* stressed that Britain was a legitimate liberator of Burma’s valuable resources, which had long been untapped and mismanaged by the Burmese authorities.

The above statements shed light on the conflation between commercial and cultural rhetoric, which was critical as it suggested that a ‘corrupt’ state like Burma could not efficiently look after or exploit its own natural resources, thereby opening the way for British mercantilist intervention in Burma. Evidently, the Calcutta press had become the flagstaff bearer of this unique mercantilist vision. With the rapid expansion of Western overseas commerce in the nineteenth century – together with the rise of other imperial competitors – it became what John Darwin calls a race against time for these mercantilists to secure and exploit natural resources and lands before others could take them away. However, the local authorities, in particularly, those in Asia, were slow or reluctant to adopt the Western ‘free trade’ and ‘open market’, where Western traders could buy or sell goods without the barrier of tariffs and

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<sup>19</sup> ‘Rangoon and Burmese Affairs,’ *Friend of India*, 11 December 1851, 785.

<sup>20</sup> ‘Burmese War or No War,’ *Friend of India*, 15 January 1852, 33.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Rangoon,’ *Englishman*, 19 January 1852, 4.

prohibitions. The resistance from local states was perceived by the Western mercantilists to be an obstacle – and had to be put down.<sup>22</sup>

Within a few months after the Sheppard and Lewis incidents, the expansionist newspapers in Calcutta escalated their campaign to a new level, by starting to call for the annexation of Pegu, citing that Burma would better be in the hands of the British. This rhetoric is evident in the *Friend of India*'s coverage in which the paper argued that Burma and its valuable resources had a potential to create wealth of the country and its people. Only British intervention, as it asserted, could liberate and elevate Burma from its despotic backwardness. In February 1852, the paper claimed that it would be an act of inconceivable 'impolicy' if the British authorities entered into a second war with Burma without determining whether or not to annex this valuable maritime province. The paper stated that the government of India should not lose this opportunity to occupy Pegu, Burma's remaining coastal province following the annexation of Arakan and Tenasserim in the aftermath of the First Burmese War of 1824–26.<sup>23</sup> The *Friend of India* was convinced that 'the rich province of Pegu, with its inexhaustible forests of teak, its fertile soil, its noble rivers, its mineral resources, and its industrious populations' would give a valuable advantage to the British. By removing the Burmese despotic rulers from power, Britain would obtain 'four or five millions of consumers of our manufactures...and new marts of commerce'.<sup>24</sup> However, it should be noted that the British authorities in Calcutta at the moment had not yet committed to the idea of annexation since they only expected a redress from the Burmese Court and a demand for compensation to the suffered British merchants (See Appendix 1).<sup>25</sup>

The same aggressive attitude can be seen in the displeasure of the newspapers with the Burmese Court, principally for its restriction of British enterprise in the country. The aftermath of the second war with Burma in 1852

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<sup>22</sup> John Darwin, *After Tamerlane: The Rise and Fall of Global Empires, 1400–2000* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), 247, 275.

<sup>23</sup> 'Progress of Events in Regard to Burmah,' *Friend of India*, 19 February 1852, 114–15.

<sup>24</sup> 'Burmah,' *Friend of India*, 13 May 1852, 305.

<sup>25</sup> Minute of the Governor General of India, 22 January 1852, 'Documents relating to the Ava - Rangoon Hostilities,' *Papers of Edward Geoffrey Stanley 14th Earl of Derby (1799-1869)*, 920 DER 14/147/12/5 (Liverpool Central Library).

saw the Burmese government becoming more open to British commerce. Two commercial treaties were signed in 1862 and 1867, relaxing the monopoly on trade. However, the loss of coastal provinces and well-cultivated areas in Pegu had worsened the economy of Upper Burma, the remaining independent territory, which had become the land-locked state (See Figures 7 and 8, shaded in green). Upper Burma's economy became heavily tied to the foreign trade through British Burma while food supplies like rice had to be imported from the British territories as well.<sup>26</sup> By the 1880s, the Burmese Court, under the reign of King Thibaw, was forced to revive some of the monopolies on trade while tightening its control over foreign enterprises in Upper Burma. This attempt was met with criticism from the mercantile classes and the newspapers. For example, on 26 December 1881, *The Times* printed a report from its Calcutta correspondent reporting of 39 British mercantile firms in Rangoon, which had submitted complaints to the British authorities, claiming that their business was being hugely affected by the renewal of Burma's monopoly on trade.<sup>27</sup>

It was not until the BBTC case in August 1885 in which the Burmese Court accused the British company of illegal logging of teak that the newspapers' advocacy for intervention in Upper Burma emerged fully. However, the focus of the news coverage quickly shifted from the Burmese legal case against the BBTC to the possible general impact on the British economic interests in Upper Burma and the surrounding region. It should be noted that most of the perspectives on the Anglo-Burmese conflict in 1885 originated from trade-oriented newspapers or those who acknowledged the economic importance of Burma – the missionary *Friend of India* went out of business by the 1870s. Nevertheless, like the coverage of the Second Burmese War, once again, Burma's strict monopoly on trade came under heavy fire from the expansionist newspapers and was used to justify British intervention and, later, the conquest of the whole kingdom of Burma.

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<sup>26</sup> Thant Myint-U, *The Making of Modern Burma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 148.

<sup>27</sup> Lord Ripon, the Viceroy of India at that time, responded to their complaints by expressing his regret for their difficulties in conducting the business in Upper Burma, and promising that his administration would send a remonstrance to the Court of Burma. See 'Latest Intelligence,' *The Times*, 26 December 1881, 3.

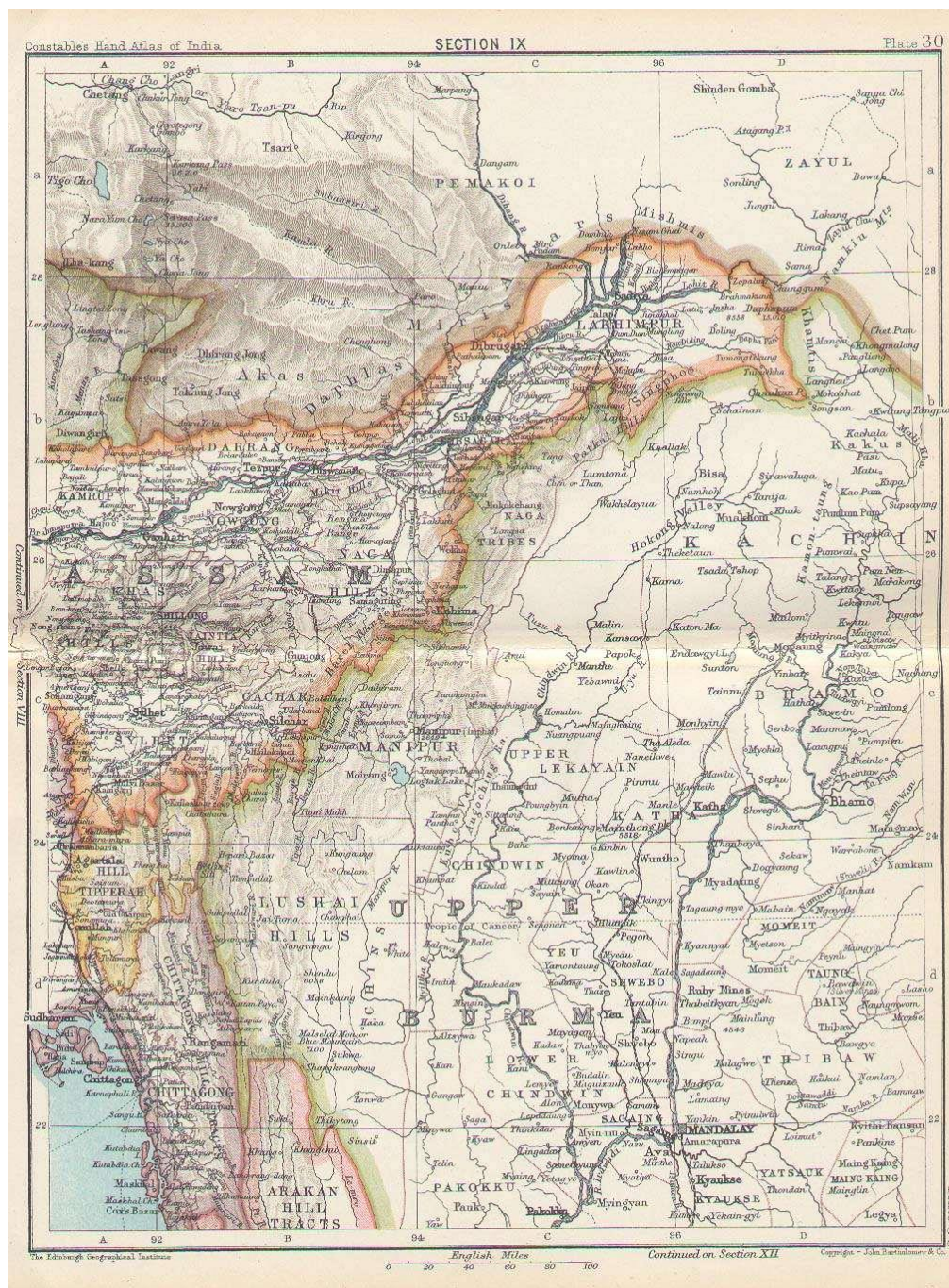


Figure 8: Map of Assam and Upper Burma [Source: Constable, *Assam and Upper Burma* [Map], 1893, 'Constable's Hand Atlas of India,' Historic Map of India, <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealc/pritchett/00maplinks/colonial/constable1893/section09.jpg> (accessed 1 October 2018).]

In 1885, an anonymous correspondent for the *Englishman* took a harsh stance on the Burmese monopoly on trade by calling the Burmese Court ‘utterly corrupt’, and considered this policy as posing real threats to British enterprises. The reporter claimed that the monopoly had seriously undermined British economic interests in Burma and urged the British authorities to step in to prevent British businesses from complete collapse.<sup>28</sup> Viewing the Anglo-Burmese conflict through economic lenses, the *Graphic*, a London-based weekly illustrated newspaper<sup>29</sup>, also attacked the Burmese monopoly on trade as being an obstacle to British interests in the region. The paper regularly received transmission of telegraphic intelligence from its own correspondent and Reuters, a British news agency, which enabled it to report the Burmese question at the same speed like its counterparts in London and Calcutta. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, the telegraph had opened wider avenues of communications, bringing in more diverse players to actively campaign for British intervention in Upper Burma and the *Graphic* is a great example. With a regular update on the Burmese question, the paper was able to present its justification for intervention by referencing the legitimacy of Britain in maintaining and protecting its interests in Burma. It reasoned that the rapid economic prosperity in Burma at that moment was mainly a result of the determination of British enterprises. Without contributions from the British, Burma would have been limited to only ‘agricultural pursuits and nothing more than a petty retail trade’.<sup>30</sup> The news reports in the two papers reflect their belief that the Burmese government had no ability to develop the kingdom into a hub of commerce, opening the way for the British to bring civilisation and economic prosperity into Burma.

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<sup>28</sup> ‘Contemporary Opinion – The Bombay Burmah Trading Company,’ *Englishman*, 21 October 1885, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Founded and run by William Luson Thomas since 1869, the *Graphic* established itself as an illustrated newspaper. The paper was known for the excellence of its wood-engravings and a platform for notable artists to publicise their works. The coverage of the paper was not only limited to local affairs, but also expanded to foreign and imperial events as well. See Mark Bills, ‘Thomas, William Luson (1830–1900), wood-engraver and newspaper proprietor,’ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 3 October 2013, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-27248> (accessed 27 September 2018).

<sup>30</sup> ‘The Crisis in Burma,’ *Graphic*, 31 October 1885, 489–92.



Concerns about the local population of Burma were also brought into the news coverage where expansionist newspapers pointed out the benefit of British imperial expansion to the local inhabitants of Burma, thereby becoming another justification for intervention. Long under the suppression of the ‘despotic’ Burmese government, the *Englishman* was convinced that the local people in Lower Burma, particularly non-Burman ethnic groups such as the Mons and the Karens, would welcome British intervention with open arms, while also making crucial contributions to the expansion of British economic interests in the region.<sup>31</sup> Prior to the outbreak the Second Burmese War, the paper published a letter from one of its correspondents, under the pseudonym Horatio, who claimed that the inhabitants of Pegu, some of whom came from different ethnic groups and had long been under the suppression from the dominant Burman, had a deep affection for the British. Their desire to be under the British rule would, as this correspondent argued, enable Britain to disseminate ‘the Anglo-Saxon principles of liberty’ to the whole people of Burma.<sup>32</sup> ‘Humanity, commerce, and [good] policy’ would, as another correspondent under the name Reformer put it, elevate them from slavery to freedom.<sup>33</sup>

The role of the British in bringing the ‘light of civilisation’ to Burma is evident in the *Friend of India*’s coverage. The paper acknowledged the goodwill of the local inhabitants of Pegu towards the British<sup>34</sup>, while also using the general perception that the local populace preferred to be under British rule to indicate that further imperial expansion in Burma was necessary. At the end of the Second Burmese War, the *Friend of India* wrote that:

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<sup>31</sup> The Burman – a majority ethnic group in Burma – considered themselves superior to all other ethnic groups such as Mons, Karens, Kachins, Arakans, and Shans and had, throughout the history of the kingdom, tried to incorporate these ethnic minorities under their rule, sometimes by means of conquest. See Pollak, *Empires in Collision*, 14–15; Michael Adas, *The Burma Delta: Economic Development and Social Change on an Asian Rice Frontier, 1852–1941* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2011), 18–19.

<sup>32</sup> Horatio, ‘Maulmain,’ *Englishman*, 3 February 1852, 2.

<sup>33</sup> Reformer, ‘Burmese Matters,’ *Englishman*, 12 February 1852, 2.

<sup>34</sup> ‘Burmese Affairs,’ *Friend of India*, 1 April 1852, 209; ‘Burmah,’ *Friend of India*, 3 June 1852, 353–54.

When the war first broke out, no one raised his expectations beyond the annexation of Pegu. But when we found how thoroughly this oriental despotism was burnt down into the socket, how completely the Burmese power was shaken, if not shattered, by our first shock, and how galling was the yoke of the King and his Court to the whole population, our hopes were expanded, and it began to be whispered that we ought to extend our dominion...to the whole of Burmah.<sup>35</sup>

This highlights the firm belief of the expansionist newspapers in the misgovernment of the Burmese Court, which then became justification for imperial expansion.

The press' rhetoric of the liberation of the local people re-emerged again during the Third Burmese War of 1885. The idea of liberating the local population and the natural resources in Upper Burma, which had been trapped under the Burmese despotic rule for too long, had again become a thrust for the press' campaign for intervention. Expansionist newspapers claimed that there were great potential territories beyond British-occupied Burma and that the British authorities should take the idea of further territorial expansions more seriously. For example, in the aftermath of the BBTC case, the *Englishman* expressed its wish that the British authorities would 'act boldly and promptly, with the double [objective] of rescuing the people in an eastern frontier from misery, and of giving free play to commercial enterprises in a new and promising territory'.<sup>36</sup> The newspaper published an article highlighting how British rule had brought peace and prosperity to Lower Burma since the annexation of Pegu in 1853, and hoped that the same would happen to the inhabitants of Upper Burma.<sup>37</sup>

On 5 November 1885, the *Englishman*'s editorial discussed the economic potential of the Shan States, Burma's hinterlands, while mentioning how the Shan people preferred not to be under the Burmese rule and would not

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<sup>35</sup> 'The Factory Swelled to a Kingdom; the Kingdom Swelled to an Empire,' *Friend of India*, 6 January 1853, 1–3.

<sup>36</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 5 October 1885, 5.

<sup>37</sup> 'Contemporary Opinion – The Burmah Question,' *Englishman*, 23 October 1885, 3.

‘come to the aid of the Burmese’ in the event of a war with the British.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, *The Times* referred to the weakening power of the Burmese Court and the pro-British attitudes of the inhabitants. The paper announced that King Thibaw, ‘with his subjects disaffected and his officials ready to revolt,’ would be ineffective in defending his country from British intervention. It believed that ‘the people of Upper Burmah would receive...[the British] with open arms’.<sup>39</sup> This chapter will return to discuss the press’ perception of King Thibaw later.

As we can see, the explanation for the cause of British intervention in Burma was not purely limited to economic motives, but was also an opportunity to carry their civilising mission to Burma – by the means of commerce. The expansionist papers were convinced of the role of the British in bringing economic prosperity and civilisation to the inhabitants of Burma who had long been under ‘barbarian’ and ‘despotic’ rule. They strongly believed that the population of Burma and the valuable natural resources had a potential to become a new hub of commerce in the region, making a huge contribution to the growing British commerce. This development could only be achieved after the troublesome Burmese rulers was replaced by the ‘mild and equitable rule’ of the British, in the words of the *Friend of India*.<sup>40</sup>

#### ‘Our Barbarous Neighbour’: The Rangoon authorities and the Second Anglo-Burmese War

Apart from the economic interests in Burma, the bellicose character of the Burmese authorities prominently occupied the newspapers’ opinion as shown in the coverage of the Anglo-Burmese conflicts. The Burmese hostilities against the British became another reason for the press’ campaign for British intervention in Burma. Beginning with the period leading to the Second Burmese War, the character of the Rangoon governor had been under scrutiny of the press since the Sheppard and Lewis incidents in the summer of

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<sup>38</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 5 November 1885, 4.

<sup>39</sup> Editorial, *The Times*, 15 October 1885, 9.

<sup>40</sup> ‘Burmah,’ *Friend of India*, 13 May 1852, 305; ‘Burmah,’ *Friend of India*, 3 June 1852, 353–54.



1851. The events were followed by further explosion of stories about the misconduct of the Rangoon governor, which enabled the press to depict the 'barbaric' and 'despotic' character of the Burmese rulers and to highlight the urgency of immediate intervention. In the cases of the expansionist papers, the 'barbaric' acts of the Rangoon governor became the centre of their news coverage, which underlined the necessity of British intervention.

Historians have studied at length the ways in which British cultural imperialism worked in colonial territories, establishing preconceived notions of race and civilisation. Ronald Hyam, for example, refers to the idea of civilisational hierarchies that dominated Victorian Britain's views of the colonies.<sup>41</sup> The news reporting became another platform where this concept of racial hierarchy was shown, according to Roger T. Stern. News correspondents and artists were, as he points out, imperialists and firm believers of the British Empire and 'the white man's burden'.<sup>42</sup> In his article on the metropolitan press' perception of Eastern European immigrants in London during the early twentieth century, David Speicher sheds light on how many newspapers sought to draw a line between the civilised British and the 'barbaric' foreigners. Fearing that some of these immigrants might have a link with the rise in the crime rates in London during that time, a number of British newspapers had taken a harsh stance in characterising the suspected criminals, who were said to speak with foreign accents, as 'crazed, violent and uncivilised, closer to an animal or reptile rather than human'.<sup>43</sup> These kinds of derogatory words were no different to the newspapers' coverage of the Anglo-Burmese Wars, particularly since figures from the Burmese side became a target of criticism.

Intelligence coming out of Burma conveyed stories of the alleged barbaric act of the Rangoon governor, particularly his hostile treatment of

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<sup>41</sup> Ronald Hyam, *Britain's Imperial Century, 1815–1914: A Study of Empire and Expansion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 76–77.

<sup>42</sup> Roger T. Stern, 'War Correspondents and Colonial War, C. 1870–1900', in John M. MacKenzie, ed., *Popular Imperialism and the Military, 1850–1950* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 150.

<sup>43</sup> David Speicher, 'Terror, Spectacle and the Press: Anarchist Outrage in Edwardian England', in Tom Crook, Rebecca Gill, and Bertrand Taithe, eds., *Evil, Barbarism and Empire: Britain and Abroad, c.1830–2000* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 62–65.

British and European subjects. These reports became the main foundation of the press' coverage of the Anglo-Burmese conflict, which strongly emphasised the hostility and threat posed by the Burmese governor to the security of European subjects and interests.

At the beginning of the conflict in 1851, the expansionist newspapers in Calcutta received reports from local residents in Burma, stressing the belligerent characteristics of the Rangoon governor. This information led the *Englishman* to start calling for British intervention against the barbaric and 'half-civilised' Burmese authorities.<sup>44</sup> After the government of India decided to send an expedition to Rangoon to demand a redress for Captain Sheppard and Captain Lewis in November 1851, the newspapers in Calcutta published information suggesting that the troublesome governor of Rangoon had become even more hostile in his attitude. A British resident in Burma alleged that the governor had asked the Burmese Court for permission 'to fortify the country against the English!'<sup>45</sup> The Rangoon governor was also, as reported in the *Friend of India*, trying to use his influence at the Court of Ava, at every means, to prevent any peaceful settlement with the British despite a risk of hostilities.<sup>46</sup> Further coverage in the *Englishman* also stated that Rangoon had already been fortified while a large group of armed men was reportedly present in the town. These kinds of hysteric reports in turn led to a revival of the newspapers' call for an intervention to remove the troublesome governor from 'any further trouble in misgoverning Pegu'.<sup>47</sup>

Despite the press' initial reaction that the expedition to Rangoon would bring an end to the conflict in Burma<sup>48</sup>, further transmissions of intelligence from Burma suggested that the Burmese authorities had no real intention to resolve the conflict amicably. Intelligence from the *Maulmain Times* claimed that the Rangoon governor had threatened 'time after time to massacre all

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<sup>44</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 10 October 1851, 2.

<sup>45</sup> Editorial, *Hurkaru*, 1 November 1851, 494, 'Burmah,' *Hurkaru*, 3 November 1851, 503.

<sup>46</sup> 'Rangoon and the Burmese Affairs,' *Friend of India*, 18 December 1851, 801–2.

<sup>47</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 11 December 1851, 2; 'Rangoon and the Burmese Affairs,' *Friend of India*, 18 December 1851, 801–2.

<sup>48</sup> 'The Conduct of the Burmese Governor at Rangoon,' *Friend of India*, 13 November 1851, 721–22.

foreigners [and] burn down the town'.<sup>49</sup> The *Friend of India* referred to the 'prevailing opinion in Rangoon', which indicated that war with Burma was inevitable. One report stated that the governor had stationed a band of nearly 10,000 armed men in Rangoon and the surrounding neighbourhoods which was seen as a threat to the security of the British residents there.<sup>50</sup>

Although the Burmese Court, in response to the demand for redress from the Calcutta authorities, showed signs of moderation by appointing a new Rangoon governor in January 1852, the distrust of the Burmese prevailed. The *Friend of India*, for example, was convinced that 'the mild reply only intended to gain time, with the view of avoiding any hostile movement till the rains set in,' when the troops 'will be unable to take the field, and...the intermediate period will pass in military preparations on the part of the Burmese'.<sup>51</sup> The *Englishman* and the *Friend of India* agreed upon the hostile attitude of the Burmese authorities and used this concern to urge the British government to establish a British consul in Burma to prevent further hostilities from the Burmese side.<sup>52</sup>

The suspicion of the Burmese character was further fuelled by a dispute between the new Rangoon governor and the British delegation on 6 January 1852. The conflict occurred when four of the British delegates were refused an audience with the governor, who was said to be asleep at the time. However, the *Englishman* referred to intelligence received from Burma which suggested that the governor was fully awake at that time; and it was his unwillingness to settle the affair with the British that led to his 'insult' to the delegation by leaving them standing 'under the heat' outside his house.<sup>53</sup> The governor's refusal to meet the British delegates was interpreted as a proof of the Burmese hostile attitude against the British. The event convinced Commodore Lambert, the commander of the British expedition to Rangoon, to escalate the tension further by ordering a blockage of the Rangoon River and the subsequent seizure of the King's barge.

<sup>49</sup> 'Maulmain,' *Englishman*, 1 January 1852, 3–4.

<sup>50</sup> 'War with Burmah,' *Friend of India*, 1 January 1852, 5.

<sup>51</sup> 'Burmese War or No War,' *Friend of India*, 15 January 1852, 33.

<sup>52</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, January 7, 1852, 3; 'The Burmese,' *Friend of India*, 8 January 1852, 20.

<sup>53</sup> 'War with Burmah,' *Englishman*, 17 January 1852 (Evening), 3.

Although there was another aspect of the incident – in which the British delegates were seen to have contributed to the dispute – this story was not part of the newspapers' main coverage. In *A History of Rangoon*, B. R. Pearn gives another viewpoint of the incident by highlighting the misunderstanding between the British officials and the new Rangoon governor. It seemed that the four officials had first showed signs of disrespect and arrogance by riding a horse up to the house even after being asked by the governor's servant to dismount outside the compound. On the other hand, the governor, who preferred to settle the affair only with high-ranking representatives of the British government, misunderstood that the arrival of the low-ranked British officers – and not the Commodore himself – was offensive. It was thought to be this that led to his refusal to give them an audience.<sup>54</sup> However, the expansionist newspapers overtly focused on the governor's 'insult' to the British delegation, and showed no attempt to investigate the incident thoroughly. In contrast, the incident was considered to be a symbol of the insolent and 'semi-barbarous' spirit of the Burmese authorities, putting the new report further in line with the press' campaign for intervention.<sup>55</sup>

The press' distrust of the Rangoon governor – and the Burmese authorities as a whole – had been apparent since the beginning of the conflict in 1851. This perception continued until the completion of the war. Despite signs of moderation by the Burmese in removing the problematic Rangoon governor from his post, the press' suspicion prevailed. Moreover, this notion was reinforced by an apparent 'studied insult' by the new Rangoon governor as he refused an audience to the British delegation. The incident further convinced the press that the intervention in Burma was inevitable. As the *Friend of India* put it, there was no 'effectual plan [that could be adopted]...to avoid the expense of the periodical tuition of an incorrigible, and barbarian pupil than to deprive him [of] all that political power...' <sup>56</sup> It was the press' lack of trust in the character of the Burmese character that contributed to the campaign for intervention in Burma.

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<sup>54</sup> Bertie Reginald Pearn, *A History of Rangoon* (Rangoon: American Baptist Mission Press, 1939), 166.

<sup>55</sup> 'The Second War with the Burmese has commenced,' *Friend of India*, 22 January 1852, 49–50; Prospero, 'Burmah Affairs,' *Englishman*, 12 February 1852, 2.

<sup>56</sup> 'Burmah,' *Friend of India*, 13 May 1852, 305.

### Thibaw as an 'Oriental Despot'

Another figure on the Burmese side that received much scrutiny during the Anglo-Burmese conflict was King Thibaw. After the period of temporary stability during the reign of his father, King Mindon (1853–78), who pursued a friendly relationships with the British, in particular the relaxation on trading monopolies<sup>57</sup>, the reign of Thibaw saw a complete reversal of the Anglo-Burmese relations. As mentioned earlier, his decision to revive the monopoly greatly angered the British mercantile community. The growing ties between Upper Burma and other Western nations, particularly France, was furthermore considered to be a threat to British political and economic interests in the region. All of these events convinced the expansionist newspapers of Thibaw's hostile attitudes towards the British. The fixation on the character of Thibaw led the newspapers to pursue another push for intervention – which became the main subject of their campaign for the Third Burmese War of 1885.

The press' antipathy towards King Thibaw had been apparent since the beginning of his reign in 1878 and it became much stronger by the time of the Anglo-Burmese conflict of 1885. Similar to the Rangoon governor, Thibaw was also harshly attacked by the expansionist newspapers. A majority of the news coverage portrayed him as a tyrannical ruler, while intelligence from local sources in Upper Burma also depicted him as a 'caprice of a barbarian, mad with jealousy and drink' – a classic example of the oriental despot.<sup>58</sup>

The controversial nature of Thibaw's accession was also a subject of harsh criticism from the press. Thibaw's reign began with a mass execution of his royal relatives and other pretenders to the throne, which was considered by *The Times* to be an act of cruelty.<sup>59</sup> The newspaper was convinced that his 'savage and bloodthirsty temper might seek its next victims from other than

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<sup>57</sup> Myint-U, *The Making of Modern Burma*, 112–18, 128–29.

<sup>58</sup> 'Burmah,' *The Times*, 10 March 1879, 5.

<sup>59</sup> Editorial, *The Times*, 21 February 1879, 8.

his own subjects'.<sup>60</sup> In reality, however, the scale and extent of the royal massacre was grossly exaggerated.<sup>61</sup>

*The Times*' perception on Thibaw's alleged cruelties is evident. In an article under the title 'The Eastern Borders of India', the writer of this report depicted how the streets of Mandalay 'have literally "run with blood"'. It stated that the reign of Thibaw 'has been marked by a succession of brutal and uncalled-for-crimes', and only his death could restore peace and prosperity to the whole region. This anonymous writer concluded that the removal of this 'inhuman a monster should be a matter of common celebration to the people of Burmah and to the world at large'.<sup>62</sup> All of these statements pointed towards Thibaw's incompetence in governing Upper Burma – which would later become the main argument of the newspapers in their campaign for his deposition from the throne.<sup>63</sup>

The press' criticism of Thibaw re-emerged after stories about the BBTC case in August 1885 and the alleged commercial treaty between France and Upper Burma were revealed to the public in mid-September. The events convinced the press that Thibaw should be longer be tolerated. On 21 October 1885, the *Englishman* published a correspondence calling Thibaw a 'narrow minded barbarian'.<sup>64</sup> In the editorial, the paper took a harsh stance by stating that:

It is certainly time that a stop was put to the career of a monarch of such startling proclivities, and to all appearance it would seem that we are about to witness the final declension of all that remains of the old Ava Court. Not a word of sympathy will be wasted upon Theebaw

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<sup>60</sup> Editorial, *The Times*, 24 March 1879, 9.

<sup>61</sup> The first report suggested that 80 people had been killed by the alleged royal massacre. However, the number of casualties was later scaled down to only 40. See 'Burmah,' *The Times*, 10 March 1879, 5.

<sup>62</sup> 'The Eastern Borders of India,' *The Times*, 24 January 1882, 8

<sup>63</sup> Despite receiving reports of the alleged royal massacre, *The Times*, in 1879, had not yet taken up expansionist rhetoric because it still convinced that the British authorities should rather focus on guarding the British interests in occupied Burma instead of rushing to intervention. See Editorial, *The Times*, 24 March 1879, 9.

<sup>64</sup> 'King Theebaw,' *Englishman*, 21 October 1885, 3.

even among his own people, who are delighted at the prospect of emancipation.<sup>65</sup>

The Burmese decree against the BBTC, the commercial treaty with the French and the characteristic of Thibaw led the newspapers to conclude that ‘a rush for Mandalay’ became inevitable.<sup>66</sup>

Even after the annexation of Upper Burma, information about the alleged atrocities of the Burmese Court continued to emerge as is evident in the diary of Viceroy Dufferin during his visit to Burma in 1886. In this, Dufferin recorded reports from Catholic missionaries who claimed that the cruelty of Queen Supayalat, Thibaw’s wife, ‘exceeded all belief...[and that] when they were visiting the Queen they often heard in the adjoining chamber the screams of the unfortunate women who were being beaten, and which invariably elicited from Supaya Lat [*sic*] and her attendants equally resonant shrieks of laughter’.<sup>67</sup> In his speech to the European community in Mandalay, the Viceroy referred to ‘the maladministration of the late King of Upper Burma’ and the ‘lawlessness and dakoity [*sic*]’ under Thibaw’s rule. He assured his audience that British rule would restore stability and prosperity to the whole region, benefiting not just the mercantile community but also local the inhabitants.<sup>68</sup>

King Thibaw, and the Burmese Court as a whole, thus became the symbol of cruel and eccentric Burmese ‘despotism’. The newspapers had been fixated on their mistrust of Thibaw’s belligerent character, which was considered to be a plausible threat to British interests in Upper Burma and the surrounding region. Derogatory comments about the Burmese government used in the news coverage had the intention of underpinning the inferiority of the Burmese ruler. With the prospect of the economic development and the political stability in Burma in mind, the expansionist papers came to the

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<sup>65</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 22 October 1885, 4.

<sup>66</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 10 November 1885, 4; Editorial, *The Times*, 10 November 1885, 9; Editorial, *The Times*, 14 November 1885, 9.

<sup>67</sup> Alfred Comyn Lyall, *The Life of the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1909), 403.

<sup>68</sup> Marquis of Dufferin and Ava, *Speeches Delivered in India* (London: John Murray, 1890), 95.

conclusion that the Burmese government had to be replaced by a civilised nation like Britain.

### Dalhousie and the 'Heroic' British Mission against the "Barbarian" Burmese

Apart from the idea of the British mission against the Burmese 'barbarism', the press coverage of the Anglo-Burmese Wars also became a platform to the newspapers in testing the patriotism and character of key British figures. Seeing British intervention as a spread of civilisation and British virtue to the inferior states like Burma, the newspapers expected other British figures, principally policy-makers and officers, to be committed to the prospect of imperial expansion. However, those who failed to meet the press' self-created standard of good imperialists, as this section shows, became targets of criticism – sometimes could be as harsh as the newspapers' attack on the Burmese authorities. This is evident in the news coverage on the Calcutta authorities' handling of the Second Burmese War where Dalhousie, the Governor General of India (1848–56), received severe criticism from the newspapers, principally for his non-interventionist policy on Burma.

Stories of British imperial wars and expansion provided the media, in particular the press, an ideal vehicle to dramatise and romanticise Britain's burden to fight against barbarism. In his article on the war correspondent, Stern suggests that the newspaper correspondents, like other imperialists and military officers, shared the patriotism and belief in superiority of the 'British military prowess'.<sup>69</sup> Stern also highlights a craze for 'hero worship and myth-making' in Victorian Britain with the war correspondent greatly contributing to this idea.<sup>70</sup> Focusing on how imperialism was featured in American and British films during the 1930s, Jeffrey Richards argues that the cinematic depiction of the empire had a role in promoting an acceptable character and spirit of good 'Empire builders'. In general, they were presented as noble,

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<sup>69</sup> Stern, 'War Correspondents and Colonial War', in MacKenzie, ed., *Popular Imperialism and the Military*, 149.

<sup>70</sup> Stern, 'War Correspondents and Colonial War', in MacKenzie, ed., *Popular Imperialism and the Military*, 151.



brave, courage and selfless gentlemen.<sup>71</sup> Although this chapter does not see the press' coverage of the Anglo-Burmese Wars playing with the ideas of good imperialist figures, it is evident that the newspapers had a clear perception of what the empire-builders should look like; and those who failed to meet this expectation could become a target of criticism.

Looking at the news coverage of the Second Burmese War, another figure, apart from the Rangoon governor, that received much attention from the Calcutta press was Dalhousie, the Governor General of India. We know from Webster that the relationship between Dalhousie and the Calcutta press was far from harmonious. The Governor General was under attack from the Calcutta press for his frequent absences from his office. It seemed to be his habit to be away on tours of the Indian hinterland which angered the press the most.<sup>72</sup> The *Friend of India*, for example, criticised his periodic absences by satirically asking whether he was really needed.<sup>73</sup> Dalhousie's non-interventionist policy on Burma was another factor contributing to the division with the Calcutta press. Throughout the 1840s, the government of India had been under pressure from British merchants in Burma as they came into dispute with the Rangoon governor.<sup>74</sup> The Sheppard and Lewis incidents in 1851 became perfect excuses for the expansionist newspapers to pressurise the Calcutta authorities on intervention.

At the beginning of the conflict in 1851, the expansionist papers in Calcutta put the blame on Dalhousie's non-interventionist policy for making the situation in Burma worse. The *Englishman* stated that the prolonged mistreatment of the British subjects in Burma was a result of 'the absence of any real Chief of Government'.<sup>75</sup> It stated that the oppression of British traders visiting the Burmese ports 'has apparently become a rule', and no policy should be expected from the Governor General, who was satirised as being

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<sup>71</sup> Jeffrey Richards, 'Boy's Own Empire: Feature Films and Imperialism in the 1930s', in John M. MacKenzie, ed., *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 149, 158.

<sup>72</sup> Anthony Webster, *Gentleman Capitalists: British Imperialism in Southeast Asia, 1770-1890* (New York: I.B.Tauris, 1998), 153.

<sup>73</sup> 'The Removal of the Seat of the Government,' *Friend of India*, 9 October 1851, 641.

<sup>74</sup> Pollak, *Empires in Collision*, 52-55.

<sup>75</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 10 October 1851, 2.

‘the mere upper servant of the man on the hills’ – which, therefore, meant the Burmese authorities.<sup>76</sup> The *Englishman* even compared Dalhousie with Polonius, a character in William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, who was referred to as ‘tedious old fool’.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, the *Friend of India* criticised Dalhousie for his desire to ‘maintain peace with our barbarous neighbours’.<sup>78</sup> The paper satirically wrote that he deserved ‘a statue from the Peace Society’ for his reluctance to take the affair in Burma seriously.<sup>79</sup>

The press’ disapproval of the non-interventionist policy was clearly shown in the news coverage of the incident at the Rangoon governor’s house on 6 January 1852, in which the British delegation was refused an audience by the governor. Considering this to be an insult to the British government, Commodore Lambert ordered a blockage of the river and the seizure of the royal barge, as mentioned earlier. However, his action displeased the Governor General because he feared that it could worsen the situation. Unlike the Commodore, Dalhousie was reluctant to be drawn into Burma just yet and clearly did not see the incident at Rangoon as a ‘problem’ that required immediate armed intervention.<sup>80</sup> This seems to be what David J. Howlett considers to be Dalhousie’s style of governance, in which every measure needed a careful consideration, such as the merits of such policy and the impact on Calcutta’s political and economic position. Referring to Dalhousie’s well-known policy on the annexation of the Punjab in 1848, Howlett highlights how the Governor General preferred not to overstretch Calcutta’s involvement, noticeably by the preservation of chiefly authorities and the employment of Sikh soldiers.<sup>81</sup> Regarding the Anglo-Burmese conflict in the

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<sup>76</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 18 October 1851, 4.

<sup>77</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 12 February 1852, 3.

<sup>78</sup> ‘Burmese Affairs: War or No War,’ *Friend of India*, 29 January 1852, 65–66.

<sup>79</sup> ‘Our Relations with Burmah,’ *Friend of India*, 12 February 1852, 97.

<sup>80</sup> Minute of the Governor General of India, 22 January 1852 (Liverpool Central Library).

<sup>81</sup> David J. Howlett, ‘Ramsay, James Andrew Broun, first Marquess of Dalhousie (1812–1860), Governor-General of India,’ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 6 January 2011, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-23088> (accessed 27 September 2018).

early 1850s, a collection of Dalhousie's letters reflects his wishes to avoid war and the annexation of Lower Burma – which he thought to be undesirable.<sup>82</sup>

The expansionist papers in Calcutta, however, clearly showed their support of Commodore Lambert. While Dalhousie's moderation on the Burmese question was heavily criticised, Commodore Lambert received much praise for his handling of the event. The *Friend of India* wholeheartedly defended Lambert by stating that if a war with Burma occurred, the public 'must not commit the injustice of laying the blame of it at the door of the Commodore...[for] his determination to hold the King's ship in pledge to await the result of negotiations'.<sup>83</sup> The *Englishman* even claimed that his decisive actions would surely force the Burmese into an agreement with the British.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, both papers considered Lambert's handling of the event to be more 'English' than that of the Governor General who still believed in pacifist means.<sup>85</sup>

Despite this rocky relationship between Dalhousie and the Calcutta press at the start of the conflict, there was a sudden shift in the press' opinion towards Dalhousie after he became more engaged in the Anglo-Burmese affairs following the Burmese refusal to his ultimatum. His decision to approve the declaration of war with Burma in April 1852 was welcomed by expansionist newspapers in Calcutta – although it should be noted that the purpose of intervention, at this point, was only to bring the Burmese authorities to terms with the British.<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, the expansionist papers were evidently pleased with Dalhousie's engagement in the Anglo-Burmese affair. They retracted their previous criticism, while also becoming defensive of Dalhousie's handling of the event – in response to the opposition from London, particularly the moderate policy makers and *The Times*, which openly opposed the idea of intervention.<sup>87</sup> On 15 April 1852, the *Friend of India*

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<sup>82</sup> Marquess of Dalhousie, *Private Letters of the Marquess of Dalhousie*, ed. J. G. Baird, (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1972), 207, 251–52.

<sup>83</sup> 'Burmese Affairs: War or No War,' *Friend of India*, 29 January 1852, 65–66.

<sup>84</sup> 'Burmah,' *Friend of India*, 5 February 1852, 82.

<sup>85</sup> Reformer, 'Burmese Matters', *Englishman*, 12 February 1852, p. 2.

<sup>86</sup> Dalhousie, *Private Letters of the Marquess of Dalhousie*, 195.

<sup>87</sup> Editorial, *The Times*, 3 February 1852, 4; 'Parliamentary Intelligence – House of Lords, Monday, April 5,' *The Times*, 6 April 1852, 2.

lavished praises on Dalhousie for his dedication to the British intervention in Burma. It even stated that '[H]is Lordship must not retire before the complete and final settlement of this affair. If he remains in Calcutta to direct and animate every movement, Ava will unquestionably be in our possession by the 1st of March next [year]'.<sup>88</sup>

By the end of the war, the *Friend of India* celebrated the success of Dalhousie in his handling of the war in which he was hailed as a hero. In the paper's summary of the Anglo-Burmese conflict published on 6 January 1853, the *Friend of India* reinterpreted the event and linked it with Dalhousie's heroic actions. The editorial read that when the Burmese conflict intensified in late 1851, Dalhousie 'came down with doubled speed, with the "most solemn" determination to avoid a war'. Unfortunately, the situation had, as the paper wrote, severely deteriorated to the extent that even 'the most vigorous and the most pacific, the most ablest [*sic*] or the most ordinary' Dalhousie could not avoid the confrontation with the Burmese. The hostile attitude of the Burmese had taken away Dalhousie's pacifist intentions. At the end, the *Friend of India* expressed its satisfaction on Dalhousie's handling of the Burmese campaign. The paper even considered the decisive victory to be a matter of national pride.<sup>89</sup>

The imperialist character of the expansionist papers was apparent in Dalhousie's case. Many of the Calcutta papers were so dedicated to the cause of imperial expansion that their rhetoric could sometimes be more decisive than that of the British authorities. The expansionist papers became more supportive of those who shared the same notions on imperial expansion, as in the case of Commodore Lambert. At the same time, they could also use the news reporting to attack opponents of war, such as the Governor General of India. However, as soon as Dalhousie adopted an interventionist policy on the Anglo-Burmese conflict, the newspapers suddenly shifted their opinions on the Governor General and became more supportive of his handling of the

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<sup>88</sup> 'Burmah,' *Friend of India*, 15 April 1852, 241–42.

<sup>89</sup> 'The Factory Swelled to a Kingdom; the Kingdom Swelled to an Empire,' *Friend of India*, 6 January 1853, 1–3.

affair in Burma. By the end of the war in 1853, Dalhousie was even feted as the noblest man in Indian politics.

### A March for Mandalay: British heroism and the dissolution of the Burmese monarch

The news reports of the military campaign in 1885 were full of the bravery and heroism of the British troops and their heroic battles with the enemy. News of the military victory was received with enthusiasm while it also infused the press' opinion on the Burmese campaign with optimism. As MacKenzie highlights, the war provided the press with a 'remote' and 'exotic' landscape to express and enhance the idea of heroism.<sup>90</sup> This interest in the imperial warfare also led to the recreation of 'the classical and medieval heroic cults' in which military officers and their actions in the war were glorified as national heroes.<sup>91</sup> Although this chapter sees no striking figure in the Third Burmese War that could catch the press' attention, this does not mean that the press lacked an interest in the military engagement in Upper Burma. In fact, the British advance to Mandalay in 1885 was celebrated as a great success of military heroism as well as the British superiority as an imperial power.

The craze for heroic figures became more apparent in the latter decades of the nineteenth century as Britain increasingly became involved in imperial conflicts. One of the most commonly mentioned figures was General Gordon who was killed during the Siege of Khartoum in early 1885. His fearlessness towards the rebel forces had touched many imperialists, including the press. According to Robert H. MacDonald, the press considered the event to be symbolic of the British civilising mission against barbarism and savagery. Gordon's bravery received lavish praises from the press, which saw him as a type of saviour and respectable empire-builder.<sup>92</sup> The Fall of Khartoum, particularly the death of Gordon and *The Times of London's*

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<sup>90</sup> John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880–1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 6–7.

<sup>91</sup> John M. MacKenzie, 'Heroic myths of empire', in MacKenzie, ed., *Popular Imperialism and the Military, 1850–1950*, 111.

<sup>92</sup> Robert H. MacDonald, *The Language of Empire: Myths and Metaphors of Popular Imperialism, 1880–1918* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 83–88, 97.

correspondent, Frank le Poer Power, was ‘one of the severest blows suffered by the staff of *The Times* during Buckle’s editorship’.<sup>93</sup>

Not only that *The Times* held William E. Gladstone, PM at the time, accountable for failing to send relief troops to assist Gordon during the crisis, but the paper’s attitude towards Britain’s overseas dominions had also changed to more aggressive ‘imperialist’. Gladstone’s reluctance to increase the government’s spending on the military expedition in North Africa, particularly in Khartoum, received sharp criticisms from *The Times*. In a correspondence announcing the death of Power and Colonel Stewart, Gordon’s second-in-command, dated 17th November 1884, the writer called their actions in Khartoum, including that of Gordon, ‘worthy of England’ compared to Gladstone’s ‘policy of tergiversation and procrastination’.<sup>94</sup> The same attitude can be found in the editorial which criticised Gladstone for ‘refusing for a long time to recognise responsibilities which it was found at last could not be shuffled off’ and could have been ‘done at an earlier stage easily and inexpensively’.<sup>95</sup> Following the death of Gordon in January 1885, *The Times* admitted that the event proved a lesson that only the ‘moderate display of force’ could have prevented ‘all the mischiefs we now have to deplore’ and that after seeing what Gladstone’s ‘policy of timidity disguised as morality has brought us, it is time to try some other [measures]’.<sup>96</sup> According to Wood and Bishop, *The Times*, in the aftermath of the Fall of Khartoum, established a colonial department, which was staffed with people who were deeply touched by Gordon’s story and the position of Britain as an imperial power, making imperial theme the dominant subject of *The Times*.<sup>97</sup>

The shift of *The Times*’ attitude on the British imperial power can also be seen in its coverage of Burma. As discussed above, *The Times* was shocked by reports of the massacre at the Mandalay Palace in 1879 following Thibaw’s accession. Although acknowledging Thibaw’s alleged cruelty in ordering the mass execution of his royal relatives as well as the advocacy from some

<sup>93</sup> The Times of London, *The History of the Times. Vol.3, The Twentieth Century Test, 1884–1912* (London: The Times, 1947), 42.

<sup>94</sup> ‘Colonel Stewart’, *The Times*, 17 November 1884, 7.

<sup>95</sup> Editorial, *The Times*, 18 November 1884, 9.

<sup>96</sup> Editorial, *The Times*, 12 February 1885, 7.

<sup>97</sup> Oliver Woods and James Bishop, *The Story of The Times* (London: Joseph, 1983), 134–35.

mercantile interests in Rangoon for the annexation of Upper Burma, *The Times* stood its ground that it was against the idea of intervention. Rather, the paper believed that Thibaw's reign would not last long and that his regime would collapse without the need for British intervention.<sup>98</sup> Even in 1884 when British interests in Burma was threatened by France's imperial expansion in Asia, *The Times* realised that the prospect of British intervention in Upper Burma, which had long been favoured by the Rangoon mercantile groups, would be inevitable in the future and it was 'the business of Indian statesmanship' to decide what form the intervention should take. However, the paper asserted that '[A]t present it seems distant enough'.<sup>99</sup>

The non-interventionist stance of *The Times* suddenly changed after reports of the Franco-Burmese treaty and the BBTC case were revealed to the public. On 10 October 1885, *The Times* considered Thibaw's decision to open his country to France to be a demonstration of 'the irremediably illogical character of his theoretical independence' and British India could not definitely 'allow a foreign Burmese policy inspired by any other Power than itself...'<sup>100</sup> On 17 October, the paper expressed its support of the annexationist policy by claiming that it was a great opportunity for Britain to assert itself in Upper Burma, it would be foolish enough to let this chance slip. Peace, as it argued, 'would have been preserved at too heavy a cost if it had allowed some other Power to obtain control in Upper Burmah, and to stand in the way of [British] free trading intercourse with the country itself and with the vassal [Chinese] Empire beyond it'.<sup>101</sup> With this stance, *The Times* became one of the vocal advocates of British intervention in Upper Burma and, later, the conquest of the whole Burmese kingdom.

For the idea of military heroism in the Third Anglo-Burmese War of 1885, despite the lack of the British figure that could match the standard of Gordon's heroic actions, the news coverage on Burma represented the press' interests and enthusiasm in the tales of military advance and success in foreign lands. The press was willing to dedicate plenty of space on each issue to

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<sup>98</sup> Editorial, *The Times*, 21 April 1879, 11; Editorial, *The Times*, 26 November 1879, 9.

<sup>99</sup> Editorial, *The Times*, 13 October 1884, 9.

<sup>100</sup> Editorial, *The Times*, 10 October 1885, 9.

<sup>101</sup> Editorial, *The Times*, 17 October 1885, 9.

accommodating intelligence about the military engagement – which could sometimes be very lengthy. At the same time, the newspapers also expressed their interests in the progress of the military advance. Every movement of the British troops was reported with enthusiasm. For example, the *Illustrated London News*<sup>102</sup> on 14 November 1885 showed its interest in the British advance to Upper Burma by providing a detailed report of the troops as well as a brief profile of General Prendergast, the commander of the expedition force.<sup>103</sup> *The Times* even appointed Edward Kyran Moylan, an Irish freelance writer and journalist, as its own correspondent who joined the British troops in the march to Mandalay.<sup>104</sup> This allowed *The Times* to provide coverage on the movement of the troops, enabling to follow every development of the Third Anglo-Burmese War.<sup>105</sup>

Focusing on the *Englishman* and *The Times*, the papers benefitted from the works of their own correspondents in Burma, who regularly telegraphed intelligence to the newsroom in Calcutta and London, enabling both papers to report British military advance to Mandalay in great detail. ‘Latest Telegrams’ on ‘The Burma Crisis’ appeared in the intelligence section in *The Englishman* throughout the war, reporting every movement of the British expedition forces. With most of the reports conveying stories of the military gains, the *Englishman* expressed its optimism that the war would proceed very well<sup>106</sup>, while also portraying the war as ‘the generous indulgence of strength towards weakness; of a great enlightened Power towards a puny, barbarous and insolent State’.<sup>107</sup> Similarly, *The Times* received a regular transmission of news from its correspondent in Burma, presumably Moylan, and was able to publish

<sup>102</sup> The *Illustrated London News* was founded in 1842 by Herbert Ingram as a weekly newspaper – the world’s first illustrated newspaper. Its operation was a success with a high rate of circulation. See Isabel Bailey, ‘Ingram, Herbert (1811–1860), newspaper proprietor and politician,’ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-14416> (accessed 27 September 2018).

<sup>103</sup> ‘The Burmah Expedition’, *Illustrated London News*, 14 November 1885, 503.

<sup>104</sup> Moylan had been writing an article for *The Irish People* since the 1860s before becoming a war correspondent for *The Times* during the Third Anglo-Ashanti War of 1873 and he kept his relationship with the paper since then. Blackburn stated that Moylan who stayed in India in 1885 sensed that the war with Burma was imminent. He telegraphed to *The Times*, offering ‘to report on the situation and the subsequent war, if it occurred’. See Terence R. Blackburn, *An Ill-Conditioned Cad, Mr. Moylan of The Times* (New Delhi: A.P.H. Pub. Corp, 2002), 20.

<sup>105</sup> ‘Upper Burmah’, *The Times*, 11 November 1885, 7.

<sup>106</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 17 November 1885, 4.

<sup>107</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 19 November 1885, 5.



news of the Burmese question nearly every day during the period of war. By the end of the war, *The Times*' editorial claimed that the rapid success of the advance to Mandalay compared to the previous two Burmese wars was because the Burmese became 'half-hearted and nominal' in their resistance to the British. This was considered by *The Times* to be a testament to the paper's belief that the British military expedition was regarded as the liberators of the Burmese 'from a stupid and brutal tyranny'.<sup>108</sup>

Images were another platform for the press' worship of the military bravery. The illustrated papers played a crucial part in conveying news from Burma in the form of images back to their readers at home. They conveyed messages of the soldiers' fearlessness when facing the enemy while at the same time emphasising the downfall of the Burmese monarch. The two illustrations below are good examples of how the press' ideology of empire was narrated through pictures. Like many of the sketches on military engagement, the image (Figure 9) with the title 'How I Saw One of the Enemy' depicts a scene where two fearless British officers are confronted by a Burmese armed man who pointed a gun at them. It reflected the press' worship of military bravery and sacrifice in the name of imperial expansion.

The front page of the *Illustrated London News* captured the dethronement of King Thibaw after the British forces entered the Burmese capital (Figure 10). The event took place on 29 November 1885 when the King surrendered himself to General Prendergast, the commander of the expedition force. This illustration came with an extract from another London-based newspaper which described the meeting between Prendergast and Thibaw. The article narrated that the expedition force entered the palace through the Royal Gate, 'which no one but the King has ever before used'. Thibaw was described as having 'no particular richness in his dress, and was...without jewellery'. The King was also claimed to look 'stout...heavy and unintelligent'.<sup>109</sup> In the image, Thibaw looks abject and helpless, while the British soldiers and the sole civilian, possibly Colonel Sladen, the chief political officer, command attention and display firm power. Together with

<sup>108</sup> Editorial, *The Times*, 5 December 1885, 9.

<sup>109</sup> 'The Burmah Expedition', *Illustrated London News*, 30 January 1886, 103.

this article, the illustration pointed to the end of the Burmese ‘despotic’ ruler and a victory for a superior race like the British.

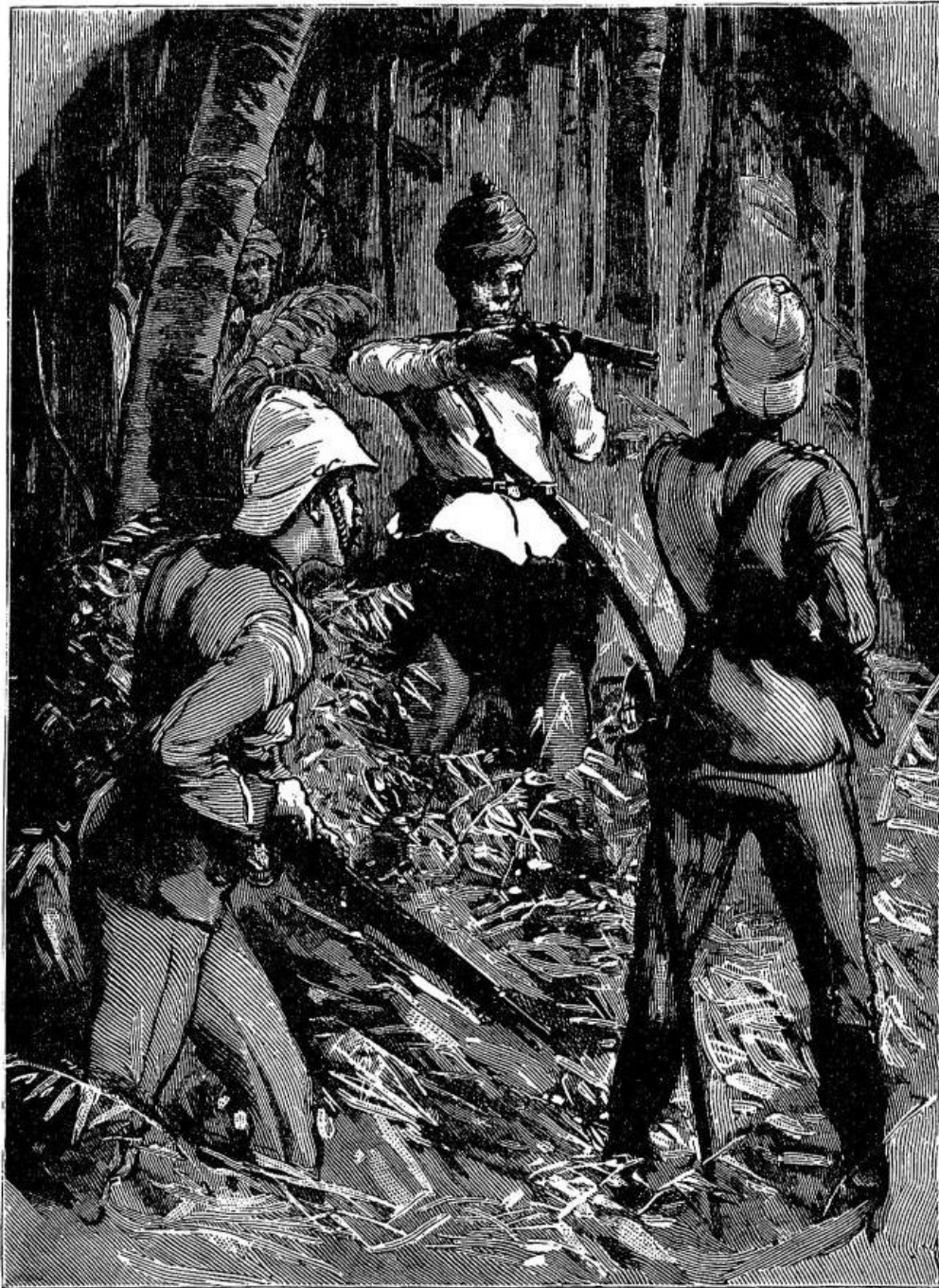
In order to emphasise British heroism, the messages in the pictures were sometimes exaggerated. Figure 11 from an unknown source is a great example of this distortion of reality. The picture shows the storming of the Mandalay Palace by the British troops. The centre of the picture contains the burning Great Audience Hall, one of the most important parts of the palace. However, in reality, no confrontation had occurred during the siege of Mandalay because the Burmese government surrendered to the British forces on 27 November 1885 before the expedition could reach Mandalay; and the British troops marched into the city of Mandalay without firing a single shot. Following the annexation of Upper Burma, the palace was used as the barracks from British troops until the Second World War, when it was entirely destroyed by British aerial bombing. The peaceful march into Mandalay was confirmed by The *Illustrated London News*’ coverage, as it narrated that:

On the 27<sup>th</sup> [of November] King Theebaw agreed to surrender, with his army, his forts and guns, and his capital city of Mandalay, the British flotilla having that day arrived at Ava, on the river thirty miles below Mandalay, and the Ava forts and guns having surrendered to avoid the threatened attack...A later telegram from Mandalay states that the British troops have entered that town without meeting with any resistance. All the Europeans were found to be safe.<sup>110</sup>

Although the picture in question was greatly exaggerated, particularly its depiction of the burning palace when, in fact, there was no fighting, it presents us with a clear message – which is the British victory in the Third Anglo-Burmese War and the dissolution of the Burmese ‘despotic’ rule.

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<sup>110</sup> ‘Success in Burmah: Surrender of Mandalay’, *Illustrated London News*, 5 December 1885, 557.



HOW I SAW ONE OF THE ENEMY  
From a Sketch by a Military Officer

Figure 9: A sketch from a military officer depicting the confrontation between British soldiers and the Burmese military. [Source: 'How I Saw One of the Enemy', *Graphic*, 27 February 1886, 236.]



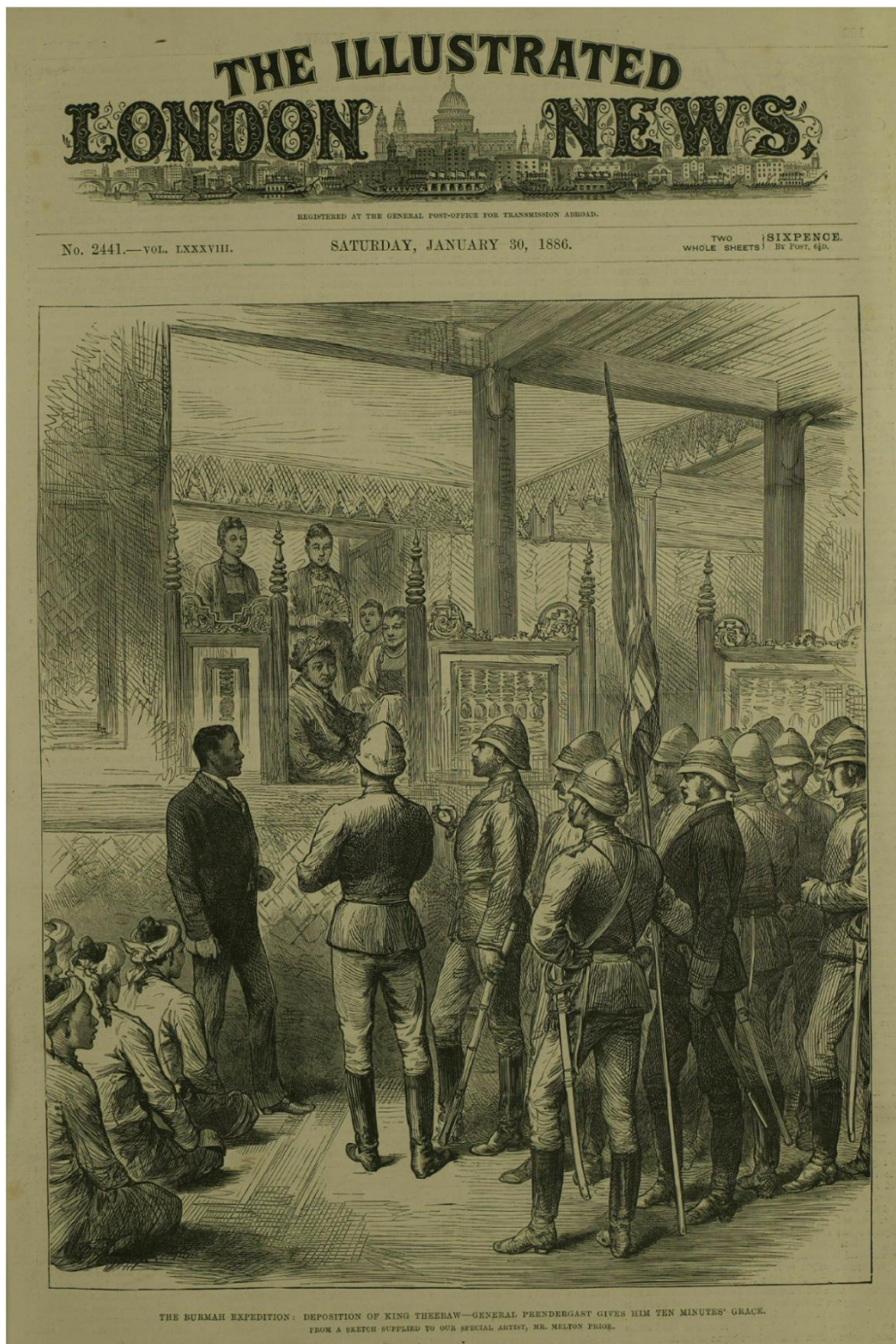


Figure 10: The downfall of the Burmese monarch as the British expeditionary force achieved victory in the Third Anglo-Burmese War. [Source: 'The Burmah expedition: Deposition of King Theebaw – General Prendergast gives him ten minutes' grace', *Illustrated London News*, 30 January 1886, 101.]



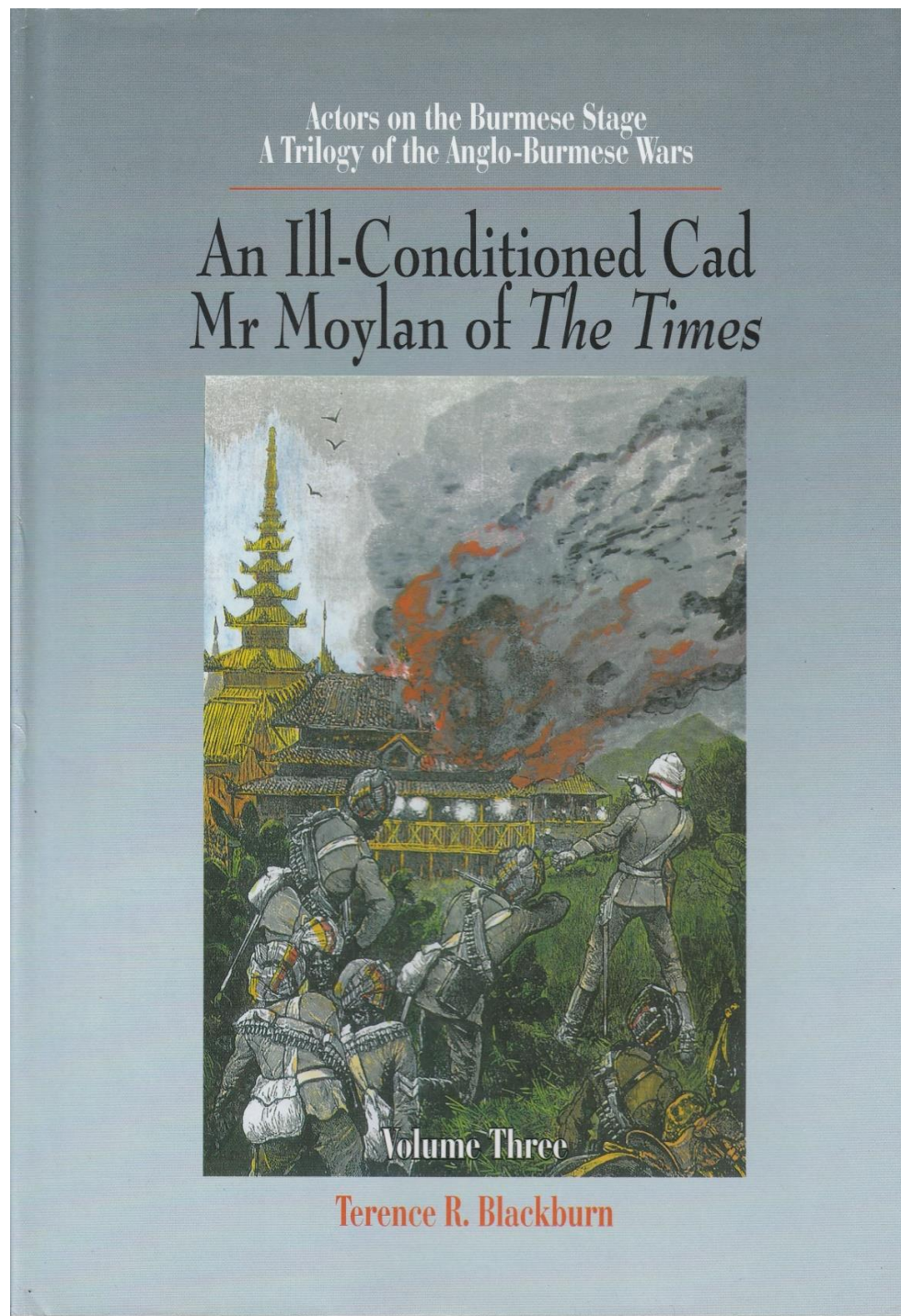


Figure 11: The picture (unknown source) shows the fictional burning of the palace and the British expedition force firing at the Mandalay Palace. [Sources: Cover of Terence Blackburn's *An Ill-Conditioned Cad: Mr Moylan of The Times* (New Delhi: A.P.H. Pub. Corp, 2002).]

The British advance in Upper Burma in 1885 provided a perfect case for the press to glorify the superiority of British imperial power. The war correspondents and artists worked to create and represent stories of the heroic British action against the enemy while the press at home in either Calcutta or London received the news with enthusiasm. However, based on the illustrations above, the news reporting of the Anglo-Burmese conflict opened the way for interpretation – and, in some cases, manipulation. One could not expect the correspondent or the sketcher to be present at the exact moment of the military engagement or, in reality, to have closely followed the troops into battle. Moreover, looking at how the correspondent described Thibaw in the aftermath of the occupation, the report was evidently based on the opinions of that reporter. Nevertheless, the pictures and the reports successfully depicted the victory of Britain, as well as the downfall of the Burmese monarch. In the next two chapters, this thesis will discuss the process of news reporting – or, to be precise, the creation of news – in which stories of the Anglo-Burmese Wars were meticulously selected in order to make a convincing justification for British intervention in Burma.

### Conclusion

Instead of treating the press as a monolithic institution, the news coverage of the Anglo-Burmese wars suggests that the newspapers were rather active, if not provocative, in their assertion of their own interpretation and justification for British imperial expansion in Burma. Run and operated by people with expansionist views on the empire, the newspapers unofficially proclaimed themselves the protectors of the British imperial position. The news reporting became a platform for the newspapers to express various ideas and perceptions regarding the Burmese question, particularly the necessity of British intervention and the morality of Britain in the war and the annexation of Burma. Their concerns ranged from the importance of British economic interests in Burma to the despotic and belligerent character of the Burmese rulers, which, thereby, were used to make the case for intervention. As shown earlier, the mistrust of the Burmese was so strong that every action from the

Burmese side was viewed with suspicion by the newspapers. This stereotype was firmed up by every piece of rumour and suspicion gathered from Burma – most of them emphasising the hostile attitude of the Burmese authorities. During the Second and Third Anglo-Burmese Wars, the newspapers produced a clear message: that Burmese hostilities had become a real threat to British interests and it was Britain's burden to replace the 'despotic' rulers with a more civilised and stable administration. The element of subjectivity in news reporting, therefore, requires further examination of the style and process deployed by the newspapers during the making of Burma's news – which will be the main subject of the next chapter.

## Chapter 4: The Making of Burma's News: Strategising Information during the Second Anglo-Burmese War, 1851–52

‘We deem it as well to warn our readers against relying on the exaggerated statements from parties in Rangoon which are likely to find their way into print...[And] we have ground to suspect, moreover, that some of those parties alluded to, are availing themselves of the presence of an armed force to provoke outages that may render any pacific settlement with the Court of Ava impossible’. *Hurkaru* (12 December 1851)<sup>1</sup>

The role of newspapers in British imperial expansion has been the subject of academic interest in regard to how they conveyed stories of Britain's overseas activities to readers back home. The most common topic is how imperial events were reported by the press, as we can see in the work of Stephen Vella on the news coverage of the Opium Wars (1839–42) in Scottish newspapers.<sup>2</sup> However, apart from presenting news to readers, there was, as this thesis contends, a deliberate intention behind the news reporting, in which news was made and managed. The previous three chapters have already shed light on the dynamics of newspapers' campaign for British imperial expansion in Burma. As discussed previously, there were several factors contributing to news reporting of British imperial expansion, such as the publishers and editors who had a responsibility in shaping the direction and tone of news, and Burma-based informants who played a role in the supply of intelligence to the press. This chapter will investigate how contributions from these factors and shifts within the technologies of news production had an impact on news reporting of the Second Burmese War, in which news, as this chapter argues, was made and manipulated.

Scholars of printing history have raised concerns regarding the process behind the making of knowledge in printed works. For example, Adrian Johns highlights the manipulation of information during the process of book making.

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<sup>1</sup> Editorial, *Hurkaru*, 12 December 1851, 654.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Vella, ‘In an Indian Net: China and British Imperial War News (1839–1842)’, in Peter Putnis, Chandrika Kaul, and Jürgen Wilke, eds., *International Communication and Global News Networks: Historical Perspectives* (New York: Hampton Press, 2011), 99–117.



With a great amount of available materials, book writers, according to Johns, had to be creative when selecting pieces of information to support their books, especially when many of these materials contradicted each other.<sup>3</sup> Thus, a wide range of techniques and literacy were deployed to back up the message of a book and the opinions of the writers, which could sometimes make printed materials too subjective and untrustworthy.<sup>4</sup> Seeing a newspaper as a political enterprise, Kevin G. Barnhurst and John Nerone, as mentioned in Chapter 1, argue how the content of news represented the opinions and politics of news writers and editors. For Barnhurst and Nerone, editors and proprietors had real control over the selection and the presentation of news.<sup>5</sup> This kind of historiographical perspective adds a critical dimension to the study of news reporting, and creates a complex picture of the subjective distortion of news. This chapter further elaborates on this discussion by focusing on the strategies the press deployed in news reporting on the Second Burmese War. As we shall see below, advocacy and pressure as well as a manipulation of ‘intelligence’ were strategically mingled with news coverage.

The period before the outbreak of the Second Burmese War had a uniqueness that made the press’ strategy workable. As discussed in Chapter 2, the news reporting of affairs in Burma during 1851–52 was primarily based on intelligence from the local mercantile community. This chapter shows how a regular arrival of news and intelligence from Burma enabled the Calcutta newspapers to form the news coverage of the Anglo-Burmese conflicts. It effectively generated, if not escalated, the press’ advocacy for the British intervention in Burma. C. A. Bayly believes that intelligence from local informants in Burma – most of whom came from the mercantile community – could sometimes be questionable in nature since it only, as he contends, reflected the sender’s agenda.<sup>6</sup> This chapter, however, argues that the press, as one of the receivers of intelligence, was not always a victim of those who

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<sup>3</sup> Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago, 1998), 325.

<sup>4</sup> Johns, *The Nature of Book*, 378.

<sup>5</sup> Kevin G. Barnhurst and John C. Nerone, *The Form of News: A History* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2001), 8–9.

<sup>6</sup> C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 118, 127.

created it. In many cases, pieces of intelligence related to Burma became critical instruments for the press in the advocacy for British imperial expansion.

This chapter will place an emphasis on the news coverage of Burma in the *Englishman* and the *Friend of India* to highlight how news was created. First, this chapter will explore the connection between the newspapers' preconceptions about Burma and how this shaped the way news was presented. The aim is to emphasise that news consisted of not just a summary of events but also the press' take on it. Secondly, the chapter will investigate the press' manipulation of intelligence coming out of Burma. It will demonstrate that the press – in this case, the expansionist newspapers – used intelligence from local residents in Burma to support its advocacy for British intervention. In doing so, this chapter will bring in several documents on affairs in Burma, particularly those of the British authorities in Calcutta, to compare them with the press' news reports. This analysis will help underline my argument that the press' prejudice regarding Burma played a crucial role in its news reporting, principally through the selection and presentation of news. Despite reporting the same events, the press and British authorities seemed to hold contradictory views on the Anglo-Burmese conflicts. Finally, this chapter will compare the news coverage of Burma in the Calcutta press with metropolitan newspapers, principally *The Times of London*. This chapter argues that the press in Calcutta significantly benefitted from a regular transmission of intelligence from Burma, which provided it with a substantial amount of crucial information and knowledge about Burma to play a politics in the Second Burmese War.

#### Advocacy as News: The press' justification for the British intervention in Burma

An examination of the news coverage of Burma in the 1850s reveals how newspapers presented news through their perspective of Anglo-Burmese relations, in particular the bellicose character of the Burmese authorities and the need for British intervention. Editorials, where editors voiced their

opinions, became a platform for newspapers to play politics at the time of the Second Burmese War. This section argues that the press strategically campaigned for British intervention in Burma through biases, pressures, and petitions as well as the manipulation of intelligence.

The Sheppard and Lewis incidents in the summer of 1851 provided expansionist newspapers in Calcutta with an opportunity to advocate for British imperial expansion in Burma. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Sheppard and Lewis claimed that they were wrongfully charged with a crime they did not commit by the Rangoon governor – an act of extortion of money, in their views.<sup>7</sup> Following the two incidents, there was an increase in the transmission of intelligence from Burma, much of which pointed to the continuous disturbance caused by the Rangoon authorities. The expansionist papers quickly seized this opportunity to pursue their advocacy for political and military intervention in Burma through their news reporting. They agreed that immediate action to end this prolonged conflict in Burma was needed. Between late 1851 and the commencement of the war in April 1852, newspapers in Calcutta strategically used intelligence from Burma to back up their demand for intervention and, later, for the annexation of Burma.

Historians suggest that the press' decision to provide news coverage – or to play politics – on any particular issue was rather subjective. With hundreds of events occurring each day – and limited space for news columns – press editors had to decide which events or stories qualified for publication, making news reporting highly opinion based. As discussed in the introduction of this thesis, Benedict Anderson highlights cultural factors such as opinions, interests, and politics behind the creation of news.<sup>8</sup> Focusing on the selection of crime news, Bob Roshier suggests that the seriousness of an event was a

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<sup>7</sup> Sheppard was charged with throwing a native pilot overboard, whereas Lewis was accused of the murder of one of his seamen. Sheppard testified that the charge was false because the seaman had jumped overboard himself. Similarly, Lewis defended himself by stating that the need for opium was the main cause for the death of his seaman. However, both attempts failed to stop the governor from continuing the trial. Eventually, a huge fine was imposed on the two men. See Editorial, *Englishman*, 31 July 1851, 2; 'Maulmain,' *Englishman*, 3 October 1851, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2016), 33.

decisive factor that could determine whether it would be featured as news.<sup>9</sup> The newsworthiness of any particular event, in Roshier's view, was subjectively decided by the people working in the newsroom.

Another factor contributing to the news selection process was, as this chapter contends, the amount of information obtained by the press. To play politics through news reporting, the press needed materials, in this case reports and intelligence, to maintain its advocacy campaign. This was the case of the Second Burmese War, in which intelligence about the mistreatment of British subjects played a great part in fuelling the press' consensus about the event. Although the Sheppard and Lewis incidents attracted the press' attention, stories about the suffering of local British merchants from the alleged misconduct of the Burmese authorities, which had been increasingly transmitted from Burma from late 1851, effectively stimulated the Calcutta press' advocacy for intervention. As we shall see below, the increased inflow of intelligence allowed the press to strategically offer its own justification for imperial expansion.

According to Vella, the Asian news in the early nineteenth century was mainly based on a 'veritable jumble' of information and rumours.<sup>10</sup> Bayly, as mentioned earlier, also highlights how information related to Burma during the same period was mainly obtained from unofficial sources such as merchants and missionaries, making it questionable in nature. Instead of seeing newspapers being under the influence of local informants in Burma, this section argues that newspapers in Calcutta were also to take advantage of unverified information regarding the severity of the Anglo-Burmese conflict to campaign for British intervention.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, apart from the Sheppard and Lewis incidents in 1851, there were at least two more incidents where the Rangoon governor was alleged of showing his hostile attitude towards the British subjects in Burma. Several reports suggested that he was involved in a

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<sup>9</sup> Bob Roshier, 'The selection of crime news by the press', in Stanley Cohen and Jock Young, eds., *The Manufacture of News: Social Problems, Deviance and the Mass Media* (London: Constable, 1981), 46.

<sup>10</sup> Vella, 'In an Indian Net', in Putnis, Kaul, and Wilke, eds., *International Communication and Global News Networks*, 104.

widespread robbery in the British settlement in Burma.<sup>11</sup> The Calcutta press reported that the houses of Aga Bukker and Carapiet Zachariah, two Armenian merchants, were raided by a robber gang who, according to intelligence, had a connection with the Rangoon governor.<sup>12</sup> However, the authenticity of the stories is questionable because they were not eyewitness accounts, while the names of reporters were not disclosed since most of writers preferred to use pseudonyms. Moreover, the press, as a receiver of intelligence, did not attempt to verify the information. Rather, the *Englishman* and the *Friend of India* seemed to enjoy obtaining complaints or narrative from the unverified sources in Burma because their information significantly allowed them to continue their advocacy for the intervention. The continuous arrival of intelligence from Burma convinced the press in Calcutta that immediate intervention in Burma was inevitable.<sup>13</sup>

The inflow of intelligence from Burma effectively allowed the press to put pressure on the Calcutta authorities. Although it is impossible to determine whether the authorities were somehow under the influence of the press, it was apparent that the arrival of intelligence in Calcutta led to the press' attack on the government. After several attempts from the British merchants in Burma in pressurising the Calcutta authorities to adopt interventionist policy in the 1840s, the conflict in 1851 became an opportunity for them – and the press – to strategically campaign for intervention.<sup>14</sup> The press brought up the Treaty of Yandabo of 1826, which ensured the safety of all British subjects residing in Burma, to back up its claim for the necessity and legitimacy of intervention.<sup>15</sup> This was meant to attack Dalhousie, the Governor General of India (1848–56), for his reluctance to take harsh stance on the Anglo-Burmese conflict and to protect the interest of the merchants. With the continuous arrival of intelligence from Burma, the expansionist papers in Calcutta could produce a clear message – that Burma had first violated the treaty, and it became the

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<sup>11</sup> 'Maulmain,' *Englishman*, 3 October 1851, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 27 October 1851, 2; 'The Conduct of The Burmese Governor at Rangoon,' *Friend of India*, 13 November 1851, 721–22.

<sup>13</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 27 October 1851, 2.

<sup>14</sup> Oliver B. Pollak, *Empires in Collision: Anglo-Burmese Relations in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980), 54.

<sup>15</sup> 'The Conduct of the Burmese Governor at Rangoon,' *Friend of India*, 13 November 1851, 721–22.

British government's duty to teach this 'half-civilised' state a severe lesson on how to treat British subjects.<sup>16</sup>

The relentless reporting of the Sheppard and Lewis incidents, however, ultimately convinced Dalhousie of the necessity of intervention in Burma, causing him to send an expedition, under the commandship of Commodore Lambert, to Rangoon to demand a redress from the Burmese Court. The arrival of the British expedition fleet at Rangoon in late 1851 opened up a significant channel of communication between Burma and India. This was the first time in a decade since the withdrawal of the British Residency in 1840 that a representative of the British authorities visited Burma. After the arrival of British delegates in Rangoon, local British and European residents saw the presence of the British gunboats as an opportunity to convey their grievances to officials on the expedition vessels, which were then reported back to Calcutta – providing the press there with more information in regard to Burma.

Petitions became another strategy that the Calcutta press used to persuade readers of the idea of intervention in Burma. It was common for local British mercantile communities in Burma to pass on their communications with the British delegation at Rangoon to the newspapers in either Moulmein or Calcutta. Merchants' complaints and petitions to Commodore Lambert were forwarded to Calcutta and also reported by the press. It was reported that a few days after the arrival of the expedition at Rangoon, the Commodore was visited by two local residents, Reverend Kincaid, an American missionary, and Mr Birrel, who brought complaints from European subjects who were facing difficulties with the Rangoon governor. They discussed their suffering caused by the misconduct of the Burmese authorities since the withdrawal of the Residency. The two residents also alleged that the Rangoon governor had threatened to behead any European resident found to be in contact with the expedition fleet. Further, the intelligence stated that another European resident visited the British expedition fleet and had an interview with Commodore

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<sup>16</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 10 October 1851, 2; and 'The Conduct of the Burmese Governor at Rangoon,' *Friend of India*, 13 November 1851, 721–22.

Lambert, 'in which they represented in such strong colours the character and behaviour of the present Governor'.<sup>17</sup>

On 8 December, the *Englishman* published a petition to the Government of India signed by one hundred British merchants and residents in Rangoon. They reasoned that the presence of British war vessels at Rangoon was a good opportunity for the British authorities to step in and end the Burmese oppression, which had long 'been wantonly inflicted on [the] British resided here'. The petition mentioned the fear of merchants of the Burmese 'act of outrage', which was depicted via 38 stories of their 'grievances'. At the end, the petition stated that if protection was not given to the merchants, they would surely 'be visited with tenfold cruelty and outrage' as soon as the British war vessels left Rangoon.<sup>18</sup> To maintain interest in this story, the *Englishman* republished the petition in its first issue of 1852 along with an editorial and another piece of intelligence, which emphasised the hostile attitude of the Burmese authorities towards the British, highlighting the inevitability of intervention and war.<sup>19</sup> Thus, within a single issue, the *Englishman* published three news reports on the affairs in Burma. This suggests that the paper took the event very seriously – considering that each issue of the *Englishman* contained only four pages at that time.

This rhetoric of the mercantile communities in Rangoon was picked up uncritically and reproduced by the expansionist papers in Calcutta. The *Friend of India*, for example, reported that the governor had threatened to massacre all foreigners and burn down their homes and properties if they were found communicating with the expedition fleet.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, intelligence from the Burma-based *Maulmain Times* highlighted the bellicose character of the Rangoon governor. One piece of intelligence revealed that the Burmese governor made three attempts to assassinate Commodore Lambert during his visit to the town of Rangoon, although the editor of the *Englishman* was not

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<sup>17</sup> 'Rangoon,' *Hurkaru*, 9 December 1851, 644.

<sup>18</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 8 December 1851, 2–3.

<sup>19</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 1 January 1852, 2; 'Maulmain,' *Englishman*, 1 January 1852, 3–4; 'Rangoon,' *Englishman*, 1 January 1852, 4.

<sup>20</sup> 'Rangoon and Burmese Affairs,' *Friend of India*, 11 December 1851, 785.

entirely convinced of this story.<sup>21</sup> Another report narrated how the Rangoon governor had a British subject forcefully taken out of his house and ordered to go tell the commodore that unless he withdrew his vessels from Rangoon, they would be blown out of the river.<sup>22</sup> None of this information was verified or scrutinised by the Calcutta press.

Therefore, the majority of the news coverage pointed to the hostile attitude of the Burmese authorities towards the British. The newspapers, by the end of 1851, concluded that the government of India must, at least, establish a consular agent in Burma to look after the British residents there. The *Friend of India* asserted that all British subjects 'have waited on the Commodore begging him to recommend the Governor General [of India] the appointment of a Consul'. The newspaper argued that it would be a disgrace if the ongoing negotiation failed to emphasise the necessity of having a consul at Rangoon.<sup>23</sup>

Although the limited local sources of information in Burma may have, as Bayly surmised, prevented the press from fully understanding the events there, the scarcity of information sometimes benefitted the press as well. Complaints, petitions and rumours from local residents in Burma became a useful tool for the press in its advocacy for intervention. The continuous inflow of information and intelligence allowed the press to make its campaign more intense. The next section will focus on the process behind the 'making' of Burma's news in the 1850s, particularly how the press' attitudes towards Burma shaped the direction and tone of news reporting. It will highlight the fact that news was manipulated by means of the distortion and selection of intelligence in regard to Burma.

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<sup>21</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 1 January 1852, 2; 'Maulmain,' *Englishman*, 1 January 1852, 3–4.

<sup>22</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 11 December 1851, 2.

<sup>23</sup> 'The Burmese,' *Friend of India*, 8 January 1852, 20.



### News Selection and Presentation: The process behind the making of Burma's news

The previous section discussed how the press used news coverage to campaign for British intervention in Burma, and this section will further examine the process behind the news reporting, particularly the selection of information. In using news to advocate for British intervention in Burma, newspapers had to present coverage that justified their political stances. Arguably, the continuous transmission of intelligence from local residents in Burma to Calcutta allowed newspapers to employ a great deal of manipulation of intelligence. The massive amount of information enabled the newspapers, in particular the expansionist papers, to maintain their coverage of the conflict while pushing their advocacy campaign forward. This section will discuss how news was manipulated by these newspapers. As we shall see below, the press adopted a creative approach when conducting news reporting, principally the selection and presentation of news. In doing so, accounts from the British authorities will be investigated in order to highlight the differences in the narratives of Burmese affairs by politicians and the press.

Historians have discussed several political and cultural factors that contributed to the press' selection of news. Johan Galtung and Mari Ruge, for instance, emphasise how the press' 'pre-images' or prejudices come into play during the selection of news. They argue that a story that was in line with the press' pre-images had more potential to be selected as news.<sup>24</sup> Galtung and Ruge also highlight the personification of 'news', which refers to the press' attempt to simplify an event to appeal to its readership. This could, according to the authors, be achieved through 'a combination of projection and empathy'.<sup>25</sup> This method is similar to Johns' assertion on the techniques of materials selection used by book writers to support the main subject of their books.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, based on Anderson's statement on the agenda behind the

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<sup>24</sup> Johan Galtung and Mari Ruge, 'Structuring and selecting news', in Cohen and Young, eds., *The Manufacture of News*, 58–59.

<sup>25</sup> Galtung and Ruge, 'Structuring and selecting news', in Cohen and Young, eds., *The Manufacture of News*, 57–58.

<sup>26</sup> Johns, *The Nature of the Book*, 378.

newspapers' coverage<sup>27</sup>, news reporting provided a way for the manipulation and distortion of information, allowing the opinions of press editors and news writers to influence the news report. This section further examines the process of news making in regard to the Anglo-Burmese conflict, in particular the selection and interpretation of information. The section will show that pieces of intelligence about Burma, particularly stories about the 'barbaric and uncivilised' action of the Burmese authorities, were masterfully and meticulously inserted into news coverage, producing meaningful and forceful statements on the necessity of British intervention.

First, it is important to examine the reports of local British informants in Burma which, as mentioned above, were of a questionable nature. Most of their information was based on rumours or stories told by people whose identities were not disclosed. It was very rare to find an eyewitness account being reported by the press. Usually, local informants would simply state that they 'had heard' the story from somebody or that 'it was said' by other residents. This made it difficult to trace the origin of intelligence from local informants as well as to confirm their authenticity. Additionally, the press, as a recipient of this intelligence, did not attempt to verify it. Rather, expansionist papers in Calcutta actively published the intelligence and used it to pursue their advocacy for intervention in Burma.

The case of the news coverage of Burma in the *Hurkaru* suggests that it treated intelligence differently. Unlike the *Englishman* and the *Friend of India*, the *Hurkaru* acknowledged that intelligence from Burma was dubious and was often based on rumours from local residents. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the *Hurkaru* distanced itself from the dominant mercantile community and aligned itself with the indigenous people, principally the Indian elites. The newspaper's indifference to the British merchant was greatly noticeable in its news coverage of the Second Anglo-Burmese War of 1852. In two editorials dated 12th December and 13th December 1851, the *Hurkaru* warned readers not to trust information from local residents in Burma. It claimed that mercantile 'parties' in Rangoon were trying to prevent any

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<sup>27</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 33.

peaceful settlement between the British and Burmese authorities by submitting information that suggested the hostile attitude of the Burmese authorities to newspapers in Calcutta.<sup>28</sup> The *Hurkaru* flatly dismissed merchants' intelligence for having 'no foundation in truth'.<sup>29</sup> However, the scarcity of information on Burma forced the *Hurkaru*, on many occasions, to publish such intelligence.

Despite being questionable in nature, the 'prevailing opinion in Rangoon' effectively allowed expansionist papers to reinforce their notion that the Burmese would choose to open hostilities with the British. The papers were, at the very first stage of the conflict in 1851, convinced of the necessity of British intervention. This bias significantly affected the way news was reported, and as this chapter demonstrates, the belligerent character of the Rangoon governor even became the topic of prejudiced news coverage. This bias was supported by intelligence from Burma, which pointed to the Burmese preparations for the war.

Information gathered from the *Maulmain Times* stated that the Rangoon Governor had proceeded to the Court of Ava to obtain permission to build stockades to defend the British.<sup>30</sup> A letter written by a local informant, dated 11th October 1851, stated that some British officers 'had heard' the governor saying he was travelling to the Court of Ava to convince the king of the urgency for a fortification of Rangoon.<sup>31</sup> Unlike the *Hurkaru* which, as mentioned above, questioned the authenticity of intelligence coming out of Burma in a subsequent editorial published the following month<sup>32</sup>, the *Friend of India* chose to completely trust stories and reports of the Burmese hostilities. The paper was entirely convinced that the governor, whose influence in the Court of Ava was reported to be considerably high, would try everything to prevent a peaceful settlement between Burma and the Government of India.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, the *Englishman* published a letter from a local resident in Rangoon

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<sup>28</sup> Editorial, *Hurkaru*, 12 December 1851, 654.

<sup>29</sup> Editorial, *Hurkaru*, 13 December 1851, 659.

<sup>30</sup> Extract from the *Maulmain Times* as reported in Editorial, *Hurkaru*, 3 November 1851, 502.

<sup>31</sup> 'Burmah,' *Hurkaru*, 3 November 1851, 503.

<sup>32</sup> Editorial, *Hurkaru*, 12 December 1851, 654.

<sup>33</sup> 'Rangoon and the Burmese Affairs,' *Friend of India*, 18 December 1851, 801–2.

stating that the Rangoon authorities had started to fortify the town and that a large group of armed men had reportedly been seen around town.<sup>34</sup>

I would argue that this kind of intelligence on the bellicose character of the Rangoon governor greatly encouraged the expansionist papers to promote the notion of the necessity of British intervention. Further transmission of 'negative' intelligence from Burma also caused the press to be pessimistic about the possibility of a peaceful settlement between the government of India and the Burmese Court. Stories from local informants seemed to convince the press that Lambert's expedition to Rangoon would be a failure because the Rangoon governor and the Burmese authorities had no real intention of pursuing peace with the British. One piece of intelligence revealed that the prevailing opinion of the British communities in Rangoon was that the Court of Ava would rather prefer to go to war. The report mentioned that a large group of armed men, around 8,000 to 10,000, had already been dispatched to Rangoon. At the same time, the Burma-based missionaries reported that the Burmese king's reply to the British demand for a redress was received by the Rangoon authorities, and it was written in a hostile tone.<sup>35</sup> Locating these pieces of intelligence in the context of the newspapers' advocacy shows that they greatly helped support what the press was demanding – the establishment of a British consul to prevent further repression by the Burmese authorities.

Although the Burmese Court's reply dated 1st January 1852 contradicted such newspapers' assumption of the hostile character of the Burmese authorities, their bias did not fade away so easily. The Burmese Court's letter to Commodore Lambert showed some desire to reconcile with the British. The problematic Rangoon governor was replaced. A new governor was appointed who would be in charge of investigating the British cases 'brought against the late Governor, and to reimburse those parties who had suffered by his extortions, and in fact to do all [in] their power to be on friendly terms with the English Government'.<sup>36</sup> However, despite this pacifist offer, the newspapers' prejudice against the Burmese authorities prevailed.

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<sup>34</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 11 December 1851, 2.

<sup>35</sup> Editorial, *Hurkaru*, 31 December 1851, 731; 'War with Burmah,' *Friend of India*, 1 January 1852, 5.

<sup>36</sup> 'The Burmese,' *Friend of India*, 8 January 1852, 20.

The hostile attitude of the Burmese towards the British continued to be at the centre of news coverage.

Intelligence on the arrival of the new Rangoon governor on 4 January 1852 stating that he was accompanied by a large armed troop raised suspicion among the press about the real intentions of the Burmese. The report stated that the new governor of Rangoon ‘arrived in regal pomp, with an immense armament of barges, and war boats decorated with elaborate carving and gilding. He was accompanied by a retinue of more than three thousand men’. This ‘war-like’ preparation was interpreted, by the press, as a sign of the continuation of the hostile attitude of the Burmese against the British.<sup>37</sup> Although B.R. Pearn, in *A History of Rangoon*, reasons that the arrival of troops with a new governor was simply customary to Burmese tradition and did not indicate any hostility, the Calcutta newspapers, whether intentionally or not, interpreted the movement of the troops as preparation for war.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, instead of believing in the contents of the Burmese Court’s pacifist offering, the expansionist *Friend of India* entirely agreed with ‘those who are acquainted with the character of the Ava court’ that the mild reply from the Burmese Court was simply an attempt to gain more time for military preparation.<sup>39</sup>

The incident at the house of the new Rangoon governor on 6 January 1852 is a good example of how information from Burma was purposefully manipulated. The event, which was considered a turning point that led to the Second Burmese War, occurred when Commodore Lambert sent four delegates to the house of the new Rangoon governor to settle a negotiation between the two governments. The delegation, consisting of Captain Fishbourne, Captain Latter, Mr Edwards, and Reverend Kincaid, was refused an audience with the governor, who was reported to be asleep at the moment the delegation arrived. However, the British delegates believed that the governor was fully awake, and it was his intention to avoid meeting with the

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<sup>37</sup> ‘The Second War with the Burmese has commenced,’ *Friend of India*, 22 January 1852, 49–51.

<sup>38</sup> Bertie Reginald Pearn, *A History of Rangoon* (Rangoon: American Baptist Mission Press, 1939), 166.

<sup>39</sup> ‘Burmese War or No War,’ *Friend of India*, 15 January 1852, 33.

British. Seeing this as an insult to the British government, Lambert ordered a blockage of the Rangoon River and a seizure of the Burmese king's barge anchored at the port of Rangoon until the Rangoon governor reduced hostilities. Information on this incident reached Calcutta on 17 January and was widely reported that evening by newspapers, such as the *Englishman* and the *Hurkaru* as a new aspect of the Anglo-Burmese conflict – both papers even published the intelligence under the title 'War with Burmah'.<sup>40</sup>

Despite their publication of this information – which apparently came from the same source – the *Englishman* and *Hurkaru* treated the information in significantly different ways. For the *Hurkaru*, it was the newsworthiness of the intelligence that mattered. Because the paper had to compete directly with the *Englishman*, it was important for the *Hurkaru* to offer the same coverage as its counterpart. Although the content of the intelligence – which was extracted from the *Maulmain Times* – entirely put the blame on the new Rangoon governor for refusing 'to settle affairs amicably, and finding every disposition in the Burmese to shew fight'<sup>41</sup>, the *Hurkaru* did not pursue the news in the same way that the *Englishman* did. The paper printed another piece of intelligence on the same issue indicating that there were, in fact, at least two instances of communication between the British delegation and the new governor prior to the incident. A day before the incident, two British delegates were sent to the governor's house to arrange a meeting between the governor and the British envoy. The new governor reportedly replied that he would 'at all times be happy to hear from the Commodore or to see him'.<sup>42</sup>

This particular aspect of the incident at the Rangoon governor's house was not mentioned by the *Englishman*, and it took half a month for the newspaper to publish a similar piece of intelligence that had similar content to that of the *Hurkaru*. On 2 February, the *Englishman* reported that the new Rangoon governor, prior to the incident, had expressed his intention to communicate only with the commodore in person.<sup>43</sup> This piece of information

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<sup>40</sup> Editorial, 'War with Burmah,' *Englishman*, 17 January 1852 (Evening), 3; 'War with Burmah,' *Hurkaru*, 17 January 1852 (Evening), 70.

<sup>41</sup> 'War with Burmah,' *Hurkaru*, 17 January 1852 (Evening), 70.

<sup>42</sup> 'Important from Rangoon,' *Hurkaru*, 17 January 1852 (Evening), 70.

<sup>43</sup> 'Maulmain,' *Englishman*, 2 February 1852, 4.

explains why the new governor refused to give an audience to the British delegation when it appeared at his house. However, it should be noted that the *Englishman* chose to place this intelligence in a separate section – not in its editorial, which focused on news about the arrival of 7,000 armed forces in the neighbourhood of Rangoon.<sup>44</sup> The *Friend of India* also shared the same rhetoric as the *Englishman*. Based on all the negative intelligence regarding the belligerent character of the Burmese authorities, the paper concluded that the prospect of the Second Burmese War had become inevitable. It also claimed that the government of India was left with no alternative but to intervene and annex Lower Burma.<sup>45</sup>

Following the 6 January 1852 incident, the newspapers in Calcutta became fixated on the hostile attitude of the new Rangoon governor as well as on the necessity of the war, which is very apparent in the intelligence they chose to publish. The *Englishman* and the *Friend of India* reported that a large armed troop numbering around 20,000 soldiers had been stationed around Rangoon, waiting to attack the British community there.<sup>46</sup> The town of Rangoon was also reportedly fortified with about one hundred cannons. This led the editor of the *Friend of India* to conclude that such extensive preparations signified the Burmese intention to settle matters with the British ‘in the field’.<sup>47</sup> The newspaper also mentioned an incident in Rangoon in which the Rangoon governor was criticised for offering a ‘studied insult’ to Commodore Lambert. The governor allegedly sent ‘a dirty unofficial man, looking like a labourer, in a common canoe, befitting his appearance’ to deliver his letter to the commodore (See Figure 12).<sup>48</sup> The *Friend of India* saw the event as an act of derision ‘which manifested the contempt the Burmese entertained for us’.<sup>49</sup> Until the outbreak of the war in April 1852, the newspaper continued to publish intelligence from ‘those who had some experience of the Burmese character’, enabling it to promote the notion that

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<sup>44</sup> Editorial’ *Englishman*, 2 February 1852, 3.

<sup>45</sup> ‘The Second War with the Burmese has commenced,’ *Friend of India*, January 22, 1852, 49–51.

<sup>46</sup> *Friend of India*, 22 January 1852; Editorial, *Englishman*, 7 February 1852, 2.

<sup>47</sup> ‘Our Relations with Burmah,’ *Friend of India*, 12 February 1852, 97.

<sup>48</sup> *Friend of India*, 12 February 1852.

<sup>49</sup> ‘Progress of Events in Regard to Burma,’ *Friend of India*, 19 February 1852, 114–15.

the Second Burmese War was unavoidable.<sup>50</sup> The manipulation of news will be further discussed in the next section where official accounts, which gives us another aspect of the Burmese question from the viewpoint of the British authorities and policy makers, will be investigated.



Figure 12: Servants of the Rangoon governor delivered a letter to the British envoy on board the expedition vessel. The contents of this illustration seemed to be based on the story of the Burmese's 'studied insult' of sending 'a dirty unofficial man, looking like a labourer' to deliver a letter to Commodore Lambert. [Source: Thomas Turner Baker, *The Recent Operations of the British Forces at Rangoon and Martaban* (London: Thomas Hatchard, 1852).]

### Burmese Affairs from the Perspective of the British Authorities: A Rather Different Story

To identify the press' biases in the selection of news, it is necessary to investigate how the events in Burma were viewed by other parties, particularly the British government. Two accounts by Dalhousie and Richard Cobden, MP, show us another aspect of the conflict, which was downplayed or overlooked by the press. This analysis will raise the issue of where the cultural factor

<sup>50</sup> 'Burmah,' *Friend of India*, 4 March 1852, 145.



came into play in the news selection process. For example, whereas the expansionist papers in Calcutta praised Commodore Lambert for his bold action against the Burmese<sup>51</sup>, Dalhousie and Cobden believed the commodore and British delegates in Rangoon were contributing to the deterioration of Anglo-Burmese relations. The following paragraphs show how Dalhousie and Cobden viewed the incident at the house of the new Rangoon governor. They highlight the fact that some aspects of the Anglo-Burmese conflict in 1852 were intentionally overlooked by expansionist newspapers in Calcutta.

Beginning with Lord Dalhousie's perspective on the Anglo-Burmese conflicts, particularly the Rangoon incident in 1852, it can be argued that his stance on the event was ambiguous – he privately criticised Commodore Lambert's handling of the Rangoon affair, but publicly defended him. Most of his publicised minutes and accounts on the Burmese question reflect his imperialist rhetoric. For example, in his minute dated 12th February 1852, which was included in the Parliamentary report published in June that year, Dalhousie harshly criticised the Burmese government, principally the Rangoon governor, for the insult offered to the British delegation on 6 January. The governor's continuous refusal to apologise to the British delegation for the incident convinced Dalhousie that strong action was required. He wrote that '[A]mong all the nations of the East, none is more arrogant in its pretensions of superiority, and none more pertinacious in its assertion of them, than the people of Burma. With them, forms are essential substance, and the method of communication and the style of address are not words, but acts.'<sup>52</sup> In the same minute, Dalhousie also asserted that the Government of India could not tolerate the inferiority offered by the Burmese and that immediate intervention by the force of arms became unarguable necessary.<sup>53</sup>

Dalhousie's minute dated 22nd January 1852 was, however, noticeably more moderate than his latter accounts and the news reports in the expansionist papers in Calcutta. The letter, which was not part of the report

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<sup>51</sup> 'Burmah,' *Friend of India*, 5 February 1852, 82.

<sup>52</sup> Minute by the Governor General of India, 12 February 1852, *Papers Relating to the Hostilities with Burmah*, 4 June 1852 (Parliamentary Papers).

<sup>53</sup> Minute by the Governor-General of India, 12 February 1852 (Parliamentary Papers).

presented to the Parliament, gives a contrasting picture of the Rangoon incident on 6 January where Dalhousie acknowledged the missteps taken by the British delegation, which, he believed, greatly worsened the Anglo-Burmese conflict.<sup>54</sup> For example, Lambert's decision to send 'inferior officers' to meet the Rangoon governor was seen as a breach of Burmese customs. In this minute, Dalhousie referred to the Burmese tradition according to which all communication with the Rangoon governor should be conducted through 'an equal authority on the part of the British Government'. This meant that Lambert 'had no right to require that his inferior officers bearing his letter should be received by the Chief Governor in person'.<sup>55</sup> Instead of putting the blame entirely on the Burmese, the Governor General admitted that he 'cannot altogether exempt Commodore Lambert from some responsibility for the failure of the negotiation; and must regard him as wholly responsible for the act of hostility which has been unfortunately committed on both sides'.<sup>56</sup>

Dalhousie also acknowledged that the actions of the British delegates had greatly contributed to making things worse. He referred to reports from Rangoon that Rangoon's deputy governor had offered to receive the letter from the British delegates but Captain Fishbourne rejected this proposal and insisted on handing over the letter to the new Rangoon governor in person. Demanding the highest Burmese authority to personally communicate with lower-rank officers of the British Government, was, as Dalhousie noted, considered by the new governor to be an act of discourtesy to the Burmese Court – an assumption of 'superiority which ought not to be conceded by them', according to Dalhousie (See Appendix 1).<sup>57</sup> Sir Cyril Philip refers to Dalhousie's minute dated 15th February in which the Governor General stated his preference for reconciliation with the Burmese authorities, while criticising

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<sup>54</sup> The authorities in London, while preparing the report for the Parliament, deliberately suppressed Dalhousie's minutes that criticised Lambert's handling of the Rangoon affairs. See Maung Htin Aung, *A History of Burma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 226; Charles Donald Cowan and Oliver William Wolters, eds., *Southeast Asian History and Historiography: Essays Presented to D.G.E. Hall* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), 55–56.

<sup>55</sup> Minute of the Governor General of India, 22 January 1852, 'Documents relating to the Ava - Rangoon Hostilities,' *Papers of Edward Geoffrey Stanley 14th Earl of Derby (1799-1869)*, 920 DER 14/147/12/5 (Liverpool Central Library).

<sup>56</sup> Minute of the Governor General of India, 22 January 1852 (Liverpool Central Library).

<sup>57</sup> Minute of the Governor General of India, 22 January 1852 (Liverpool Central Library).

Lambert for disobeying his instruction and committing hostility by seizing the royal barge. He also acknowledged the movement of British residents in Rangoon and Reverend Kincaid in concealing the commodore on 'vigorous measures' they deemed necessary.<sup>58</sup> Writing in the aftermath of the war on 19 June 1853, Dalhousie stated his regret in appointing Lambert to command the expedition. He even wrote that '[I]f I had had the gift of prophecy, I would not have employed Lambert to negotiate'.<sup>59</sup> Although most of his accounts strongly attacked the Burmese authorities for insulting the British delegation, which, as he contended, forced him to adopt interventionist policy, some minutes that were not publicised or put in official report to the Parliament show that Dalhousie was well aware of the missteps taken by the British officials – only that he chose not to criticise them publicly.

In *How Wars Are Got Up in India: The Origin of the Burmese War* presented to Parliament in 1853, Richard Cobden also pointed to the role of British delegates in the Rangoon incident. Known for his role in the Anti-Corn Law League (1838–46), Cobden, as Miles Taylor points out, entered into another reform campaign in late 1840s by advocating the government's retrenchment on military spending at home and non-intervention in the international affairs.<sup>60</sup> This is evident in his pamphlet on the Second Burmese War which he presented to the Parliament in 1853 after complaining that the official paper written by the government had omitted several crucial extracts and reports and could not give a complete picture of the Anglo-Burmese conflict in the early 1850s.<sup>61</sup> Cobden gathered available reports of the event that were not part of the Parliamentary Papers – it was common for letters from the Government of India to be duplicated and sent to relevant government officials. This is similar to Dalhousie's minute dated 22nd January, used in this thesis, which was duplicated and sent to the Earl of

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<sup>58</sup> Philip, 'Dalhousie and the Burmese War of 1852,' in Cowan and Wolters, *Southeast Asian History and Historiography*, 36.

<sup>59</sup> Muhammad Abdur Rahim, *Lord Dalhousie's Administration of the Conquered and Annexed States* (Delhi: SChand & Co, 1963), 94.

<sup>60</sup> Miles Taylor, 'Cobden, Richard (1804–1865), manufacturer and politician,' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-5741> (accessed 17 December 2018).

<sup>61</sup> Dorothy Woodman, *The Making of Burma* (London: Cresset Press, 1962), 122.

Derby. According to Dorothy Woodman, Cobden was regularly in touch with the Peace Society and befriended Rev. H. Richards, the secretary, who supplied him with government reports and copies of Calcutta newspapers such as the *Hurkaru*.<sup>62</sup> With access to other sources of information, apart from the official report of the war presented to the Parliament, Cobden was able to form a narrative of the Anglo-Burmese affair that contradicted what had been in the coverage of the expansionist papers as well as publicised government accounts.

Cobden pointed out that Commodore Lambert disobeyed an instruction from the Government of India that ‘no act of hostility is to be committed’ by getting into communication with the Burmese Court, demanding a redress to Captains Sheppard and Lewis. Cobden argued that the instruction was made clear that he should thoroughly investigate complaints from merchants before taking appropriate actions: to demand compensations from the Rangoon governor and, if this was refused, then he should get into communication with the Burmese Court.<sup>63</sup> Regarding the incident at the new Rangoon governor’s house, Cobden viewed that the British delegates had overstepped their duties by insisting to deliver the letter of the Government of India to the Rangoon governor in person. He argues that ‘there was nothing in the contents of the letter which in the slightest degree called upon the writer to force the Governor to receive it by the hands of a deputation’.<sup>64</sup> However, this matter was entirely ignored by the newspapers. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, their emphasis on the Rangoon governor’s refusal to meet the British delegates supported their earlier statements about the hostile attitude of the Burmese towards the British. This rhetoric would be maintained throughout the war.

In contrast to Dalhousie and Cobden, the expansionist newspapers in Calcutta were fiercely protective of Lambert and the British delegates in Rangoon. The *Friend of India* stated that the Rangoon governor’s communication with the British delegates was done ‘in a tone of derision

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<sup>62</sup> Woodman, *The Making of Burma*, 144–45.

<sup>63</sup> Richard Cobden, *How Wars Are Got Up in India: The Origin of the Burmese War* (London: W. & F. G. Cash, 1853), 8.

<sup>64</sup> Cobden, *How Wars Are Got Up in India*, 18.

which created no small merriment among the officers around him'.<sup>65</sup> The *Friend of India* urged the public not to put the blame 'at the door of the Commodore [for] his determination to hold the King's ship'.<sup>66</sup> It defended Lambert's decision by reasoning that the seizure of the royal barge would pressure the Burmese authorities to come to terms with the Indian government.<sup>67</sup> Evidently, the newspapers were willingly to endorse Lambert's actions, even though they knew it could intensify the Anglo-Burmese conflict and lead to the outbreak of hostilities.

The most significant aspect of the news reporting about Burma was that the press, namely the editors, had full control over which piece of intelligence to include in a news report as well as how to present it. This manipulation of information helped further the press' advocacy for the British intervention in Burma. Reports of the belligerent character of the Burmese authorities received special attention from the press and was at the centre of its news coverage. At the same time, other threads of news that showed contrasting perspective to the hard stand, such as the pacifist offer from the Burmese Court and Lambert's missteps in the Rangoon incident, were given less importance or was entirely excluded from the editorial section of the newspapers. This manipulation of intelligence shows that there was a political and cultural motivation behind the news reporting.

#### Dividing Opinions: *The Times of London*, the *Friend of India* and the Second Burmese War

As mentioned in Chapter 1, on the topic of the Second Burmese War, newspapers were divided into advocates of intervention – namely the *Englishman* and the *Friend of India* – and those who opposed British involvement in Burma – such as *The Times of London*. The sharp division between the expansionist papers in Calcutta and the leading newspaper in London is very apparent. This section demonstrates that the speed and timing

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<sup>65</sup> 'The Second War with the Burmese has commenced,' *Friend of India*, 22 January 1852, 49–51.

<sup>66</sup> 'Burmese Affairs: War or No War,' *Friend of India*, 29 January 1852, 66–67.

<sup>67</sup> 'Burmah,' *Friend of India*, 5 February 1852, 82.

of the transmission of intelligence from Burma as well as the amount of information received by the newspapers in the two cities greatly contributed to the consistency of the news reporting. As will be shown, a comparison of the news coverage of Burma in *The Times* with that of the *Friend of India* suggests how intelligence played crucial role in the making of news about the Burmese question in two different newspapers on opposite sides of the globe.

Historians have underlined how a lack of instant modes of communication created a challenge for authorities and business communities in metropolises. In his work on the role of metropolitan ‘gentleman capitalists’ in British commerce in India during the first half of the nineteenth century, Anthony Webster argues that the lack of means of instant communication resulted in little involvement by the metropole. With the transmission of intelligence from India to Britain being rather slow, it was impossible for the mercantile community in the metropole to fully and efficiently control commercial activities in the East.<sup>68</sup>

Focusing on the information network of the Dutch Empire, Charles Jeurgens states that authorities in the Netherlands were in a state of ‘information panic’ because they had no idea when information would arrive, what its content would be, and whether it would be urgent or not. Jeurgens argues that because its response to affairs in its colonies was reactive, it became a matter of pressing importance for the Dutch government to have an efficient mode of communication.<sup>69</sup> As shown in the Second Burmese War, mails from Rangoon usually took one week to reach Calcutta, while mails from Calcutta could take more than six weeks to be received in Britain.<sup>70</sup> This slowness in the transmission of intelligence from Burma did not only prevented the metropole from involving itself in policy planning for the war and annexation effort, but also made it a target of criticism by other

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<sup>68</sup> Anthony Webster, ‘The Strategies and Limits of Gentlemanly Capitalism: The London East India Agency Houses, Provincial Commercial Interests, and the Evolution of British Economic Policy in South and South East Asia 1800–50,’ *Economic History Review* 59 (2006): 760.

<sup>69</sup> Charles Jeurgens, ‘Network of Information: The Dutch East Indies’, in Catia Antunes and Jos Gommans, eds., *Exploring the Dutch Empire: Agents, Networks and Institutions, 1600 - 2000* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 102–3.

<sup>70</sup> Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 130.

expansionist figures in the colony. This was the case with the news coverage of Burma in *The Times* and the *Friend of India*. The latter had evidently superior knowledge of Burma and used this privilege to attack metropolitan newspapers as well as politicians who opposed the prospect of British intervention.

I would like to argue that the Calcutta press greatly benefitted from a regular steamship service between Burma, principally Rangoon and Maulmain, and Calcutta. A comparison of the intelligence about Burma published in the *Maulmain Times* with that printed in the Calcutta press shows that ships arrived from Burma at least once a week on average.<sup>71</sup> The transmission of information to Calcutta took about a week, allowing the urgency and freshness of the information to be maintained. The constant inflow of intelligence from Burma following the Sheppard and Lewis incidents in 1851 effectively allowed the Calcutta newspapers to keep up the reporting about the case.

Several ships participated in the transmission of intelligence from Burma to the eastern coast of India in 1851–53. The Calcutta newspapers frequently mentioned the name of the ships arriving from Burma, such as *HMS Fox*, *HMS Hermes*, *HC* (Honourable Company) *Enterprises*, *HC Proserpine* and *HC Fire Queen*. The topic of the movement of these ships received special treatment from the press, which had a designated column for information about arriving and departing vessels – suggesting the press' anxiety for information.<sup>72</sup> This can be seen from the case of the incident at Rangoon on 6 January 1852. An extract of a news article about the incident in the *Maulmain Times*, dated 10th January, was dispatched to Calcutta via the *HC Proserpine*. This intelligence arrived at Calcutta on 17 January and was immediately reported in the *Englishman* and the *Hurkaru*, as mentioned

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<sup>71</sup> Taking the example of the Sheppard and Lewis incidents, the *Englishman* covered the incidents on 31 July, 10 October, and 18 October 1851. The number of such news reports increased after the conflict in Burma intensified. See Editorial, *Englishman*, 3 July 1851, 2; Editorial, *Englishman*, 10 October 1851, 2; Editorial, *Englishman*, 18 October 1851, 2.

<sup>72</sup> The editorial would usually begin with intelligence about the arrival of the ship. According to Amelia Bonea, shipping intelligence was the earliest type of telegraphic intelligence published by newspapers. See Amelia Bonea, *The News of Empire: Telegraphy, Journalism, and the Politics of Reporting in Colonial India C. 1830-1900* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016), 279–80.

earlier.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, the speed of transmission and the volume of news became an important factor that allowed the press to be regular in its news reporting – or, to be precise, in its advocacy for British intervention in Burma.

Unlike the press in Calcutta, *The Times of London* conducted its news reporting on Burma under different circumstances. The metropolitan paper could not enjoy the same benefits as its counterpart in Calcutta. The lack of instant communication between Asia and Europe made any intelligence from the former, when received by the press in Britain, rather outdated. Consider the story of the Burmese mistreatment of Sheppard and Lewis. The two events were initially reported by the Calcutta press on 31 July and 10 October 1851, respectively. It took around two months for the same intelligence to be reported by *The Times*. Stories about the Sheppard and Lewis cases were reported around, at least, mid-December 1851.<sup>74</sup> The two-month gap in the transmission of intelligence took away the urgency of the story (See Table 4).

Table 4: Transmission time of news reports on Burma in Calcutta, Bombay and London newspapers.

Events	<i>Englishman</i> (of Calcutta)	<i>Bombay Times</i>	<i>The Times of London</i>
Sheppard incident	31 July 1851	13 August 1851	
Lewis incident	10 October 1851	18 October 1851	17 December 1851
The incident at the house of the new Rangoon governor	17 January 1852	28 January, 31 January 1852	2 March, 6 March 1852

Apart from receiving information about Burma with much delay, *The Times* also received shorter versions of intelligence than the Calcutta press. The novelty value of intelligence was lost during the two-month transmission. The previous section has already discussed the Calcutta press' method for selecting news. However, as will be shown below, Burma's intelligence to

<sup>73</sup> 'War with Burmah,' *Englishman*, 17 January 1852 (Evening), 3; 'War with Burmah,' *Hurkaru*, 17 January 1852 (Evening), 70.

<sup>74</sup> 'India and China,' *The Times*, 17 December 1851, 6.



Europe had to pass through another filter in Bombay. The city was a gathering place for all London-bound mail during the mid-nineteenth century. The Bombay correspondent for *The Times* was responsible for supplying intelligence about ongoing affairs in the East to London – although only extracts of news could be sent via steamships to London due to the weight limit.<sup>75</sup> In many cases, intelligence on Burma published in *The Times* can be traced back to news reports in the Calcutta press. For example, intelligence about the Sheppard case that appeared in *The Times* in mid-December 1851 was an extract of the *Bombay Times* article dated 13th August.<sup>76</sup> The report clearly stated that the intelligence was obtained from the *Englishman*. For the Lewis case, the *Bombay Times* referred to a news article from the *Maulmain Times*, which contained the same intelligence that appeared in the *Englishman*.<sup>77</sup> Thus, it was nearly impossible for metropolitan newspapers to obtain the same amount of information as their counterparts in Calcutta.

The volume of news was another contributing factor to the formation of the press' opinion on Burmese affairs. The topic of the superiority of knowledge of Burma re-emerges in the debate between *The Times* and the *Friend of India* during the Second Burmese War. The regular transmission of intelligence from Rangoon and Moulmein to Calcutta gave the press there the privilege of having a greater volume of information about Burma. At the same time, it gave local newspapers in Calcutta the impression that they had far better knowledge of affairs in Burma than those in the metropole. It should be noted that while news articles from or copies of Calcutta and Bombay newspapers were dispatched to Britain, metropolitan papers were read in India as well. As we shall see below, throughout the Anglo-Burmese conflict in 1852, the *Friend of India* directly attacked papers and politicians who opposed the British involvement in Burma. *The Times* was one of the targets of this criticism. The debate between the two papers over the Second Burmese War

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<sup>75</sup> British steamers in the 1830s–50s needed to carry heavy coal to make the journey across the oceans, leaving little room for the crew and the mail. The freight steamers in the 1850s were only used for transporting expensive cargoes such as cotton and fruits. See Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tentacles of Progress: Technology Transfer in the Age of Imperialism, 1850–1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 24.

<sup>76</sup> 'Bengal,' *Bombay Times*, 13 August 1851, 530.

<sup>77</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 10 October 1851, 2; 'Maulmain,' *Bombay Times*, 18 October, 1851, 686.

will highlight how the amount of knowledge could contribute to the formation of the press' viewpoint on a particular issue.

As discussed in Chapter 1, *The Times*' knowledge of Burma was rather limited due to a small volume of full reports being transmitted to London as well as the slow communication. From December 1851, when stories of the Sheppard and Lewis incidents were first reported, to April 1852, when the war was officially declared, *The Times* only received a number of reports from its Bombay correspondent, which could not give a full picture of the Burmese question. Evidently, the paper's thought was occupied with the First Anglo-Burmese War of 1824–26, which took two years to end and cost £13 million, only £1 million of which could later be recovered from Burma by indemnity. The war also killed 15,000 out of the 40,000 troops that were deployed.<sup>78</sup> This experience of war with Burma seriously concerned *The Times*, causing the paper to adopt a pacifist stance on the conflict during 1851–52.<sup>79</sup> The paper predicted that the second war with Burma would not end as easily as the Calcutta press anticipated. It believed that, after the First Burmese War, Britain was not the only country that had improved its military strength. The Burmese had made their own improvements, as shown in their rapidity in building blockades around Rangoon.<sup>80</sup> The Earl of Ellenborough – the former Governor General of India from 1842 to 1844 – shared the same view. Speaking to the House of Lords, the earl expressed his disapproval of the prospect of Britain's involvement in Burma. Based on his experience with the Government of India, he reasoned that 'the Burmese had been left at liberty, after provocation, to organise all their strength at the probable points of encounter, and apprehensions are generally expressed that the storming of Rangoon may prove an affair of no trifling cost'.<sup>81</sup> *The Times* agreed with the

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<sup>78</sup> The majority of the troops were killed by disease and wound rather than by the military confrontation. See Woodman, *The Making of Burma*, 80.

<sup>79</sup> Under the editorship of John Thadeus Delane (1841–77), the paper became a critic of Britain's overseas involvement. See Oliver Woods and James Bishop, *The Story of The Times* (London: Joseph, 1983), 115.

<sup>80</sup> Editorial, *The Times*, February 3, 1852, 4

<sup>81</sup> Editorial, *The Times*, 2 April 1852, 4; Editorial, *The Times*, 5 May 1852, 5.

Earl of Ellenborough that in case the war became inevitable, Britain ‘must prepare...for all that may arise from a twelvemonth of Indian war’.<sup>82</sup>

Meanwhile, the regular inflow of information from Burma to India gave the Calcutta press the authenticity and authority to advocate intervention. Using the numerous reports about the hostile attitude of the Burmese towards the British, the *Friend of India* was able to draw pieces of ‘evidence’ to dismiss and attack the non-interventionist rhetoric of the metropolitan authorities and newspapers. As mentioned earlier, the local British residents in Burma were entirely convinced that the Burmese would choose to fight an open war with the British. This notion was discussed by the *Friend of India* in its attack on the opponents of the intervention. On 8 April 1852, the newspaper’s editorial read:

All Parties at home seem to dread a Burmese war and are willing to receive the pacific assurance of the Burmese authorities with unbounded confidence. They have yet to learn that the Burmese, like other Asiatics, are utterly unacquainted with the thing called Truth. The public press and the Queen’s Minister will now learn that the officer who deputed from Ava to make peace, came down with the fullest determination not to yield an inch, but to resist our demand for satisfaction.<sup>83</sup>

The *Friend of India* also claimed that there was no better policy that could restrain ‘the barbarian pupil’ from repeatedly provoking a conflict with Britain than the acquisition of Burma.<sup>84</sup> It believed that the superior British armed forces would bring Britain a quicker victory at a lower cost than in the case of the First Burmese War.<sup>85</sup>

The ‘value’ of Lower Burma became another topic of debate between *The Times* and the *Friend of India*. Both papers used intelligence to support their opinions. The prospect of annexing more territories in Burma seemed to

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<sup>82</sup> Editorial, *The Times*, 18 May 1852, 4.

<sup>83</sup> ‘Burmah,’ *Friend of India*, 8 April 1852, 226.

<sup>84</sup> ‘Burmah,’ *Friend of India*, 13 May 1852, 305.

<sup>85</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 3 February 1852, 3; ‘Our Relations with Burmah,’ *Friend of India*, 12 February 1852, 97; ‘The Conduct of the Burmese Governor at Rangoon,’ *Friend of India*, 13 November 1851, 721.

be distasteful to *The Times*. The paper claimed that Arakan and Tenasserim, which had been occupied by the British since the First Burmese War, had been 'all loss and no gain'. The loss of life and money in that war was enormous, but the two territories were 'too poor to yield contributions, and too worthless to be retained'. The newspaper believed that the maritime province of Burma would not be able to give Britain as many benefits as the mercantile communities in Rangoon and Calcutta anticipated.<sup>86</sup> *The Times* saw the prospect of a second war with Burma as 'a losing game, and our best triumph will consist in getting back to Calcutta with as little loss of time as the honour of the army and the credit of the empire will allow'.<sup>87</sup>

The *Friend of India*, however, referred to intelligence that confirmed its views on the benefits of the annexation of Lower Burma. Information from 'those who have traversed in every direction [of Burma]' also convinced the *Friend of India* that the annexation of Lower Burma could create a new major entrepôt of British commerce in the East.<sup>88</sup> The paper argued that Arakan and Tenasserim had prospered significantly under British rule, so there was no reason that the remaining coastal province of Burma could not contribute to the growing commercial activity in this region.<sup>89</sup> The paper claimed that:

The Forests, which produce Teak and other timber, cutch, lac, and oil, are scarcely surpassed in riches by any in the world. Farther up the country, the field for industrial and commercial enterprise is equally expansive and alluring. The Irrawaddy, which is the great artery of the country, would open to us a mercantile intercourse with fifteen or twenty millions of people, and enable any spirited nation which commanded it to pour its manufactures into the western provinces of China.<sup>90</sup>

The *Friend of India* also dismissed *The Times*' suggestion that the Indian Government should refrain from getting involved in Burmese affairs. It warned that the withdrawal of expedition forces from Burma, as suggested by

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<sup>86</sup> Editorial, *The Times*, 3 February 1852, 4.

<sup>87</sup> Editorial, *The Times*, 30 June 1852, 5.

<sup>88</sup> 'Burmah – The London Times – Annexation,' *Friend of India*, 26 August 1852, 547–48.

<sup>89</sup> 'Burmah,' *Friend of India*, 13 May 1852, 305.

<sup>90</sup> *Friend of India*, 26 August 1852.

the newspapers and policy makers in London, 'would expose us to the derision of Asia, [and] destroy the prestige of our power [in Asia]'. The paper believed that unless British authorities interfered in Burmese affairs, India could not avoid further disruptions from the Burmese government.<sup>91</sup>

What is really significant about the response from the *Friend of India* is that the paper was rather confident about its knowledge of Burma. The greater amount of available intelligence about affairs in Burma increased *Friend of India*'s confidence in its advocacy for British intervention. However, the lack of an instant communication system in the 1850s put the metropolitan press at a disadvantage. Not only did it take up to two months for intelligence from Burma to appear in *The Times*, the smaller volume of news also made the paper's knowledge of Burma less extensive compared to its counterpart in Calcutta. At the same time, the London authorities were also prevented from becoming involved in the Anglo-Burmese conflicts in the 1850s. The 'Parliamentary Intelligence' in *The Times* suggested that while the Government of India officially commenced the war with Burma on 5 April 1852, politicians in London were still discussing whether Britain had the right to intervene in Burmese affairs.<sup>92</sup>

### Conclusion

The news reporting about Anglo-Burmese affairs during 1851–52 suggests that the press used the news to advocate British imperial expansion in Burma. The expansionist newspapers, in particular, did not simply report on affairs in Burma. Rather, they strategically influenced news reports with their outlook on Burma and British imperialism, while they themselves, in turn, continued to represent pressure from local British mercantile interests in Burma. At the same time, a certain style of news writing was deployed by the newspapers to promote their stances on the Anglo-Burmese conflict. Pieces of intelligence from local residents in Burma were meticulously selected – or

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<sup>91</sup> 'Burmah – The London Times – Annexation,' *Friend of India*, 26 August 1852, 547–48.

<sup>92</sup> 'Parliamentary Intelligence – House of Lords, Monday, April 5,' *The Times*, 6 April 1852, 2.

manipulated – to make news coverage more consonant with the campaign for intervention. By examining official accounts in regard to the event, we also saw that there were several aspects of the Anglo-Burmese conflict that the press downplayed and overlooked. While Dalhousie seemed willingly to accept reconciliatory offers from the Burmese authorities, the expansionist newspapers put more emphasis on stories about Burmese hostilities – the idea they had been fixated with since the beginning of the conflict in 1851. This manipulation of news revealed that the political and cultural roots of the newspapers were deeply embedded in their news reports – particularly, how they constructed the news.

The regular transmission of intelligence from Burma provided the Calcutta press with crucial and up-to-date information, enabling it to reinforce its notions on the Burmese question. In contrast, metropolitan newspapers and the London authorities could not receive the same volume of intelligence as newspapers Calcutta because of the absence of an instant communication system. However, this circumstance would entirely change after the Indo-European telegraph line became fully functional in the second half of the nineteenth century. This modern and instant way of communication would change the geopolitics of British imperialism since several actors in the metropole such as the authorities, the mercantile community and newspapers could now make their own contributions to imperial expansion. The press' news reporting on affairs in Burma during the age of the telegraph will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 5: Telegraphic War: Technology and the Third Anglo-Burmese War of 1885**

The news reporting of the Third Anglo-Burmese War of 1885 reveals a significant change in communication technology, in particular the increased reliance on the telegraph. Unlike the Burmese war of 1852 when the transmission of intelligence was carried out mostly through the time-consuming steamship service, the telegraph became the major channel of communication for both the British authorities and newspapers during British imperial expansion in Burma in 1885. The newer mode of communication had significantly transformed the way the press conducted news reporting as well as the geopolitics of British imperial affairs. Information transmitted from a peripheral place such as Burma could reach the government and press in both India and Britain within a day, enabling the decision making to be carried out swiftly and efficiently. At the same time, the instant communication also enabled diverse imperial actors, principally policy makers, in both the metropole and periphery to make their contributions to the Anglo-Burmese affairs. This chapter will examine the impact of the telegraph and the change in geopolitics of the British Empire on the press news reporting. This approach will shed light on the position of the press in the Third Burmese War, particularly the way it campaigned for British intervention.

Recent historiographies on the role of the telegraph in British imperial expansion have mainly focused on two significant issues: the speedy communication and the change in geopolitics of the British Empire, and the possibility of state intervention in the flow of information. Looking at the first issue, several scholars have highlighted how speedy communication enabled several imperial actors, irrespective of their locations, to make contributions to imperial expansion. Daniel Headrick, Deep Kanta Lahiri Choudhury and Roland Wenzlhuemer point out that the arrival of the telegraph significantly reduced communication time between Britain and its overseas dominions from weeks or months to a matter of hours, meaning that the decision making could

be carried out more swiftly and efficiently.<sup>1</sup> Focusing on the Third Burmese War, Anthony Webster argues that the improved mode of communication played a crucial role in allowing mercantile communities in the metropole to assert more influence over their trading activities in the East. He contends that the metropolitan economic interests took advantage of speedy telegraphic communication to make the case for British intervention in Upper Burma.<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, the question of state intervention in the flow of information has been extensively discussed by several historians. In her work on the Victorian newspapers, Lucy Brown, for instance, argues that the telegraph became a ‘weapon in the hand of the authorities’ since it enabled the states to strengthen their controls over the content and sensitiveness of messages transmitted via the wire.<sup>3</sup> In the case of India, experiences from the Indian Uprising of 1857 gave local British authorities a lesson on the sensitivity of news and the need to contain information. Regarding the stability of the British rule in India, the Government of India, in 1857, imposed a rule on telegraph signallers, ordering them not to transmit news of government’s losses before it was officially published.<sup>4</sup> After the event, the government adopted a policy of controlling all telegraph lines in India after 1874, while also imposing more restrictions on the press, principally vernacular newspapers, in hopes that it would enable the government to control and suppress ‘seditious’ propaganda circulating among the Indians and to ensure that only ‘correct’ information was sent out to the public.<sup>5</sup> The Vernacular Press Act 1878, for example, allowed the Government of India to censor the vernacular papers or suspend their operation – although this lasted until 1881.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 163; Deep Kanta Lahiri Choudhury, *Telegraphic Imperialism: Crisis and Panic in the Indian Empire, c.1830* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 145; Roland Wenzlhuemer, *Connecting the Nineteenth-Century World: The Telegraph and Globalization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 238–39.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Webster, “Business and Empire: A Reassessment of the British Conquest of Burma in 1885,” *The Historical Journal* 43 (2000): 1016.

<sup>3</sup> Lucy Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 232–33.

<sup>4</sup> Lahiri Choudhury, *Telegraphic Imperialism*, 42.

<sup>5</sup> Lahiri Choudhury, *Telegraphic Imperialism*, 137–39.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Headrick, “A Double-Edged Sword: Communications and Imperial Control in British India,” *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung* 35 (2010): 58.



According to Amelia Bonea, the Government of India, in 1877, experimented a new system of official news distribution to disseminate ‘correct information’ to the press. Apart from giving official-approved information to the press, the commissionership also had additional work in monitoring contents published in the press.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, there were rules that required newspapers to register themselves with the Telegraph Department – an attempt from colonial government to impose order and control over the publication of telegraphic news.<sup>8</sup> However, it should be noted that these policies mainly targeted the vernacular press, while many English newspapers in India were less affected.<sup>9</sup> As will be shown in this chapter, there is little evidence of state censorship on the news reporting of the Third Anglo-Burmese War of 1885. Rather, the telegraph enabled the government to lay down the policy on the Burmese question swiftly, preventing the press from asserting its influence on the decision-making.

This chapter proposes two complexities in the press news reporting and the telegraphic communication during the Third Burmese War. First, the chapter will discuss the fracture of the press-politics nexus which saw the decline of the influence of the Calcutta press on the government’s policy making on the Third Anglo-Burmese War. Since the telegraph popularised access to sources of information related to affairs in Burma, it enabled other players, whether the authorities or the mercantile communities, to exchange information directly with each other without involving the press. This change in the flow of information significantly reduced the ability of the Calcutta press – which had once been a gathering point of intelligence coming out of Burma – to participate in the policy-planning process regarding British intervention. Although other means of communication such as steamers, railways and runners, according to Amelia Bonea, continued to be used complementarily with the telegraph<sup>10</sup>, this chapter sees the telegraph as taking the lead in the news reporting and political decision-making at the time of the

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<sup>7</sup> Amelia Bonea, *The News of Empire: Telegraphy, Journalism, and the Politics of Reporting in Colonial India C. 1830-1900* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016), 226–27.

<sup>8</sup> Bonea, *The News of Empire*, 235.

<sup>9</sup> Bonea, *The News of Empire*, 230–31.

<sup>10</sup> Amelia Bonea, “Telegraphy and Journalism in Colonial India, c.1830s to 1900s: Telegraphy and Journalism in India,” *History Compass* 12 (2014): 393.

Third Anglo-Burmese War of 1885. Unlike during the Second Burmese War of 1852 in which the Calcutta press was able to follow the situation in Burma closely, telegraphic communication in 1885 speeded up the government's internal discussion on the prospect of intervention, leaving newspapers with little scope of news to manipulate. This relates to the government's handling of the BBTC case in August 1885 when communication regarding the Burmese case against the Bombay-Burmah Trading and Co. over the teak logging was carried out internally, and the press could not get a scoop on it until mid-September.<sup>11</sup>

The second point is the increasing role of internal discussion about policy-making via the telegraph amongst various British officials and authorities, and its impact on British involvement in Burma in 1885. While the Calcutta press became reduced in its ability to influence politics, the authorities in Calcutta, in contrast, played a more direct role in leading Britain to the war and conquest of Burma. This approach is to broaden extant historiographies on British imperial expansion in Burma in 1885, which mostly focus on contributions from the authorities and mercantile communities in peripheral Burma and metropolitan Britain – while involvements from the Calcutta authorities are surprisingly overlooked. Taking the works of D. R. SarDesai and Anthony Webster as examples, they do not quite agree on where the policy on the war and annexation of Upper Burma in 1885 originated – whether it came from London or Rangoon. SarDesai puts the emphasis on the movement from the Rangoon Chamber of Commerce and local authorities in Burma<sup>12</sup>, while Webster shifts the entire focus to the British government and 'gentleman capitalists' in London – whom he regards as the main motivators of British imperial expansion in Burma.<sup>13</sup> This chapter elaborates on the fact that the telegraph had brought the British authorities in several posts into close collaboration, leading to the formation of

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<sup>11</sup> 'Latest Telegrams – Upper Burma and the Government of India', *Englishman*, 22 September 1885, 4.

<sup>12</sup> Damodar Ramaja SarDesai, *British Trade and Expansion in Southeast Asia, 1830-1914* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1977), 202.

<sup>13</sup> Anthony Webster, *Gentleman Capitalists: British Imperialism in Southeast Asia, 1770–1890* (New York: I.B.Tauris, 1998), 227.

the imperial policy on Burma. The role of the Government of India will also be brought back into the spotlight.

‘Latest Telegrams’ from Burma: Instant but *same* news in the time of telegraph

The increasing reliance on the telegraph had changed the way the press conducted its news reporting, particularly in terms of urgency and frequency in the transmission of information. With the new mode of communication, the press and its worldwide network of informants could be connected with greater speed. As in the case of the Anglo-Burmese conflict in 1885, the telegraphic transmission of news speeded up the press’ advocacy for British intervention. However, as this section argues, the telegraph did not change the nature of news coverage of Burma in 1885. Although the news itself became shortened due to the cost of sending a telegram while the intelligence section took a lead in the press’ campaign for the Third Burmese War, cultural factors, principally the selection and presentation of news, were still critical in the production of news about Burma.

Historians have discussed how the telegraph changed the nature of intelligence from being opinion-based to more ‘fact-based’. In *Victorian News and Newspapers*, Brown claims that the high cost of sending a telegram had shifted the style of news writing from ‘a long personal letter’ to ‘a short and dispassionate’ summary of the event.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Deep Kanta Lahiri Choudhury contends that the telegraph could filter out opinions from the news piece.<sup>15</sup> The new mode of communication also enabled the press to be connected with its own network of correspondents and sources – ending the dependence on local informants whose information could be perceived as irrational and questionable in nature.<sup>16</sup> In short, both Brown and Lahiri Choudhury believe that by reducing the number of words in each piece of intelligence, there was less chance for the writer to insert personal opinions

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<sup>14</sup> Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers*, 228.

<sup>15</sup> Deep Kanta Lahiri Choudhury, *Telegraphic Imperialism: Crisis and Panic in the Indian Empire, c.1830* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 113.

<sup>16</sup> Lahiri Choudhury, *Telegraphic Imperialism*, 137.

into that telegram, contributing to the modernisation of press news reporting. However, this section sees things differently.

As will be shown, the scarcity of information about Upper Burma after the withdrawal of British Residency in 1879, and as discussed in Chapter 2, still enabled local residents in Burma to play a critical role in the supply of information to the press. Their reports – gathered and summarised by the press’ appointed correspondent in Burma – were arguably the main foundation of the news coverage of Upper Burma, even that covered by telegraphy. The telegraph, as this section demonstrates, significantly increased the speed of news reporting and critically enabled the press to continue campaigning for British intervention faster and more efficiently.

With Britain’s overseas empire in the second half of the nineteenth century consisting of territories and dominions in every part of the globe, ranging from India to Australia, the need for an efficient mode of communication became paramount. Looking back at the Second Burmese War when the steamship service was the quickest way of communication between Burma and outside world, the British authorities, newspapers and mercantile community in both Calcutta and London faced a problem in getting up-to-date information about Burma. The Calcutta press, for example, complained about the lack of news coming out from Burma. On 22 April 1852, the *Friend of India* complained:

[There is no information about]...the capture of Rangoon to announce which we last week expressed a hope of being able to do. We regret still more to say that up to the latest hour to which intelligence from Calcutta has reached us, no steamer from Rangoon had been announced by the Electric Telegraph. It is impossible to conceal the fact that the non-arrival of any accounts is just a cause of anxiety.<sup>17</sup>

Amelia Bonea refers to the motive behind the construction of this ‘Electric Telegraph’ wire that linked Calcutta’s city centre and Diamond Harbour, the port, in the 1840s. This particular line, as she contends, served

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<sup>17</sup> ‘Burmah,’ *Friend of India*, 22 April 1852, 257.

interests of local commercial houses, governments and the press, particularly on the foreign news.<sup>18</sup> Latest shipping intelligence, particularly lists of arriving ships, could be transmitted instantly from the port to the city. Since then, the telegraph line was progressively expanded. The 1860s and 1870s also saw several attempts by the British authorities and telegraph companies in linking India with Britain via the wire.<sup>19</sup> By the time of the Third Burmese War of 1885, intelligence from Upper Burma could be transmitted to both Calcutta and London within one day.

The instant communication during the Third Burmese War evidently enabled the press to conclude on the necessity of intervention faster than the previous war in 1852. Following the revelation of stories about the alleged draft treaty between France and Upper Burma and the BBTC case, the *Englishman* quickly began its campaign for British intervention. From 21 September to 28 September, the paper published at least five long telegrams about affairs in Burma. They all emphasised the threat from the growing Franco-Burmese ties. Within a week after the first report was published, the *Englishman* became certain on its advocacy for political intervention in Upper Burma – although the paper, at that moment, only pushed for the reestablishment of the British Residency at the Burmese capital.<sup>20</sup>

Apart from the speed of communication, what had changed from the news coverage of Burma is that the press increasingly preferred to pursue advocacy through ‘intelligence’ rather than the opinion-based editorial. Unlike during the Second Burmese War when the press campaigned for British intervention through the editorial, the coverage of the Third Burmese War saw the ‘Latest Telegrams’ taking a lead in the campaign. In the case of the *Englishman*, this intelligence section occupied half of a page where intelligence, correspondences and ‘Contemporary Opinion’ – extracts of other newspapers’ articles – were published. Although the cost of sending and receiving telegraphic communication was expensive, some newspapers, such as *The Times of London* and the *Englishman* – as discussed in Chapter 1, were

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<sup>18</sup> Bonea, *The News of Empire*, 279–80.

<sup>19</sup> Bonea, *The News of Empire*, 76–79.

<sup>20</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 28 September 1885, 4.

willing to spend their financial resources on the telegraph. The *Englishman*, in particular, positioned itself as a platform for Calcutta mercantile interests which can be seen from its extensive coverage of shipping, commercial and overseas intelligence in each issue. During the Third Burmese War, the *Englishman* also received continuous transmissions of telegraphic news from Burma, enabling the paper to launch a special service in supplying telegrams to those who chose to subscribe – possibly the mercantile community which had a keen interest in the development of the conflict.<sup>21</sup> Figures 13 and 14 demonstrate how lengthy the telegraphic news about Burma could be. It should be noted that they were full reports from the Burma-based correspondents for the *Englishman*.

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<sup>21</sup> ‘Advertisement – The Expedition to Upper Burma,’ *Englishman*, 7 November 1885, 7.

**THE BURMA QUESTION.**

[FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.]

RANGOON, SEPTEMBER 23.

At the meeting of the Chamber of Commerce yesterday, it was resolved that a deputation should wait on the local Government to-morrow to represent that injury must accrue to British trade and interests from the proposed grant of the Burmese Government for a lengthened term of years to a French company of the exclusive right to construct railways in Native Burma, and to establish Banks, pledging the Customs dues and involving thereby the right of searching English ships by French Officials counter to treaty obligation. The Chamber desires to urge on the Government the necessity for prompt action to prevent the treaty taking effect, its concessions being unwarranted by the circumstances of Upper Burma, where all trade is and has been British, and where no French commercial interests exist. The Chamber is to point out further that the proposed concessions to the French would result in Upper Burma becoming a French dependency, and in an extensive and important market being closed to English manufactures.

H. M. S. *Torquoise*, 22 guns, senior Man-of-war on the Indian station, arrived this evening, and reported that she had been suddenly ordered round here.

Figure 13: The lengthy telegraphic intelligence reported by the *Englishman*. [Source: 'Latest Telegrams – The Burma Question,' *Englishman*, 24 September 1885, 4.]

**THE WAR IN BURMA.**  
**OCCUPATION OF MANDALAY.**

[FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.]  
MANDALAY, THRO' THAYETMYO, DEC. 2.  
Mandalay, November 23.—The flotilla left Ava to-day at daybreak, and arrived here, without opposition, at 9 A. M. Large crowds of natives thronged the banks, spectators being especially numerous at the riverside at Mandalay, where the vessels anchored before the custom-house. Several Europeans who have been resident in Mandalay during the past few weeks at once came off to the steamers. They have not, with one exception, been injured by the Burmese authorities, though of course they passed an anxious time. Lately Captain Redman, of one of the Flotilla Company's steamers, was, however, treated with great brutality. He was locked up in irons for seven days, and half starved. No member of the Burmese Government received General Prendergast. Accordingly, after waiting till about half-past ten, Colonel Sladen sent the Kenwoon Mengyee, the chief Burmese Minister, and the leading member of the party friendly to the English alliance, a message requesting him to come to the steamer, and suggesting that he should bring the King with him. Orders were at the same time issued for the troops to prepare to land. The 1st Brigade, under General Forde, consisting of two companies of the Liverpool Regiment, and the 21st and 25th Madras Native Infantry, were directed to secure the south and east city gates. The 2nd Brigade, under General White, consisting of the 9-1 Cinque Ports Royal Artillery, the Hampshire Regiment, and the 12th and 23rd Madras Native Infantry, were to secure the south and east gates of the palace enclosure, which is within the city. The 3rd Brigade, under General Norman, composed of the Hazara Mountain Battery, the Welsh Fusiliers, the 1st Madras Pioneers, and a half company of Sappers, held the west gate of the palace enclosure, securing also the north gate of the palace and of the city wall. The three Brigades advanced by parallel roads leading to the city from the river bank.

No reply having been received at two P. M., the troops started on the march. General Prendergast, escorted by mounted infantry, accompanied the 1st Brigade, which was preceded by the Naval Brigade under Captain Woodward, Royal Navy. The regiments took their bands and colours with them. The people crowded the streets, and seemed scared and surprised at the display. As the 1st Brigade neared its destination, an hour-and-a-half after its departure, the Kenwoon Mengyee appeared riding on an elephant, and explained to Colonel Sladen that he had just missed meeting General Prendergast at the steamer, whither he had gone in obedience to Colonel Sladen's message. He earnestly begged Colonel Sladen to see the King at once, and prayed that no troops should enter the palace grounds until the interview had been held. The Kenwoon Mengyee, after greeting General Prendergast, accompanied Colonel Sladen to the palace, accompanied by Captain Morgan of the *Shintawbo*, one of the Flotilla Company's vessels. The King received these two officers in a small richly furnished room, the only other person present being the Kenwoon Mengyee. Both Colonel Sladen and Captain Morgan entered the room with their boots on, no allusion being made by the Burmese to the usual etiquette of entering the King's presence shoeless. His Majesty is described as being very nervous during the interview, and he was observed several times to be in tears.

Figure 14: Another lengthy telegram supplied by the *Englishman's* special correspondent in Burma. [Source: 'Latest Telegrams – The War in Burma,' *Englishman*, 4 December 1885, 4.]



Telegrams were used variably by the newspapers. The *Englishman* and the pacifist *Statesman* had different approaches to how they treated intelligence coming out from Burma. The case of the *Englishman*'s coverage of the Third Burmese War suggests that the editorials were being replaced by the 'Latest Telegrams' section in bolstering interventionism. The paper provided far more telegrams that emphasised the severity of the situation in Upper Burma and the necessity of British intervention. Masked in the language of urgency and parading as 'facts', such intelligence, if anything, carried far more currency than the seemingly subjective editorials.

The *Statesman*, however, was pessimistic about the idea of British involvement in Upper Burma, which significantly shaped the way its coverage of Burma was presented. Despite the paper's publication of telegraphic intelligence gathered from Burma, albeit far less often compared to the *Englishman*, the *Statesman* continued to use the editorial to voice its opinions on the Burmese question, which could be different from the report it chose to publish. While agreeing on the seriousness of the conflict depicting by intelligence obtained from Burma, the *Statesman* wished that the matter would be discussed fully and thoroughly before any measure was taken.<sup>22</sup> On 29 October 1885, the editor clearly wrote that the right policy on Upper Burma was not annexation, but rather the appointment of the new Burmese ruler.<sup>23</sup>

Looking at the nature of intelligence coming out of Burma, local informants continued to play a critical role in the production of news. Another important figure in news coverage of affairs in Upper Burma, at this time, was the Rangoon correspondent. The rise in importance of the press correspondent seemed to be a response to the change in news reporting during the second half of the nineteenth century. According to Bonea, major newspapers began to appoint people who were familiar with the press' operation to report foreign news.<sup>24</sup> Although there is little information related to the identity of the press correspondent in Burma as discussed in Chapter 2, the case of Mr Moylan, a Burma-based correspondent for *The Times of London*, suggests that many

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<sup>22</sup> Editorial, *Statesman*, 26 September 1885, 2.

<sup>23</sup> Editorial, *Statesman*, 29 October 1885, 2.

<sup>24</sup> Bonea, *The News of Empire*, 156.

correspondents usually had journalistic skills such as news writing and news gathering. Critically for my argument, these foreign correspondents made crucial contributions to the news reporting of the Third Burmese War by supplying the press in India and Britain with news gathered from political and mercantile communities in Burma.

Objectively considered, the dependency on reliable sources of information could at least filter out personal opinions from the news piece. However, as we shall see below, the case of the press' coverage of the Third Burmese War is an exception. The telegraph did not change the nature of news – which continued to be influenced by opinions of those who produced it. Although Brown claims that the 'brief and dispassionate' telegraphic news could ensure that personal opinions of the writer were taken out, she acknowledged the difficulty of overseas correspondents in doing the news reporting.<sup>25</sup> They still needed to seek a connection with local sources, such as local governments, newspapers and prominent parties in order to conduct their work.<sup>26</sup> Despite the role of the Rangoon correspondent in supplying telegraphic news to the press, it was local residents in Upper Burma who created that information.

Taking the *Englishman* as an example, its Rangoon correspondent seemed to have good relationships with the local mercantile community – the crucial source of information. The paper was able to provide a full coverage of the meeting of the Rangoon Chamber of Commerce as it prepared to lobby the British authorities in Rangoon for intervention.<sup>27</sup> However, it should be noted that the work of the Rangoon correspondent was limited to British-occupied Burma. As the British had cut diplomatic ties with the Burmese Court since 1879, the scarcity of information forced the mercantile community and newspapers correspondents in Rangoon to rely heavily on local residents in Upper Burma. It was only when Mandalay was occupied by the British in late November 1885 that news reporters could conduct a firsthand investigation of the situation in Upper Burma.

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<sup>25</sup> Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers*, 228.

<sup>26</sup> Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers*, 212–13.

<sup>27</sup> 'Latest Telegrams – Burma Question,' *Englishman*, 24 September 1885, 4.

The continued contribution from the private sector – principally the mercantile community – to press news reporting was highlighted by the *Statesman* as a matter of deep concern. This notion is apparent in the paper's comment on the nature of intelligence coming out of Upper Burma. On 15 October, the paper complained that most of the intelligence from Burma mainly came from local residents – whom the *Statesman* dismissed for being unreliable. The editorial stated that:

It will be observed that news is not necessarily true, being a report, and it would, therefore, be premature, in the absence of further information, to place absolute reliance on it. As a matter of fact, very little authentic intelligence has reached us from Upper Burmah for some time past, though there have been plenty of rumours of all kinds.<sup>28</sup>

The paper also attacked the mercantile community for piling their difficulties with the Burmese authorities onto the press. On 29 October, the editorial stated that '[T]he gentlemen at Rangoon have long looked with envious eyes at Upper Burmah, and we have no sympathy with their howl for annexation and their eager seizure of the present pretext as an excuse for appropriating our neighbour's goods'.<sup>29</sup>

Unlike the *Statesman*, the *Englishman* chose to publish several telegrams from the Rangoon correspondent – even though the nature of the intelligence was rather questionable. On 18 July 1885, the paper referred to a telegram from Mandalay that was entirely based on rumours. It read that '[B]azaar rumours are rife to the effect that a detachment of French troops are on their way from Annam via the Shan States... Though the rumours seem absurd, they are implicitly believed by the people'.<sup>30</sup> Another example is the Burmese Court's response to the British demand for a redress. In October 1885, the government of India sent an ultimatum demanding: first, an immediate halt to the Burmese case against the BBTC; secondly, an establishment of the British Agent at the Court of Mandalay with 'proper guard' and 'steamer for his personal protection'; and thirdly, a submission of

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<sup>28</sup> Editorial, *Statesman*, 15 October 1885, 2.

<sup>29</sup> Editorial, *Statesman*, 29 October 1885, 2.

<sup>30</sup> 'Latest Telegrams – News from Mandalay,' *Englishman*, 18 July 1885, 4.

all external relations to the British.<sup>31</sup> However, the Rangoon correspondent for the *Englishman* started to speculate that the reply was unsatisfactory – although the content of the response was not, at that moment, publicly disclosed. It was purely a speculation that the reply was written with ‘a decidedly hostile intention’ to prolong negotiation to prepare for the military defence.<sup>32</sup>

The case of the news coverage of Burma in *The Times of London* suggests that, in some events, contesting impressions could emerge on gaining access to this region. Like its counterparts in Calcutta, *The Times* did not have its own correspondent in Upper Burma to conduct a first-hand investigation. It mainly relied on the Calcutta correspondent who gathered available information and telegraphed it back to London. As discussed in Chapter 3, stories about King Thibaw’s cruelty from the alleged mass execution of his royal relatives and the ‘blood-soaked street’ of Mandalay became a foundation of *The Times*’ advocacy campaign in 1885.<sup>33</sup> This kind of story convinced the paper that Thibaw ‘in his half-drunken or half-insane frenzy [of the military prowess of his army]’ would not easily come to terms with Britain. *The Times* concluded that, with Thibaw’s recklessness, Britain would have no other choice but to intervene in Upper Burma.<sup>34</sup>

The interview between a correspondent for *The Times* and dethroned Thibaw after the British occupation of Mandalay gives us a completely opposite picture of King Thibaw – contradicting what had been retold by the press as well as the British authorities.<sup>35</sup> Mr Moylan was assigned by *The Times* to report the British advance to Mandalay.<sup>36</sup> The paper first published

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<sup>31</sup> A telegram from the Viceroy of India to Lord Randolph Churchill, 16 October 1885, *Correspondence respecting the Relations between France and Burmah*, FO 425/148 (The National Archives, hereafter TNA).

<sup>32</sup> Editorial, *Englishman*, 10 November 1885, 4.

<sup>33</sup> Editorial, *The Times*, 21 February 1879, 8; ‘The Eastern Borders of India,’ *The Times*, 24 January 1882, 8.

<sup>34</sup> Editorial, *The Times*, 28 October 1885, 9.

<sup>35</sup> Following the annexation of Upper Burma, Marquess of Dufferin, the Viceroy of India (1884–88), continued to remark on the alleged maladministration of King Thibaw and his hostile attitude towards the British. See Marquis of Dufferin and Ava, *Speeches Delivered in India, 1884–1888* (London: John Murray, 1890), 93–95; Alfred Comyn Lyall, *The Life of the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1909), 398–99.

<sup>36</sup> Terence R. Blackburn, *An Ill-Conditioned Cad, Mr. Moylan of The Times* (New Delhi: A.P.H. Pub. Corp, 2002), 20.

intelligence by its Burma-based correspondent on 26 October – although the name of the correspondent was not mentioned.<sup>37</sup> After the occupation of Mandalay in late November, the correspondent for *The Times* had a chance to interview Thibaw. In the coverage, the dethroned king said that he acknowledged the criticism from the paper, but insisted that he did not harbour any hostility towards the British. Furthermore, he asserted that he was a pious Buddhist and was never addicted to alcohol (See Appendix 5).<sup>38</sup> This very different perspective on affairs in Upper Burma was entirely absent from the news coverage prior to the war. With local residents dominating the supply of intelligence, it was impossible for the press' correspondents – who were mostly based in Rangoon – to obtain information at such close quarters in Upper Burma with their own eyes.

The nature of Burma's news in 1885 had not radically changed from the period of the Second Burmese War. The telegraph made a clear distinction, at least structurally, between 'news' and opinion in the news reporting of the Third Burmese War. The emphasis on coverage of Burma was now on the telegram section rather than the opinion-based editorial. However, what has not been sufficiently appreciated in historical literature on the Anglo-Burmese War of 1885 is that the intelligence itself was still presented within the framework of the press' opinion. The editor still had full control over the selection of news. Moreover, the contribution from the telegraph and the appointed correspondent did not change the nature of intelligence coming out from Burma. The scarcity of information about Upper Burma meant that the press still had to rely on intelligence from local residents. Thus, apart from the speed of communication, the press' production of Burma's news in 1885 did not see much difference from the earlier period. Instead, the only thing that had changed was the packaging of opinion and perspective within the 'factual' format of the telegram, thus gaining its significant weight and credibility.

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<sup>37</sup> 'Latest Telegrams – Burmah,' *The Times*, 26 October 1885, 5

<sup>38</sup> 'Latest Intelligence – The Burmese War,' *The Times*, 5 December 1885, 5.

Bypassing Calcutta: Telegraph and the decline of the Calcutta press as a hub of the intelligence coming out of Burma

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the transmission of intelligence from Burma to Britain in the 1850s was done in a one-dimensional pattern: intelligence from Burma was gathered in Calcutta before being forwarded to Bombay and London. However, the telegraph had changed the direction of the flow of information between Asia and Europe. The new technology created a more complex network of communication. It also reduced the hierarchy in communication because people in various places could access information more uniformly. Intelligence from Burma could be telegraphically transmitted to and from every major city in the subcontinent, such as Madras, Simla and Bombay. A news correspondent in the hill-town of Simla was now able to be in direct communication with newspapers in either London or Manchester. This transformation of communication system greatly affected the status and privilege of the Calcutta press which was once a hub of intelligence coming out of Burma. This section demonstrates that while the majority of intelligence related to Burma was still transmitted to Calcutta, the capital city of British India (1772–1911) could not maintain its status as a centre of news anymore.

Taking a look at the hierarchy in communication between Burma and Britain in the 1850s, Calcutta had acted as a medium through which most of the intelligence had to pass. As mentioned in Chapters 1 and 4, nearly all intelligence about Burma being reported in newspapers in London and Bombay could be traced back to the news coverage in the Calcutta press. The capital had the privilege of being the first to receive intelligence coming out from Burma while other cities, namely Bombay, had to rely on what the news agent in Calcutta selected. The passage of communications from London could, in contrast, bypass the western coast of India and be sent directly to Calcutta. With a regular steamship service from the Suez to the eastern coast of India, a stopover at Bombay was unnecessary.<sup>39</sup> This is evident in the coverage of Burma in the *Friend of India*. The ‘General Post Office Notification’ on the front page of the paper suggests that the Peninsular and

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<sup>39</sup> Bonea, *The News of Empire*, 58.

Oriental Steam Navigation Company (P&O) had a regular steamship service connecting the Suez directly with Calcutta.<sup>40</sup>

However, the flow of intelligence between India and Britain had completely changed with the availability of the Indo-European telegraph cable in the 1870s. The hierarchy in communication was no longer an issue since the press in either London or Bombay could equally access the intelligence about affairs Burma like their counterparts in Calcutta. At the same time, the position of Bombay in the traffic of news between Britain and India also changed. Significantly, the city became a hub of the metropolitan news for the press in India. According to Bonea, the British authorities intended to reduce transmission time of intelligence between the two sides of India. They decided to make Bombay a gathering point of mails from Europe, while also improving the transportation system, principally the rail network and, later, the telegraph, to link the city with the eastern coast. This change was, as Bonea put it, a major milestone in turning Bombay into a port for all English mails in India.<sup>41</sup>

Taking the lead from Bonea, this chapter argues that the Calcutta press lost its monopoly on news and intelligence with respect to Burma. For news reporting on the Third Burmese War, the Calcutta press can be seen extracting intelligence from Bombay newspapers. News sources in Bombay – principally the *Bombay Gazette* – were frequently cited by the Calcutta press. This increased reliance on news sources in Bombay can be seen in a report of the meeting between the French Government and the Burmese envoys in 1885. There was a lot of discussion regarding the possibility of the French intervention in Upper Burma, making any information about the Franco-Burmese relationship highly desirable. The news about the Burmese envoy to France was viewed with anxiety by the British community as well as the press. In October 1885, the London correspondent for the Bombay-based *Times of India* telegraphed the newsroom stating that the French Premier and the Burmese delegation had met in Paris. It speculated that they were about to

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<sup>40</sup> ‘General Post Office Notification – Export Overland Mail per P. and O., Co.’s Steamer “Hindoostan” Direct from Calcutta,’ *Friend of India*, 28 October 1852, 689.

<sup>41</sup> Bonea, *The News of Empire*, 61–62.

finalise the treaty. This intelligence was then picked up by the Bombay correspondent for the *Englishman*, and was later published on 5 October.<sup>42</sup>

The telegraph thus broadened the imperial geopolitics to cover more actors – even in the hinterland. The ‘conversation’ or discussion about the future of the Anglo-Burmese relationship was no longer dominated by the Calcutta press. The ‘Contemporary Opinion’ section of the *Englishman* is a great example for this complexity of the communication network. In October 1885, the British communities in Rangoon started to discuss which actions should be taken in the case of intervention in Upper Burma – one of them being the replacement of Thibaw with other princes. In a telegram to the *Bombay Gazette*, an anonymous correspondent in Rangoon reported the concern of local residents about one of the candidates, Mingoon Prince, whom they suspected of being too close to the French authorities. This telegram was later published on the *Englishman* on 19 October.<sup>43</sup> So, the flow of news was no longer hierarchical as it used to be during the previous Burmese war in the 1850s. Evidently, the telegraph had given the press in every city of the subcontinent an equal access to sources of information in Burma. However, this should not be mistaken as a decline of Calcutta’s position in the imperial politics as such. As will be discussed later, the Government of India still had an active role in British imperial expansion in Burma; and it was the telegraph that made the contribution from the Calcutta authorities more impactful.

### Speed and Exclusion: The fracture in press-politics nexus in the age of the telegraph

The telegraph had greatly speeded up the news reporting and, at the same time, the newspapers’ campaign for British intervention in Upper Burma. However, the British authorities in various places, such as Britain, India and British Burma did benefit too. The speedy communication, as this section argues, enabled the British authorities to make swift decisions on the

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<sup>42</sup> ‘Correspondence – France and Burma,’ *Englishman*, 5 October 1885, 4.

<sup>43</sup> ‘Contemporary Opinion – The Burma Question,’ *Englishman*, 19 October 1885, 3.



Anglo-Burmese matter, leaving the press with little scope to manipulate information or influence public opinion.

Historiographical debates have been dominated by a question of whether the telegraph enabled the authorities to monitor and manipulate the press news reporting. A number of historians argue that the state subsidy to telegraph companies enabled the authorities to strengthen their controls over the content and nature of messages transmitted via the wire. This is evident in the works of Donald Read and Chandrika Kaul, in their studies of Reuters' telegraph service to the press. Reuters was founded in London in 1851 by Julius Reuter, a German Jew, and gradually expanded its service to many cities of the British Empire as Britain extensively constructed and developed the intercontinental telegraph system in the 1860s and 1870s. This made Reuters, as Donald Read puts it, an institution of the British Empire.<sup>44</sup> It performed 'four imperial roles': first, it supplied world news to the press of Britain and the empire; secondly, it reported activities of the rulers of the empire while at the same time keeping them informed; third, it circulated important commercial intelligence to businessmen and traders; and, fourth, it provided private telegram and money remittance services for firms and individuals within the empire.<sup>45</sup> In its news services to the press, Reuters drew subscriptions from newspapers in both Britain and India since the 1860s.<sup>46</sup>

Although Reuters had presented itself as independent from political influence, Read and Kaul question its impartiality in news distribution, particularly because of its receipt of government's subscription and subsidy.<sup>47</sup> With the state subsidy, Reuters could become a tool of the state to suppress and distort information. For example, Reuters received a contract from the

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<sup>44</sup> Donald Read, *The Power of News: The History of Reuters, 1849-1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 40.

<sup>45</sup> Donald Read, "Reuters: News Agency of the British Empire," *Contemporary Record* 8 (1994): 196.

<sup>46</sup> London dailies was charged £1,600 per annum. Despite this expensive tariff, the stiff competition in the news market convinced many newspapers to subscribe to Reuters to be able to report instant domestic and foreign news. See Read, *The Power of News*, 45; Chandrika Kaul, *Reporting the Raj: The British Press and India, c.1880-1922* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 43; Jonathan Silberstein-Loeb, *The International Distribution of News: The Associated Press, Press Association, and Reuters, 1848-1947* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 175.

<sup>47</sup> Read, "Reuters," 197; Kaul, *Reporting the Raj*, 46.

India Office for £500 per year, or around £58,000 of today's values, to provide the authorities with an exclusive channel of communication while also supplying all Indian-related news to the Office.<sup>48</sup> It was, according to Kaul, 'frequently used by the India Office to telegraph additional words of a meeting or a speech, which it thought desirable to publicise in India, or to counteract articles in the London press'.<sup>49</sup> Later on, there was a practice of sending telegrams related to India to the India Office for approval before publishing in the British press. As Read argues, this means that 'India news issued by Reuters might not only have been officially supplied but also officially "managed"'.<sup>50</sup>

Although the extent to which the state could make use of the telegraph to manipulate the press news reporting is to be determined, recent historiographies have shed light to the 'information incontinence' where undesirable information was leaked to the press and the state was not able to control it. Apart from Reuters, there were other ways of sending telegrams such as by using a private telegram service of the Indo-European Telegraph Department (IETD). Wenzlhuemer claimed that about 95.3 per cent of telegrams sending through IETD during 1888–89 were labelled "Commercial and Private".<sup>51</sup> The practice of sending private telegrams seemed to have caused a great concern for the authorities since it was not possible for them to know the nature of that intelligence. In many instances, the British authorities were surprised when what they regarded as sensitive and unwanted information could be leaked to the public and the press. Lahiri Choudhury gives an example of the proposal to reduce military expenditure in India in the 1900s which eventually leaked to *The Times* and *Standard*. Internal investigation had found out that 'information from here [India] was being transmitted privately to the War Office in London and from there it got into the Press'.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Kaul, *Reporting the Raj*, 45.

<sup>49</sup> Kaul, *Reporting the Raj*, 46.

<sup>50</sup> Read, "Reuters," 199.

<sup>51</sup> Wenzlhuemer, *Connecting the Nineteenth-Century World*, 239.

<sup>52</sup> Lahiri Choudhury, *Telegraphic Imperialism*, 149–50.

The two examples of *The Times*' coverage of the British control of Upper Burma below indicate how telegraphic communication enabled a press correspondent to evade state censorship. According to Terence R. Blackburn, the British military force, after the occupation of Mandalay, had imposed censorship on all information coming out of Upper Burma. However, Moylan, the correspondent for *The Times*, was still able to telegraph his own account of the situation in Mandalay to the newsroom in London without a problem. The report mentioned the military deficiency in the handling of the occupied state after a riot occurred in Mandalay – in which many of the European subjects were attacked while the Palace and Buddhist monasteries were looted. This story prompted the editor of *The Times* to put in harshly that even the Thibaw's rule was 'better than [the current] anarchy and lawlessness'.<sup>53</sup> Moylan's report caused a fury among the British military officials and resulted in his deportation from Mandalay.<sup>54</sup>

Another example is *The Times*' coverage of the public execution of the Burmese rebels in January 1886, when the Provost-Marshal Willoughby Wallace Hooper, an amateur photographer, conducted an experiment on 'securing views of [the rebels] executed at the precise moment when they are struck by the bullets'. The correspondent worried that this public execution and the 'cruel experiment' of the Provost-Marshal would not only demoralise indigenous people but also British Indian soldiers and civilians as well.<sup>55</sup> The story also caused a public stir in Britain, which eventually forced the British Government to initiate an investigation. Lord Randolph Churchill of the India Office (1885–86) telegraphed Lord Dufferin, the Viceroy of India, asking for clarification. However, the Viceroy's response suggested that the report on the Provost-Marshal had not yet been known in India. In a telegram to the London authorities, the Viceroy stated that he had no knowledge of the event and that

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<sup>53</sup> Blackburn, *An Ill-Conditioned Cad, Mr. Moylan of The Times*, 22–23. See full coverage in 'Latest Intelligence – The Burmese War,' *The Times*, 5 December 1885, 5; Editorial, *The Times*, 5 December 1885, 9.

<sup>54</sup> This order was later overturned. George Earle Buckle, the editor of *The Times*, used his friendship with Lord Randolph Churchill, the Secretary of State for India (1885–86), to pressure the British authorities to revoke the deportation of Moylan from Upper Burma. See Blackburn, *An Ill-Conditioned Cad, Mr. Moylan of The Times*, 23–24.

<sup>55</sup> Wenzlhuemer, *Connecting the Nineteenth-Century World*, 237. See full coverage in 'Latest Intelligence – Burmah,' *The Times*, 21 January 1886, 5.

the query from London ‘was almost the first warning of these harsh proceedings’, and *The Times*’ telegram that had caused public anxiety was ‘not transmitted to our local papers’.<sup>56</sup> These examples point to the role of the telegraph in creating an enclosed line of communication which made it even harder for the state to interfere.

Alongside this, this section would also like to throw light on another aspect of the press-politics nexus in the age of telegraph – which is the exclusion of the press from having a chance to manipulate the news. The enclosed nature of exchange among private correspondents via the telegraph, as outlined above, functioned similarly for government servants and official exchange that used the same technology. In fact, the authorities were keener than ever to keep this correspondence secret and to make a decision on the Burmese question quickly and swiftly before the public sector, like the press, could have a scoop on it. A telegram from the Viceroy of India to the London authorities suggests that British statesmen desired to proceed with the British expedition to Upper Burma in 1885 quietly. Viceroy Dufferin telegraphed to Churchill when the advancement to Mandalay was critically about to commence as follows:

I am also fully alive to the consideration you have shown in maintaining a reserved attitude in regard to our proceedings in Burma. It was certainly desirable that we should get everything pretty well forward before public attention was called to the matter.<sup>57</sup>

The Viceroy acknowledged that the role of the newspaper in conveying information about British involvement in Burma to the public, including the opponents of the government’s interventionist policy on Burma.<sup>58</sup>

The speedy communication in 1885 evidently left the press with little time to manipulate the news. Looking back at the press’ coverage of the Anglo-Burmese conflict in the early 1850s, the slow mode of communication,

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<sup>56</sup> ‘Document no.1335 – Military executions in Burmah,’ 26 January 1886, *Papers of Lord Randolph Churchill*, Add MS 9248/11 (Cambridge University Library, hereafter CUL).

<sup>57</sup> ‘Document no.1019 – Burmah,’ 1 November 1885, *Papers of Lord Randolph Churchill*, Add MS 9248/9 (CUL).

<sup>58</sup> ‘Document no.1335 – Military executions in Burmah,’ 26 January 1886, *Papers of Lord Randolph Churchill*, Add MS 9248/9 (CUL).

as this chapter contends, allowed the press with more time to monitor the affair in Burma closely. For example, the military preparation for the Second Burmese War – particularly, the enlistment of the troops and the advancement of the expeditionary force – was extensively reported by the press.<sup>59</sup> However, this ability of the press was reduced by the increased reliance on the telegraph – as is evident in the case of British imperial expansion in Burma in 1885.

The case of the BBTC case is a great example of how the telegraph enabled the authorities to handle the affairs in Burma swiftly – and the press was technically excluded from it. Since the first telegram from the BBTC agent in Upper Burma to Wallace Brothers, the owner of the company, on 12 August 1885, there was a series of communications among the British authorities in London, Calcutta and Rangoon, in particular when they were trying to clarify the story. The Viceroy of India, the Chief Commissioner of Burma and the London authorities were communicating with each other throughout this period. Within a few days, the British authorities could have an understanding of the Burmese decree against the BBTC.<sup>60</sup> However, it was not until mid-September that the press in Calcutta, London and even Rangoon could conduct news reporting on the event.<sup>61</sup> At that moment, the British authorities had already started to discuss possible policies on Upper Burma – either diplomatic intervention or annexation.<sup>62</sup>

With the British authorities' ability to handle the event in Upper Burma speedily and quietly, the press remained sidelined from having any significant role in the decision making. The news reporting of Burma in 1885 suggests that the source of information for the press was limited to intelligence from Reuters and local correspondents. For example, since France became increasingly involved in the affairs in Upper Burma, the British Government

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<sup>59</sup> 'Burmah, *Friend of India*, 15 April 1852, 241–42.

<sup>60</sup> A telegram from the Viceroy of India to Lord Randolph Churchill, 24 August 1885, *Relations between France and Burmah*, FO 425/148 (TNA).

<sup>61</sup> The event was first reported in Rangoon around 18th September 1885, and it later appeared on the Calcutta press as well as *The Times*. See 'Burmah,' *The Times*, 21 September 1885, 5; 'Latest Telegrams – The Alleged Franco-Burmese Treaty,' *Englishman*, 21 September 1885, 4; 'Mofussil Letters – Rangoon,' *Statesman*, 23 September 1885, 3.

<sup>62</sup> A telegram from Mr Symes, Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Burma, to Mr Durand, Secretary to the Government of India, 24 September 1885, *Affairs in Burmah (Aug-Sec 1885)*, FO 422/15 (TNA).

had made regular contacts with the Paris authorities for more clarification on their intention. However, communications between the British Consul in Paris and the French government were not publicised. Between September and November 1885, the press in Calcutta only received intelligence from the Reuters agent in Paris, who could not give a full picture of this diplomatic discussion between the two governments.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, when the British expeditionary forces began their advance to Mandalay in November, newspapers still had to rely on intelligence obtained from their appointed correspondents who travelled up to the Burmese capital with the troops.<sup>64</sup>

The news reporting of Burma in 1885 indicates that the telegraphic communication created two parallel effects on the press' operation. While the telegraph speeded up the press' advocacy for British intervention in Upper Burma, it also simultaneously prevented the newspaper from influencing the government's handling of the Burmese affair. With the speedy communication, the British authorities were able to handle affairs related to Upper Burma faster and more efficiently. Thus, the press was technically stripped of the privilege in accessing official intelligence, which once had given it the upper hand in its political campaign for British intervention. In the next section, this chapter will move to communication among the British authorities. It will investigate how the telegraph allowed the authorities in various places to work together in making the British conquest of Burma possible.

#### Telegraph and the Direct Collaboration between the Metropole and Periphery in regard to the Making of the British Empire in Burma

This section will take a closer look at the policy-planning process prior to the outbreak of the war in 1885. This approach is to challenge the metropole and periphery concept which has dominated the writing of historiographies on British imperial expansion, in particular that of Webster and SarDesai. Instead

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<sup>63</sup> 'Latest Telegrams – Reuter's Telegrams,' *Englishman*, 28 September 1885, 4.

<sup>64</sup> 'Latest Telegrams – The Advance on the Frontier; Military Details,' *Englishman*, 12 November 1885, 4; 'Latest Telegrams – The Advance of the British Force,' *Englishman*, 13 November 1885, 4.

of pinpointing the driving force behind British intervention in Burma – either peripheral Rangoon or metropolitan London – this section contends that there were several imperial actors working together in paving the way for the British imperial expansion in Burma, and this was made possible by the telegraph.

Historians are divided over the question of who was responsible for the handling of the Burmese affairs in 1885. SarDesai claims that the advocacy from the Rangoon commercial communities greatly contributed to the British intervention in Upper Burma.<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, Webster considers the authorities and economic circles in London to be the main driving force in this event.<sup>66</sup> Wenzlhuemer also contributes to this historiographical debate by claiming that the telegraph had allowed the metropolitan government to become involved in overseas affairs. He claims that the telegraph was used to ‘inform the higher echelons of colonial administration about the strategic situation on the spot’.<sup>67</sup> He highlights that the flow of information was done in a unidirectional way from Asia to Europe. However, as discussed earlier, the telegraph, in fact, created a complex network of communication in which there was no hierarchy. Communication could be done in a multi-directional way. The last section of this chapter will highlight that the telegraph brought the colonial administration at every level to work together for the imperial expansion in Burma. In this discussion, the chapter throws particular spotlight on the contribution from the Indian government which has surprisingly been missing from the historiographical debate.

Previous historiographies have overlooked or downplayed the role of the Calcutta authorities in the Anglo-Burmese conflict in 1885. Webster, in particular, suggests that the Marquess of Dufferin, the Viceroy of India, was against the prospect of intervention in Upper Burma. However, because of his desire to keep his job, the Viceroy chose to follow the British Government’s instruction without resistance. Rather, Webster emphasises that the policy on

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<sup>65</sup> SarDesai, *British Trade and Expansion in Southeast Asia*, 202.

<sup>66</sup> Webster, *Gentleman Capitalists*, 227.

<sup>67</sup> Wenzlhuemer, *Connecting the Nineteenth-Century World*, 238–39.

Burma mainly originated in London, principally from Lord Randolph Churchill, the Secretary of State for India.<sup>68</sup>

Webster's statements seem to contradict what this thesis has uncovered from the collection of telegrams from the India Office and the government of India. It is undeniable that since the beginning of Crown rule in India in 1858, London assumed more control of the decision making regarding the subcontinent. Thus, the signing off of policies on the British India Empire was mainly done in London – a sharp contrast to the previous period when the power dynamics was in Calcutta. However, my thesis is more interested in the processes leading to the decision making and how diverse officials and authorities contributed to the British imperial policy as in the case of the Third Burmese War of 1885. Collections of state telegrams from August 1885 onwards suggest that there was a series of communications among the British authorities in London, Calcutta and Rangoon before the prospect of British intervention in Upper Burma became certain. This evidence gives a new perspective on the history of the Third Anglo-Burmese Wars, with my thesis arguing that there were several contributors to the war – more than SarDesai and Webster have stated.

Regarding the BBTC incident in 1885, Lord Churchill of the India Office, after receiving an information from Wallace Brothers, telegraphed the Viceroy of India on 20th August and 21th August requesting clarification on the dispute. The Viceroy then asked the Chief Commissioner of Burma, Charles Bernard, for more details about the event. Bernard gathered all available information from many figures in Burma including Andreino, an Italian Consul, who stated that Frederic Haas, the French agent at the Burmese Court, was behind the incident.<sup>69</sup> This information was sent back to India instantly and was forwarded to London on the 24th of the same month.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Webster, *Gentleman Capitalists*, 224.

<sup>69</sup> Andreino acted as the Italian Consul at Mandalay. He also worked as a spy agent for several British enterprises in Burma including the BBTC. After Britain had cut ties with Mandalay in 1879, information from local residents in Upper Burma became highly sought-after. See Webster, *Gentleman Capitalists*, 222.

<sup>70</sup> A telegram from the Viceroy of India to Lord R. Churchill, 24 August 1885, *Relations between France and Burmah*, FO 425/148 (TNA).



The critical role played by telegraph in the speedy resolution of emergencies through consultation among different state-level authorities can be seen during the escalation of the situation with China when Britain invaded Upper Burma in late 1885. The state communications from November 1885 to early 1886 show that the authorities were concerned about Upper Burma's relations with China. The British Embassy in China was brought into this consultation. As soon as news of the British advancement to Mandalay was known in Peking, the Chinese Government contacted the British Envoy stating their claim that Upper Burma was a tributary state of China. This story created alarm among the British authorities because they had no desire to enter into a conflict with China. The Marquess of Salisbury, Foreign Minister, telegraphed directly to Marquis Tseng, the British envoy at Peking, mentioning that British Government had no knowledge about the tributary state nature of Upper Burma before and that further discussion on this matter should be made instantly.<sup>71</sup>

Until early 1886, there were communications between the British authorities and officials since they were trying to verify the Chinese claim. The authorities in Burma consulted several sources including Colonel Sladen, who had previously worked at the Court of Burma from 1865 to 1869 as well as in the Hludaw, the Burmese ministerial council. The consultation led to the conclusion that 'no tribute has of late years been paid by the King of Burmah to China'; and Burma, as confirmed by the Burmese Ministry, 'is not, and has not for 100 years been tributary to China'.<sup>72</sup> Although the authorities still continued discussions with the Chinese government, information about the political independence of Upper Burma greatly eased the nerves of the British authorities. They were reassured that the affairs of the Burmese kingdom rested entirely in British hands. It is undeniable that frequent communications within the authorities were made possible by the telegraph.

Unlike Webster, this chapter argues that evidence from official telegrams with the India Office suggests that Dufferin had a much greater

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<sup>71</sup> A telegram from the Marquis of Salisbury to the Marquis Tseng, 26 November 1885, *Affairs in Burma (Aug – Dec 1885)*, FO 422/15 (TNA).

<sup>72</sup> A telegram from Mr Bernard to Mr Durand, 7 January 1886, *Affairs in Burma (1886)*, FO 422/16 (TNA).

involvement in the decision-making process; and that he should be regarded as one of the important figures in affairs in Burma in 1885. Apart from his work in keeping the British government informed of the situation in the East, Dufferin also acted as one of the policy-planners. In many events, he voiced his opinions on the affairs in Burma. He was even responsible for laying down the policy on Upper Burma as well as the preparation for the British expedition to Mandalay.<sup>73</sup> His contributions to the development of the conflict in Upper Burma were made possible by telegraphic communication – despite the fact that he was not physically in Calcutta during August–December 1885.<sup>74</sup> Thus, the government of India had a greater role to play than previously thought.

The ultimatum to the Burmese Court in October 1885 was, in fact, laid down by Dufferin. His telegraphic communication with Churchill on 16 October shows that he and the Indian Government agreed on the terms of the proposed ultimatum to the Mandalay authorities. As mentioned earlier, the British demanded a halt to the legal case against the BBTC, an establishment of the British Residency and the submission of Burma's internal and external affairs to the British authorities.<sup>75</sup> This proposal was approved by Churchill the next day. The Secretary of State for India also advised that the despatch of the ultimatum 'should be concurrent with the movement of troops and ships to Rangoon'. If the ultimatum was rejected, the advance on Mandalay ought to be 'immediate' (See Appendix 2).<sup>76</sup> However, since Upper Burma was an independent state, the British demand for a total submission of the foreign affairs was unsurprisingly rejected. The Burmese Court replied to the ultimatum by stating the British Agent was welcomed at Mandalay. However, the reply, as being translated by the Chief Commissioner of Burma, insisted

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<sup>73</sup> A Reuters' telegram that was published in the *Statesman* on 17 October 1885 stated that 'the Burmah question rests now with the Indian Government'. See Editorial, *Statesman*, 17 October 1885, 2.

<sup>74</sup> Lord Dufferin's communication with the London authorities, as collected in *Papers of Lord Randolph Churchill* (Add MS9248/9–10, CUL), suggests that he was away from Calcutta to several places, such as Simla, Agra, Jodhpur, and Oodeypore (present Udaipur) until December 1885.

<sup>75</sup> A telegram from the Viceroy of India to Lord Randolph Churchill, 16 October 1885, *Correspondence respecting the Relations between France and Burmah*, FO 425/148 (TNA).

<sup>76</sup> A telegram from Lord Randolph Churchill to the Viceroy of India, 17 October 1885, *Correspondence respecting the Relations between France and Burmah*, FO 425/148 (TNA).

that '[T]he internal and external affairs of an independent State are regulated and controlled in accordance with the custom and law of that State. Friendly relations with France, Italy and other States have been, are being, and will be maintained'.<sup>77</sup> This rejection ultimately prompted Dufferin to declare the Third Anglo-Burmese War.

According to official telegrams, Viceroy Dufferin was a firm believer in the annexation of Upper Burma – and the policy on the British intervention originated from him. Although the British authorities predicted that the intervention in Upper Burma would be inevitable, they had not yet decided on the future of the Burmese kingdom in the aftermath of the annexation. The telegraphic communication within the Foreign Department as well as the press' coverage revealed that there were two possible choices being considered by the authorities: a replacement of Thibaw with another prince and a total annexation of Upper Burma. Regarding the first suggestion, doubts were raised by the press and the local authorities about the attitude of the pretenders towards the British position in Burma. Charles Bernard, the Chief Commissioner to Burma considered this option 'expedient only in the event of such Prince...agreeing to permit an armed river cruiser to stay at or visit Mandalay and Bhamo, and binding himself to enter into no relations with foreign Powers or their subjects'.<sup>78</sup> The Chief Commissioner to Burma also preferred the rule of the native prince under British supervision because this would 'conjure local opposition, would keep a buffer between us and China, and would be a less expensive arrangement'.<sup>79</sup>

Bernard's suggestion was entirely dismissed by Dufferin. In a communication to Churchill, the Viceroy stated that he had no hesitation in saying that the annexation was a better choice. He saw 'no hope of improvement in the condition of affairs in Upper Burmah so long as the

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<sup>77</sup> A telegram from the Viceroy of India to Lord Randolph Churchill, 11 November 1885, *Affairs in Burma (Aug – Dec 1885)*, FO 422/15 (TNA).

<sup>78</sup> A telegram from Mr Symes to Mr Durand, 24 September 1885, *Affairs in Burma (Aug – Dec 1885)*, FO 422/15 (TNA).

<sup>79</sup> 'Document no.999 – Burmah,' 26 October 1885, *Papers of Lord Randolph Churchill*, Add MS 9248/9 (CUL).

present occupant of the throne remains in power'.<sup>80</sup> He did not believe that the appointment of one of Thibaw's royal relatives would solve the problem as 'France will be continually trying to "get at" the man we set up'.<sup>81</sup> The annexation of Upper Burma, as the Viceroy put it, would lead to an expansion of 'our sway over the whole of the Irrawaddy Valley'. He also claimed that Burma under British rule would become a successful commercial port in the East.<sup>82</sup> All of these statements highlight the critical role played by Viceroy Dufferin during British imperial expansion in Upper Burma.

Imperial politics during the nineteenth century were rather complex because it involved diverse imperial actors, either the policy-makers in London or the men on the spot in Burma, who made crucial contribution to the expansion of the British Empire. What is clear, however, is that improvement in means of communication allowed the metropole to get more involved in affairs at the periphery. Nevertheless, the involvement of the metropole in Anglo-Burmese affairs in 1885 should not be mistaken as a complete transfer of all authority and power back to London. What is clear is that there was no monopoly on the government's handling of affairs in Upper Burma. The British authorities in Britain, India and Burma worked together in preparing the British intervention in Upper Burma. This process of consultation would definitely have been impossible without the telegraph. This new technology in communication played a crucial role in bringing these actors into a collaboration during the Third Burmese War.

### Conclusion

Although the speed of news reporting and the geopolitics of British imperial affairs in Burma had dramatically changed in the age of telegraph, the nature of news supply had not changed much. Despite the contribution from the speedy communication and the appointed correspondent, the news

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<sup>80</sup> A telegram from the Viceroy of India to Lord Randolph Churchill, 11 November 1885, *Affairs in Burma (Aug – Dec 1885)*, FO 422/15 (TNA).

<sup>81</sup> 'Document no.990 – Burmah,' 19 October 1885, *Papers of Lord Randolph Churchill*, Add MS 9248/9 (CUL).

<sup>82</sup> 'Document no.999 – Burmah,' 26 October 1885, *Papers of Lord Randolph Churchill*, Add MS 9248/9 (CUL).

coverage of affairs in Upper Burma in 1885 still showed similarities to that of the 1850s – particularly the reliance on local sources of information and therefore a reproduction of very similar mercantilist views on Burma.

What had significantly changed, in fact, is that the telegraph created a complex and multi-dimensional line of communication – in which the monopoly or hierarchy in the flow of information was no longer visible. The Calcutta press which was once a hub of nearly all intelligence coming out from Burma had entirely lost this privilege by the time of the Third Burmese War. News with regard to Burma could be telegraphically transmitted to newspapers in either Bombay or London – bypassing the Calcutta press. The speedy internal official communication excluded the press from listening in on the authorities' preparation for British intervention in Upper Burma – leaving the press with little scope of news to manipulate.

Regarding the geopolitics of the imperial affairs in Burma, this chapter concludes that there was no significant shift of power, but rather an enlargement of the political forum. Unlike the Second Burmese War when the Calcutta authorities took complete control of the handling of the event, the Third Burmese War saw more involvement from the metropolitan government. It is evident that the telegraph enabled the authorities in every part of the British Empire to effectively work together in regard to Anglo-Burmese affairs in 1885. The archives of telegraphic communications between the India Office in London and the government of India clearly highlights the collaboration among the British authorities in London, Calcutta and Rangoon, underlining a complicated picture of British imperial expansion in Burma.

## Conclusion

The production of news reports on the Anglo-Burmese Wars can be seen as an exact replica of the British imperial expansion in Burma, where a complex interplay between diverse imperial actors took centre stage. Although a number of historians have mentioned how the event was reported by the press, none of them have attempted to uncover the politics and thrust behind news making. In this thesis, the focus has been placed on the dynamics of the news reporting where diverse imperial actors, ranging from newspaper editors to information providers, took the main responsibility in bringing forward their political agenda on British imperial expansion in Burma. This approach suggested that the press was far from being monolithic and frozen. Another issue that this thesis came across is the cross-border and cross-sector collaboration among imperial actors in various locations. It moved the spotlight away from existing historiographies on British imperial expansion in Burma, which significantly obsessed with the metropole and periphery concept. As shown in the thesis, the Anglo-Burmese Wars in 1852 and 1885 became a platform for diverse imperial actors to make crucial contributions to the making of the British Empire in Burma – where the press, as I argued, was one of the significant players.

An examination of the news coverage on the Anglo-Burmese conflicts shed light on the variety of press characteristics and stances in regard to the Burmese question, corresponding to diverse interest groups involved in the production of news. The news reporting, as my thesis contended, had been treated as a political instrument for imperial players in making the case for British intervention. Editors and the people working in the newsroom, in particular, took the main responsibility in establishing the politics of their newspapers, while also shaping the direction of the news reporting. These people, however, did not stay aloof from the politics. Rather, they were part of the diverse British community that had a distinct interest in various issues, ranging from administration to the economy.

As can be seen from the cases of the *Englishman* and the *Friend of India*, both newspapers were run by and associated with people who had vested interests in the British Empire – principally, the mercantile classes and the missionaries in Bengal. Contributions from these particular groups undeniably turned both newspapers into being the active agents of the empire, as is evident in their coverage of British imperial expansion in Burma. Thus, the press was – and had always been – a platform for these interest groups to play politics through the news and information.

Being heavily tied with opinions and politics of the people working in the newsroom, the press did not simply provide its readers with actual news. In fact, news and pieces of information were specifically tailored for particular readerships and interest groups that the press sought to represent. Furthermore, opinions presenting through the editorial, a section where the editorial team voiced their views and interpretations of any particular event, also took the lead in the news reporting – and could be regarded as a selling point of each paper. In this sense, the tone and direction of the news reporting were strongly attached to the personal opinions of the editorial team. As discussed in Chapter 1, the variety of the press' opinions on the Anglo-Burmese Wars is evident because none of the selected newspapers treated and presented news in the same manner. At the very least, there was a distinct element and aspect of the news report being possessed by each newspaper. This finding raises the necessity for researchers who take the press as a material for their studies to not only examine the content of news, but also agendas and opinions being intermingled with the news *per se*.

The press-merchant nexus was another crucial element that supported the role of newspaper in being the agent of the empire. Not only did the merchants and commercial houses provided the press with the financial support – mostly in the form of subscription and advertisement – but the Anglo-Burmese Wars also saw these particular groups making crucial contributions through the supply of information to the press. With the absence of official British representatives in Burma prior to the Second and Third Anglo-Burmese Wars, local British residents in Burma, most of whom were part of the mercantile community, became the main supplier of information to

the British authorities as well as the press in both Calcutta and London. At the same time, the press became a vital medium where the mercantile classes could present stories of the Burmese hostilities, with a hope that they would be read by wider audiences, including the authorities – therefore, producing a thrust for intervention.

This cross-border and cross-sector collaboration shed light on a complex network of imperial actors, stressing that there was no sole driving force in British imperial expansion in Burma. In contrast to existing historiographies on British imperialism in Burma which have mostly focused on contributions from the economic interests, my thesis suggested that this interest group also sought collaboration from other sectors to bring forward their advocacy for intervention. This finding throws light on a conjoined movement between the mercantile classes and newspapers in bringing the severity of the situation in Burma to wider readers. The supply of information became a crucial factor that enabled both the press and merchants to lay down the path for British imperial expansion in Burma.

To further emphasise the dynamics of news reporting, my thesis examined how the press produced a thrust for its campaign for British imperial expansion in Burma. This approach was carried out through the analysis of a cultural representation of the ‘despotic’ Burmese against the ‘heroic’ British offered by the newspapers in their attempts to justify British imperial expansion. Freed from being influenced by the ‘dominant ideology of the empire’, the expansionist newspapers were, in fact, having a capability to construct their own justification for the Anglo-Burmese Wars. The news coverage on the Burmese question evidently reflected personal beliefs and experiences of people who had vested interests in British imperial expansion in Burma. Evidently, the Anglo-Burmese conflicts in the 1850s and 1885 provided the press with a platform to demonstrate its role as the guardian of British political and economic interests. As shown in Chapter 3, a wide-ranging scope of interests, such as the benefit of British occupation of Burma, the ‘despotic’ character of the Burmese government and the morality of Britain in the mission to liberate Burma and its people from the ‘despotic oriental’ rulers, were placed at the centre of the news reporting. These diverse



viewpoints and interpretations served to legitimise newspapers' advocacy for the British conquest of Burma.

All of these factors led us to the process of news making, where crucial factors, such as political and cultural roots of each newspaper and biased intelligence from local residents in Burma played a role in the making of the Burma's news. As is evident during the Second Burmese War, personal accounts, complaints and petitions produced by local mercantile communities in Burma enabled the press to stimulate its campaign for British intervention. These pieces of information provided the press with a crucial weapon to play politics in the Anglo-Burmese conflict. The regular transmission of intelligence in regard to the severity of the situation in Burma, particularly the hostile attitude of the Burmese authorities, dynamically fuelled the press' advocacy for the British imperial expansion.

To use news to make the case for British intervention, there was a degree of manipulation that the press deployed in the news reporting, principally through the selection and presentation of news. This approach revealed the process of news making in which the editorial team took a creative approach in making use of information in regard to Burma to find a legitimacy for the war and the British annexation of Burma. Furthermore, by comparing the news coverage on the Second Burmese War with official accounts of the British authorities, in particular that of Dalhousie, the Governor General of India (1848–56), my thesis came across the subjectivity of news. Despite reporting the same event, their coverage was distinctly different. The selection and presentation of intelligence obtained from Burma became instrumental in the making of Burma's news – which was masterfully handled by the people who advocated for British imperial expansion.

The role of modern technology of communication, such as the telegraph, in the news reporting was analysed to determine whether it changed the nature of news from being heavily opinion based. Historians, such as Lucy Brown and Deep Kanta Lahiri Choudhury, suggested that the telegraph modernised the news reporting by filtering out opinions from actual news due to the expensive rate of sending telegram, which required senders to write as

briefly as possible. However, as this thesis contended, the new technology did not change the nature of news in regard to the Burmese affairs in 1885, which continued to be based on biased intelligence gathered from local British and European residents in Burma. Despite its leading role in the press' coverage of the Third Anglo-Burmese War, telegraphic intelligence coming out of Burma continued to represent pressure from local British communities in Burma, which became instrumental in the press' campaign for intervention.

The telegraphic communication, however, created two complexities in how the press and British authorities in Calcutta made contributions to imperial expansion in Burma in 1885. First, the role of the Calcutta press, which had once been a hub of information coming out of Burma, had been made redundant. Despite once having the monopoly on information and 'knowledge' in regard to Burma, as is evident during the Second Burmese War of 1852, the newspapers in the metropolis of India were taken away this privilege at the time of the Anglo-Burmese conflict in 1885. With access to local sources of information in Burma being democratised by telegraphy, newspapers and other sectors in a variety of cities in India as well as metropolitan Britain could then receive reports about the affairs in Burma at the exact same speed – enabling them to produce a coverage of the Anglo-Burmese War of 1885 independently. The flow of information could also telegraphically bypass the Calcutta press, which is evident in the internal official communications amongst the British authorities in Rangoon, Calcutta and London, in which newspapers in Calcutta were entirely excluded and had no opportunity to follow up the government's handling of the affairs in Burma closely. This circumstance significantly prevented the Calcutta press from having an influence over the policy making in regard to the war and conquest of Burma in 1885.

Secondly, the telegraph significantly strengthened the position of the Calcutta authorities in the making of the British Empire in Burma. In contrast to several extant studies which mainly focused on contributions from either local British authorities in peripheral Burma or the British government in metropolitan London, my thesis saw things differently. Rather than pinpointing who the main driving force was in the British imperial expansion

in Burma in 1885, the focus should be placed on the consultation process, where several imperial actors worked in close collaboration in paving the way for the British conquest of Burma. As is evident in telegram collections of the British authorities, the telegraph enabled officers and policy-makers in various places, ranging from London, Calcutta, Rangoon and, even, Peking to make contributions in making the conquest of Burma possible. This approach led my thesis to a new territory in the study of British imperial expansion in Burma, where cross-border collaboration between diverse imperial actors produced a significant thrust for British imperialism.

The role of the Marquess of Dufferin, the Viceroy of India (1884–88) – which has been overlooked or downplayed by extant historiographies – was also brought back to the spotlight. In contrast to Anthony Webster who contended that Dufferin was anti-expansionist but chose to obey instructions from London in order to keep his job, my thesis took a completely opposing view. Based on communications between Dufferin and the British authorities in both London and Rangoon, the Viceroy of India was evidently a firm believer of British intervention in Upper Burma. Furthermore, he was also responsible for laying down the policy on the Third Burmese War and the conquest of Burma in 1885. Thus, by placing particular focus on the contributions from the government of India, this approach created a complex picture of the empire-making process, in which every imperial actor played a crucial role.

In conclusion, the entire thesis shed light on the position of the press in being one of the diverse imperial actors during the British imperial expansion in Burma. Run by and associated with certain sectors that had vested interests in the British Empire, in particular the mercantile classes and the missionaries, the newspapers were then brought into the politics of the Anglo-Burmese Wars in 1852 and 1885. The news reporting became a political instrument for these imperial actors to present their own justification for British imperial expansion in Burma to a wider audience – with a hope that it could produce a thrust for British intervention. Thus, it becomes important for readers who use newspapers as a research source to be cautioned of the complexity behind news reporting, where the political and cultural roots of each newspaper

played a role in the construction of news. Understanding the press association with diverse British imperial actors would also help us to become more aware of how the politics behind news reporting shaped key colonial events.

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## Appendices

**Appendix 1: Minute of the Governor General of India in regard to the affairs in Rangoon, dated the 22nd January 1852** [handwritten manuscript: 'Documents relating to the Ava - Rangoon Hostilities,' *Papers of Edward Geoffrey Stanley 14th Earl of Derby (1799-1869)*, 920 DER 14/147/12/5 (Liverpool Central Library).]

1. During last night I received an express conveying to me the dispatches from. Commodore Lambert dated the 9th and 12th Instant respectively. They contain a narrative of his recent proceedings at Rangoon; and report the failure of negotiations with the new Governor for the settlement of existing differences; the seizure of one of the King's ships by the squadron, and subsequent acts of hostility between the Burmese and the ships

2. I have received with much concerns the intelligence conveyed in these dispatches. I have perused them with the more regret that I cannot altogether exempt Commodore Lambert from some responsibility for the failure of the negotiations; and must regard him as wholly responsible for the act of hostility which have been unfortunately committed on both sides.

3. The letter addressed by the Ministers of the King of Ava to the Government of India was friendly in its tone and entirely satisfactory in its tenor. The Court of Ava promised, at once to remove the Governor of Rangoon, and to inquire into, in order to redress, the injuries complained of.

If there had been any good reason to doubt the sincerity of these assurances their prompt fulfilment must have cleared away those doubts. The offending Governor was at once removed, and his successor took place at Rangoon.

4. Although the first act of the new Governor, as detailed in the report of Captain Latter, were undoubtedly unfriendly in appearance and open to just objection, his communications with the Commodore bore no such aspect. He

expressed his readiness to receive him, and showed a more conciliatory disposition.

The expectations of a speedy adjustment of differences were, however, disappointed by his conduct towards the officers who on the 6th of January were deputed to convey to him a letter from the Commodore. Those officers were undoubtedly subjected to insults and iniquities by which the Government they [serve] must necessarily feel itself aggrieved, – for which it has a right to demand fitting apology, – and which justified the Commodore in refusing to hold any further communication with the Burmese authorities at Rangoon.

5. At the same time, I am bound to add that in my opinion Commodore Lambert erred in the mode in which he made communications to the Burmese Governor. According to the Known customs of that State any communication with the Chief authority of the Court of Ava should have been by means of an equal authority on the part of the British Government. The Commodore had a right to require that he should himself be received by the Burmese Governor, but I apprehend he had no right to require that his inferior officers bearing his letter should be received by the Chief Governor in person.

Commander Fishbourne rejected the proposal that he should be received by the Deputy Governor, he insisted on being personally received by the Governor himself. In thus demanding that the highest Burmese authority should personally communicate with a lower authority on the part of the British Government, Commodore Lambert must have been considered by the Burmese as showing discourtesy to their Court, and assuming a superiority which ought not to be conceded by them.

Commodore Lambert exhibited good sense and judgement in not permitting such punctilio to prevent his receiving deputation from the Burmese authority. Nevertheless he ought not to have counted upon similar good sense on the part of the Burmese; and he would have acted with greater prudence if he had not afforded to the Governor the plausible pretext for refusing admittance to the deputation which their instructions enabled him to employ.

6. Having regard to the long continued course of offensive demeanor and insulting acts of the Burmese officers and their people, I conceive that Commodore Lambert was justified in refusing to hold any further communication with them, after the gross public insult which was put upon his officers on the occasion to which I have referred. I desire only express my regret that any disregard of ordinary and proper forms on our part should have left to the Governor of Rangoon a colorable pretext for any part of his conduct.

7. But while the conduct of the Burmese authorities justified the termination of all communication with them for the present, no such justification can be pleaded for the act of the Commodore in seizing the Ship which belonged to the King of Ava.

Commodore Lambert has quoted Vattel as authority for his act. But I must beg permission to remark that the question is not whether an act of reprisal is warranted by the law of nations as a general rule, but whether reprisals were authorised by the Government of India in this particular case. The authority for Commodore Lambert acts in the Rangoon river was to be sought not in the pages of Vattel, but in the instructions under which he was acting on behalf of the Government of India. Those instructions were clear. And explicit, the course which Commodore Lambert was to pursue was pointed out with precision. The leading principle in the instructions proceeding from this Government was that no act of hostility should be committed if by possibility it could be avoided. Recourse to a blockade was enjoined. Commodore Lambert did not confine himself to these instructions.

By seizing the Ship belonging to the Government of Ava he took a step which naturally, almost necessarily, led to an act of hostility by the Burmese, and which now threatens to embroil the two nations in a second war. I need hardly say that I think Commodore Lambert was perfectly right in severely chastising the Burmese troops who had presumed to fire upon our flag, and I am satisfied that in whatever he did he was actuated solely by an anxious desire to maintain the honor of the country: but it is my duty to express the

deep regret with which I view this act of reprisal, and to withhold from it my approval.

8. Having already stated my opinion that Commodore Lambert was justified in breaking off all further communication with the Governor of Rangoon in consequence of the gross insult offered to British officers and of his obvious reluctance to give effect to the friendly professions of the Court of Ava, I conceive that no blame could attach to the Government of India, if it abstained from any further efforts to bring about a reconciliation between the States, pursuing such measures as it deemed necessary to enforce the reparation it required. But I apprehend that the President of the Council is as desirous as myself that the breach which has been made should still be retained if possible without recourse to war.

The insults offered to our officers cannot be permitted to pass without notice, the complexation demanded must be paid, and the precautions contemplated for the future must be taken.

Those points being conceded, the Government of India ought to be prepared to renew relations of a unity with the Court of Ava.

A favorable opening for obtaining these concessions appeared to me still to exist in the receipt of the letter from the Governor of Rangoon to the Government of India contained in this dispatch.

The terms of the letter appear to indicate moderation....[on part] of the King. Although I regret the hostilities which have taken place, it is to be expected that their occurrences, and the severe chastisement which has been inflicted on the Burmese troops by the fire of the ships of war in the destruction of the stockades will tend to quicken this anxiety of the Governor for reconciliation. If evidence of this anxiety were required, it is to be found in the petition from the merchants in Rangoon written after hostilities had taken place, and declaredly at the Governor's desire, in which he specifies his willingness to concede what supposed to be demanded. Having regard to these considerations, I entertain some hopes that if in reply to the Governor's letter these concessions should now be demanded as an ultimatum, they would now be fully made, and harmony might be restored.

10. I propose that a reply to the Governor should be prepared accordingly.

The Governor of Rangoon should be informed that the letter which he addressed to the Government of India, relative to the transaction between himself and Commodore Lambert, has been received; and that at the same time letters have also been received from the Commodore and other officers reporting the course of those transactions to which the letter of the Governor refers.

The Government of India perceived with extreme surprise that the Governor of Rangoon has listened to the falsehood which his servants have attempted to impose upon him relative to the conduct of the British officers who were deputed to wait upon him on the 6th day of January. British officers in the discharge of their duty are incapable of the disgraceful acts which have barely alleged against them. The statement of his officers is a falsehood and a calumny.

The Government of India, upon its part, has just cause to complain of the treatment which these officers have received at the hands of the present Governor of Rangoon.

The letter from the King of Ava at once recognized the justice of the complaints which were transmitted to it by the Government of India. The former Governor of Rangoon was removed, and redress was promised to those who had been injured.

The Governor, Mahamenghla Meng Khanny Gyan, on his arrival made no communication whatever to Commodore Lambert, the representative of the British Government. He issued orders utterly at variance with friendship to that Government, and disrespectful to it. Finally when the Commodore deputed his principal officers, in order to deliver to him a letter which he had already expressed his willingness to receive, those officers were refused admittance and were subjected to public insult and indignity at the gate of the Governor's Palace.

If those officers were inferior in rank, as the Governor now declares, and if the customs of his country were thereby violated, or any apparent disrespect were shown to the Governor or his sovereign, the departure from custom ought to have been properly represented by the governor, when the error would doubtless have been corrected.

This was not done, but the officers were exposed by the Governor to public insult at his door. The British Government in India will not permit any officer in the performance of his duty to suffer insult or injury without requiring reparation therefore. It will escort the fullest reparation for every such insult, which, inflicted upon its officer, is offered to itself.

If, therefore, the Governor of Rangoon is in truth actuated by feelings of friendship as he declares, and if he desires to avert from the Kingdom of Ava the evils which the recent conduct of its officers will unquestionably bring upon it, unless timely reparation be made, he will not delay in intimating his readiness to agree to those demands which the British Government is entitled to make, and some of which are mentioned in the Petition of the Inhabitants of Rangoon dated 11th January which the petitioners declare they were desired by the Governor to prepare.

1. The Governor will express in writing to the Government of India his deep regret that Commander Fishbourne and the officers deputed by Commodore Lambert to the Governor should have been treated with disrespect and exposed to public insult at his own residence in the 6th January.

2. He will consent to pay immediately the compensation already demanded of Rs. 9948 for injuries to Captain Sheppard and Captain Lewis.

3. He will consent to receive, with the honor due to the representative of the British Government, the accredited Agent whom, in accordance with the 7th clause of the Treaty of Yandaboo, the Government is prepared to appoint.

If these concessions shall be made, the British Government will agree as follows:

1. The Government of India will depute an officer of rank to proceed to Rangoon in order to [adjust] the final settlement of the question above mentioned and arrange the details for the reception of the agent.

The preliminaries having been settled by the subordinate of the Chief; a meeting should take place and all differences shall be composed.

2. On this settlement being completed the ship belonging to the King of Ava which has been seized by the squadron shall be released.

3. The blockade shall be renounced and entire concord shall be restored.

If these demands shall be refused, the British Government will thereafter exact in itself the separation which is due for the wrong it has suffered.

11. The turn which affairs have taken evidently under it undesirable that any further communication should pass between Commodore Lambert and the Governor of Rangoon. The mutual resentment which is shown in the letter before me renders it highly improbable that renewal of official intercourse between those functionaries could be attended with favorable results. At the same time I am reluctant to supersede an officer of high rank in Her Majesty's service by nominating any other person to conduct those negotiations with which the Commodore has hitherto been entrusted.

12. I propose therefore that Commodore Lambert be requested simply to forward the accompanying reply to the letter addressed to the Government of India by the Governor of Rangoon; and to forward to the Government of India any letter which he may receive in return. He should be requested to...[refrain from] any further communication with authorities in Ava, – to maintain the blockade for the present, and to engage in no hostile operations. Upon the future arrangements he will be addressed by the Government of India hereafter.

13. If the Governor of Rangoon should accede to these demands I intend to propose that the Secretary of the Government should proceed to



Rangoon on the special service of formally adjusting the points agreed to, and establishing the Agent...(illegible).

14. If, on the other hand, the Governor should disregard these demands, no further efforts can be made. The blockade must be maintained – defensive measures completed, and if, as may then be feared, the blockade should produce no substantial effect, the British Government must proceed, however reluctantly, to make such preparation as will suckle it to vindicate its national and treaty rights, which the Burmese authorities have so deliberated, and so...(illegible) outraged.

15. I have had the satisfaction of perceiving that the President in Council has already taken the steps for reinforcing Moulmein. All similar measures elsewhere which the judgement of His Honor in Council may approve will doubtless be carried into effect with...(illegible) promptitude.

I...(illegible) hope that my colleagues in the Council will...[share] the view I have taken of our present relations with Ava. If they should hold a different opinion the several communication I have now proposed may be postponed, until my arrival in Calcutta shall afford an opportunities of discussing the subject in Council. No delay of any consequence will be thereby produced, for on receiving the express last night, I gave immediately directions for enabling me to return to the Presidency without halt.

The measure of consequence render some previous notice indispensable but after dispatching the English mail and as soon as consequence shall be measured, I shall proceed towards Calcutta where I hope to arrive within a few days after this minute.

If these general views should be adopted, the letter to Commodore Lambert should be founded on...(illegible) 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 12.

(Signed) Dalhousie

Jan. 22nd, 1852.

**Appendix 2: Communication between Lord Dufferin, the Viceroy of India (1884–88), and Lord Randolph Churchill, the Secretary of State for India (1885–86), in regard to the ultimatum to the Burmese Government in 1885** [Source: *Correspondence respecting the Relations between France and Burmah*, FO 425/148 (The National Archives).]

Enclosure 1 in No. 208

*The Viceroy of India to Lord Randolph Churchill*

(Secret.)

(Telegraphic.)

October 16, 1885

BERNARD reports that he has received an answer from Mandalay to his communication of the 28th August; the Burmese Government maintains its own view of the case, and definitely declines to agree on proposed arbitration, or to suspend its action against Bombay-Burmah Corporation.

I propose, with unanimous consent of my colleagues, to instruct Bernard to inform Burmese Government :—

1. That, with a view of settling present dispute, we must insist upon an Envoy from Government of India being received at Mandalay, with free access to King upon same terms as are usual at other Courts, and without submitting to any humiliating ceremony.

2. That if, in meantime, any proceedings have been or shall be taken against the Company, we shall take matter into our hands without making any further communication to Burmese Government.

3. That the present and recent incidents show the necessity of an English Agent being permanently stationed at Burmese capital, with proper guard (of honour) and steamer for his personal protection.

4. That Burmese Government will be expected to regulate its external relations in accordance with our advice, as is now done by Ameer of Afghanistan; and

5. That proper facilities should be granted for opening up of British trade with China via Bhamo.

These two last items of the arrangement might be insisted on after our Agent has arrived in Mandalay. Do you approve?

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Enclosure 2 in No. 208

*Lord Randolph Churchill to the Viceroy of India*

(Secret.)

(Telegraphic.)

India Office, October 17, 1885

The term of your ultimatum are approved; but I am strongly of opinions that its dispatch should be concurrent with movement of troops and ships to Rangoon. If ultimatum is rejected, the advance to Mandalay ought to be immediate. On the other hand, armed demonstration might bring Burmese to their senses.

Also, on account of security of many British subjects and Europeans in Upper Burma, it is of vital importance that Burmese should feel that injury to them or their property would be followed by rapid punishment.

Under all circumstances of the case, and in view of public opinion here, I do not think that considerations of expense should deter you from these precautions. Lord Salisbury concurs.

I would suggest that you should demand an answer within specific time.

**Appendix 3: A translation of the Burmese Court's response to the British ultimatum in November 1885** [Source: A telegram from the Viceroy of India to Lord Randolph Churchill, 11 November 1885, *Affairs in Burma (Aug-Dec 1885)*, FO 422/15 (The National Archives).]

Enclosure in No. 32

*The Viceroy of India to Lord Randolph Churchill*

(Secret.)

(Telegraphic.)

November 11, 1885

BERNARD, 9th telegraphs Burmese reply. Following is text of translation of important parts :—

On demands 1 and 2 answer runs :—

“His Majesty was pleased to say that, although the Judgement against Corporation was one passed in conformity with the law of the State, yet, if the Bombay-Burmah Corporation presented a Petition on the subject of the money Decree arrears themselves, he would be pleased to look after and assist foreign merchants and traders, so that they should not suffer any hardship; therefore, with reference to the first and second points regarding the Corporation's forest case, the need for discussion or negotiation is at an end.”

On the 3rd demand the answer says :—

“The Burmese Government, through their wish to maintain friendly relations between the two countries, did not act in such a way as to restrict or put to hardship the British Agent formerly stationed at Mandalay, and yet he left of his own accord, and there has been no Agent since. If the British Government wish in future to re-establish an Agency he will be permitted to reside and go as in former times.”

On the 4th demand the answer says :—

“The internal and external affairs of an independent State are regulated and controlled in accordance with the custom and law of the State. Friendly

relations with France, Italy, and other States have been, are being, and will be maintained. Therefore, in the question as to whether one State alone can prefer such a request, the Burmese Government can follow the joint decision of the three States, France, Germany, and Italy, who are friends of both Governments.”

On the 5th demand the answer says:

“The friendly relations of the two countries are based on assistance to be rendered for the increase of trade, and of exports and imports from one country to the other. If, *therefore*, merchants and traders, whether of English or other race, ask the Burmese Government to endeavour to facilitate trade and the increase of exports and imports with China, they will be assisted, in conformity with the customs of the land.”

**Appendix 4: Extract from a letter from the Viceroy (of India) to the Queen, dated 18th November 1885** [Source: 'Document no.1070 - Extract from a letter from the Viceroy (of India) to the Queen,' 18 November 1885, *Lord R. Churchill Papers*, Add MS 9248/9 (Cambridge University Library).]

Your Majesty is aware that for some years past the relations between ourselves and Burmah have been very unsatisfactory. The Government of King Theebaw has encroached upon our borders, has occupied villages under our protection, and has maltreated our subjects, while the general disorganisation of his State prejudices in many ways the interests of our own territories. As long as Burmah occupied an isolated position, we could afford to be patient and to submit to a great deal of provocation, but recently the external policy of the Burmese has become openly hostile, and there is no doubt that projects were on foot for rendering French influence predominant in the upper valley of the Irrawaddy. Even this, however, might have been borne with for a time in the hope of some accident giving a more favourable turn to our relations; but not long ago the authorities at Mandalay inflicted a preposterous fine upon a British Trading Company. The Company brought their grievances to Lord Dufferin's notice; but as it was an *ex-parte* statement which they submitted, he did not feel justified in doing more than addressing a very friendly representation to the Burmese King, requesting him to suspend action in the matter until it could be investigated before an impartial tribunal. To this communication a disobliging and offensive answer was returned. The Mandalay Government declared that the Viceroy had no right to moot the subject with them, and that they intended to persevere in enforcing their unjust exactions. Under these circumstances, it appeared to Lord Dufferin that the time had come for dealing decisively with the King of Burmah and making him understand that he could not afford to treat the grave interests involved in the existing controversy and our other unsettled disputes with so much levity and indifference. Lord Dufferin, therefore, instructed our Commissioner to forward him three demands in the form of an ultimatum, accompanied by a warning that, if they were not at once complied with, we should take the matter in our own hands. Briefly stated, the above demands were to the

following effect :—First, that King Theebaw should receive at his Court and Agent of the Government of India who should permanently reside at Mandalay; secondly, that this Agent should not be required to submit to any humiliating ceremonials, and that his security should be assured by an adequate guard of English soldiers; and thirdly, that all proceedings against the Company should be suspended until the rights of the matter could be thoroughly gone into by our Agent. At the same time that this communication was being made, Lord Dufferin thought it fair that the Government of Mandalay should be warned that, in regulating their foreign relations, they would henceforth be expected to be guided by the advice of the British Resident, and to give reasonable facilities for the transit traffic up the Irrawaddy into China. These two last requirements, however, did not form a part of the ultimatum, as it would have been unreasonable to have insisted upon the immediate acquiescence on the part of the Burmese Government in arrangements with regard to which they would have been entitled to receive more definite explanations. In order, however, that it might have been clearly understood by all concerned that we were in earnest and must not be trifled with, Lord Dufferin made arrangements for the despatch to Rangoon of 8,000 troops under General Prendergast, which, with the garrison of Lower Burmah, would place at that General's disposal a force of over 12,000 men.

The reply of King Theebaw to the British ultimatum has, to Lord Dufferin's great regret, proved unsatisfactory. Not only so, but he has accompanied his refusal to come to terms by a very hostile proclamation. Under these circumstances, with the approval of your Majesty's Government, Lord Dufferin has given orders to General Prendergast to advance at once upon Mandalay. The Viceroy is in great hopes that by the despatch of a force which, if properly handled, ought to be more than sufficient to extinguish all resistance, the objects of the expedition may be accomplished with a minimum of casualties on either side, and he has impressed upon General Prendergast that his object ought to be to occupy Mandalay, if possible, without bloodshed, and to make the inhabitants of Upper Burmah understand that we are only dealing with a contumacious and impracticable Government, and are not warring upon a harmless people who are identified in race, religion, and in

their material interests with our own Burmese subjects. Lord Dufferin had also warned General Prendergast that he must not despise his enemy, as most of our recent military miscarriages have been caused by that insufficiency of the forces we have placed in the field against enemies who have proved far more formidable than was at first anticipated.

Lord Dufferin is convinced that the time has come for establishing once and for all our ascendancy along the whole line of the Irrawaddy valley. Had the matter been longer delayed, and our forbearance with the present perverse Ruler been carried to unreasonable lengths, it is probable that a situation would have been eventually created in Upper Burmah extremely prejudicial both to the commercial and political interests of India and of England, and with which it would probably have been very difficult to cope hereafter.



**Appendix 5: A telegram from a correspondent for *The Times of London*, including an interview with dethroned King Thibaw** [newspaper article, 'Latest Intelligence – The Burmese War,' *The Times of London*, 5 December 1885, 5.]

## THE BURMESE WAR

MANDALAY, Nov. 29.

I had a lengthy and somewhat remarkable interview to-day with King Thebaw. Along with him were the Queen Soopyalat, her sister, the Queen-Mother, widow of the late King, and Thebaw's sister. I was introduced by Colonel Sladen<sup>1</sup> to the Royal party, no other person being present but an interpreter.

I believe that the previous interview of Colonel Sladen with the King was the first occasion on which any European was allowed to come into the presence of King Thebaw, or any previous king of Burmah without taking off his shoes and assuming a crouching attitude.

Colonel Sladen and I remained standing during the interview, the Royal part being seated in a gallery of the garden pavilion, raised about four feet from the ground. Soopyalat sat next the King, and closely followed the conversation at the interview, in which she occasionally took part.

Thebaw is a stout, young, good-looking man of about thirty, with a weak face. He has not the receding forehead which has always been the distinctive mark of the descendants of Aloungpra.<sup>2</sup> Since he found that he had no violence to fear, King Thebaw has recovered his nerve, and he displayed a good deal of quiet dignity.

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<sup>1</sup> Colonel Edward Sladen, a former British Resident at the Court of Burma, served, in 1885, as a chief political officer of the British authorities attached to the expedition troops.

<sup>2</sup> King Alaungpaya (1752–60) was a founder of Konbaung dynasty, which lasted until 1885 when the British occupied Mandalay.

This morning Tinedah Mengyee<sup>3</sup> gave information that Thebaw might attempt to escape. The King was arrested in consequence, and removed to the pavilion where I saw him.

Colonel Sladen told the King that I was the Correspondent of *The Times*. The King immediately said that he knew *The Times*, and that a copy of it was taken by his Ministers to learn English public opinion. He then added that he was anxious the English people should hear his words, and he requested me to write down what he said. At the close of the interview I read over my notes, through the interpreter, to Thebaw, who said that they were correct.

Thebaw said :—

“I wish to be quiet. I have given over everything to the English. I want Sladen to govern the country now and in the future. If Sladen had remained as Resident and not left, this war would never have occurred. I have been badly advised.”

I then said that I thought Tinedah Mengyee had been bad adviser.

Thebaw.—“Yes, I was seized when young, and made a mere puppet. I have now to suffer for what Tinedah and others forced me to do. I now know that I was altogether wrong. Tinedah, the Athlaym Woon, and Kyong Moun Woon urged me on to war, and when the fighting commenced they were the first to abandon me. I did not hear of the English taking Minhla; but when I heard of your arrival at Pagan, I said, No more fighting must occur, as the Burmese could not resist.

“My Ministers told me that only five vessels with 2,000 soldiers were coming to make a treaty. My mother-in-law was always very anxious to prevent war. My Ministers are very ungrateful. Not one of them has waited me since the English arrived in Mandalay.”

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<sup>3</sup> Taingda Mingyi was one of the chief ministers of Thibaw's government. He was a conservative and royalist faction of the government, who, in 1885, advocated for the war with the British.

Colonel Sladen here said, “It will not raise your Ministers in English public opinion that they should thus desert you.”

Soopyalat, turning to the interpreter, said, “Tell him that the day before yesterday I had 300 maids of honours. Yesterday evening only 16 remained with me. We have two children alive, and three are buried in the northern garden.”

Thebaw, resuming, said, “Let Sladen govern the country for five years.’ The King added :—

“When he has got affairs in good order then I will come back and be guided by him. I have known Sladen since I was a boy, and have most confidence in him, or in any Englishman.

“You English think that I killed all my relations, but it is not so. I was under a guard myself, and they were murdered. The reason that I was not murdered myself was that before the King died he told the Queen I was the quiet son. A horoscope was also drawn by the priests, and my name came out first. For the first seven months after I became King I was not allowed to interfere. I was not even crowned. I continue to wear the Phoongyee priest’s robes. I ordered that my relations should not be killed but imprisoned, so that there might not be a disturbance in the country. I was sleeping in bed when the order to kill them was given by the Ministers.

“After eight months the Yenout Mengyee, who killed the Princes, tried to murder me. The English people knew much that I did, but not of what was going on behind me. I never left the palace.

“I wish the English to know that I am not a drunkard. I am a religious Buddhist. I have given up all the Crown jewels, and I am sure the English, who are a great people, will not object to me, as a King, keeping my ring” (showing me a magnificent ruby ring he was wearing), “or to my wife keeping her jewels” (pointing to a diamond necklace on the Queen).

Colonel Sladen answered :—

“I am certain that the English people would not wish you to be deprived of those jewels.”

Thebaw then asked me to return when General Prendergast visited him, as he would like the English people to know what passed.

At 2 o'clock p.m. to-day General Prendergast, accompanied by Admiral Richards and some 80 officers and civilians, proceeded to the pavilion.

Thebaw seemed disconcerted by the presence of the large crowd, who remained covered. The Burmese Ministers, however, who accompanied General Prendergast, by his order prostrated themselves before the King.

After a few words, Thebaw said, “Prendergast, cannot you allow me to remain in the palace until to-morrow?”

General Prendergast replied, “I am afraid not. I can only allow you 10 minutes.”

Thebaw expressed alarm that there would be fighting between the Burmese and the English on the river during his voyage to Rangoon, and was assured that a military escort would be provided.

The King was then conveyed under a strong guard from the palace through the town, and placed on board the *Thooreah*, which at once left.

Thibaw was accompanied by the Kinwoon Mengyee.<sup>4</sup> His departure was witness by a large crowd, which showed a good deal of feeling.

During the early part of the day, owing to the issue of an order that any woman applying should be allowed to enter the palace through the Queen's gate, the palace was looted by several hundred women from the town, who carried away a large amount of property. The Crown jewels were saved by Colonel Sladen.

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<sup>4</sup> Kinwun Mingyi U Kaung was the chief minister of the Burmese government during the reign of King Thibaw. He is part of the 'reformist' faction of the government. After the conquest of Burma in 1885, he served as a colonial civil servant in the British administration

Last night a disgraceful scene of riot and blood-shed occurred in Mandalay, and more lives were lost than in any engagement during the expedition. The Italian Consulate and other European houses were attacked. The military arrangements to protect the town were very deficient. The headquarters were on board of the steamers three miles from the town. Many Europeans are leaving, owing to the danger.

Last night the streets were occupied by gangs of armed Burmans, who looted and murdered almost unchecked. The Princesses of the Royal Family were robbed of their jewels in the streets. The Buddhist monasteries were plundered.

Unless immediate steps be taken to restore order and provide for the civil government of the country very serious consequences will result, and Burmah will become completely disorganized.

While I have been writing two men have been murdered by Dacoits, in daylight, at a short distance from this house.

CALCUTTA, Dec. 4.

By order of the Viceroy, Mr. Bernard will go to Mandalay at once with a party of selected Burmese-speaking civil officers, to administer the country provisionally in the name of the Queen Empress.

General Prendergast will conduct the administration till Mr. Bernard arrives. Hitherto military considerations have had the first place in the General's mind; now his chief attention will be directed to bringing the civil administration into order.

[A portion of the above appeared in our Second Edition of yesterday.]

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