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All Authors	Kyaw Swe Nyunt
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HISTORY OF JAPAN – MYANMAR RELATIONSHIP (1942 – 1948)

Kyaw Swe Nyunt*

Abstract

This paper tries to highlight the result of the rigorous examination of events and episodes, occurred in Myanmar. This paper describes the bilateral relation between Japan and Myanmar. This paper aims at presenting the vital role played by Japan in the Myanmar political situation and its involvement and pressures of big powers. The Japanese entered Myanmar as ally, and not as conqueror or master. There had been to do the policy of the Japanese government on the Myanmar. This paper depends on the file list of material available at National Archives from Japan and Myanmar and other available resources from the outside library such as books.

Introduction

In this paper, methodology includes; the survey method which is the most convenient due to time factor and the most cheap and quick method of obtaining information. Therefore the research of this paper depends on the file list of material available at National Archives from Japan and Myanmar and other available resources from the outside library such as books and articles. The goal of this paper is as follow;

- to know about Japanese entrance into Myanmar and response of Myanmar nationalism
- to know how Japan and Myanmar had changed their foreign policy
- to understand how Japan and Myanmar had managed to get rightful place in their politics
- to impart the knowledge of changes of political system in Japan and Myanmar in Post World War II

And then, I intend to disseminate the outcome as follow;

The method of the mass media, teaching and publication are used to disseminate this paper within all students and public.

* Doctor, Lecturer, History Department, Myitkyina University

The Situation of Colonial Period

During the early colonial period, there had been Japanese who came to live in Myanmar. In 1890, Ackiyama Masai and Osahi Sakamoto reside at No.11, 34th Street in Yangon and opened the brothel house at No.20, 34 Street in Yangon.¹ In 1907 and 1912, Sayadaw U Ottama visited to Japan. Then, Sayadaw wrote four books dealing with Japan's development programmes and urged to work Myanmar like Japanese. Sayadaw's four works are *Japanese Women(1912)*, *Japanese Tales(1914)*, *Japanese Men(1918)* and *Japanese people(1921)*.² At that time, Ma Thawt of Pyay and Ein Soe Ma of Sittwe went to Japan to study domestic science at Higher Technical School.³ Like these inter-relations, Japanese interested to trade with Myanmar and began to import in bulk rice, cotton and lead from Myanmar and exported cotton textiles and clothes to Myanmar.⁴

On 14 April 1920, the Japanese Vice – Consulate at Yangon intimated to the chief secretary to British Governor that one Mr. Takeo Ohmai had been appointed to work with and assist the Vice-consul. The opening of the Japanese Vice-consulate at Yangon was announced in the Indian Government Gazette on 17 April 1920.⁵ On 8 October 1922, the Japanese Vice-consul Mr. Fuchi visited to Patheingyi, Mawlamyine, Tavoy and Myeik.⁶ On 12 February 1930, the Japanese Vice-consul S. Kuga visited to Pinyin Oo Lwin, Thibaw, Mogoke, Myittha and Bhamo.⁷ The first policy of these tours was to study the natural environments and the latter might have been to collect data and information for political purposes. With these purposes, the Japan – Myanmar Association was established in Yangon in 1933 which carried out anti-British propaganda and intelligence work for military affairs, not to promote trade.

In 1935, Galon U Saw visited to Japan and wrote on Japan guide book. After the return from Japan, Galon U Saw bought up and controlled "*The Thuriya Daily*". This newspaper always wrote news and articles in praise and support of Japan. Therefore, the Japanese Vice-consul Keneko Toyoji gave a lot of financial support to Galon U Saw to win the 1936 elections to Lower House

of Legislative Assembly.⁸ Another fact, trade between Myanmar and Japan began to decline the textile imports from Rs. 4,500,000 in 1937 to Rs. 3,700,000 in 1938. Moreover paddy and cotton exported from Myanmar had declined in 1938.⁹ Take a look at this happen, I would like to deduce that the Japanese intelligences were involved in many political sector of Myanmar.

In the Japan – Myanmar Association, U Kyaw, retired Deputy Commissioner, became Chairman and U Ba Lwin was Vice-chairman on 25 April 1939. Likewise, the Myanmar – Nippon Trade Association was formed on 17 April 1939 led by Mr. T. Ohba. After the organization of this association, the Japanese secretly met Dr. Ba Maw together with Mr. Kuga, Dr. Suzuki, Mr. Ohba, Mr. N. Utagawa and Mr. Kato, Chairman of the Japanese Social Organization of Singapore at Dr. Ba Maw's residence. That meeting, they discussed to publish a Japanese propaganda newspaper by Myanmar language and to broadcast a programmer on Myanmar in both English and Myanmar for demolition of European powers on 22 October 1939. Beside that, they decided that educated Myanmar youths were sent to train in Japan, to serve with the Broadcasting Department of Japan.¹⁰ I think that Japan – Myanmar relations and Japan's political involvement had become deeper.

The Situation of Japan period

Fundamental cause, the people of Myanmar wanted to help from Japan to drive out the British on motherland. Moreover, I can safely assume that Japan's interest in Myanmar was comparatively slight before the opening of Burma Road to China. By late 1937, the Nationalist Government of China began the construction of the Yunnan – Burma Highway. The Japanese Imperial Forces entered Myanmar in December 1941. They occupied Yangon successfully in March 1942 and advanced to Mandalay very rapidly. The Japanese conquest of Myanmar was completed in May. The Japanese Commander-in-Chief issued an order to install the military administration soon after the capture of Yangon. Two weeks after the occupation of Yangon, Colonel SUZUKI, the Japanese Commander of the Burma Independence Army, set up the

Burma Central Government with Thakin Tun Oak as its Chief Administrator.¹¹

In the trade of mineral products, organizations or associations were established and production and marketing were implemented by Dr. Ba Maw's government. Burma Mine Association (BMA) was formed in 1943 at Tavoy which had to be given to be Japanese military authorities in Tavoy. The mineral products such as silver and *Baw* (silver of finest quality) and others had been bought by BMA which had to be sold directly to the Japanese Company called Mitsubishi Kogyo Kaisha Ltd.¹²

On 15 April 1942, the commander in chief of Japanese forces in Myanmar arrived at the Shwedagon pagoda and donated ten thousand kyat for sundry needs of the pagoda. And then, he offered food to the monks and formed an advisory body of presiding monks for Japanese army. Thus, Buddhist Sasana was used as stepping stone for Japanese military administration, to kindle anti-British sentiment. On 4 May 1942, the Japanese commander Colonel Kobarashi pleaded with the presiding monks of the Advisory Body to perform what measures were appropriate for the peace of the country. What the Japanese wanted the Advisory Body to do for the peace of the country were providing food, medical supplies and jobs for the unemployed that is lay attendant. In order to accomplish these schemes, suitable people would be chosen and committees would be formed. Those persons were to be selected these facts: must not have any dispute, must not be those who seek self-interest, induce in sinful acts and do their work dutifully.¹³ Similarly, the religious organizations were established in Taikkyi, Okkan, Letpadan, Twante, Kyaikwaing, Shwenathar and Hlegu respectively. Fifty monks headed by the presiding monks of Bahan Wailuwun monastery and Zeyar Theingi monastery organized the Buddhist Sasana propagating organizations in Taungoo, Pyinmana and other towns.¹⁴ Be that as it may, it could be conjectured that the very formation of these organizations was more for aiding the Japanese than for religious purposes.

We can see evidences that all religious that is Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Islam were encouraged to develop all over the country. On the occasion of the second anniversary of the War of Greater East Asia on 8 December 1943, it was found that leaders of religious were invited to be present and to deliver an address as representative of each religion; Hindu leader Mr. R. Mugampilay, Muslim leader Mr. Nazir Amad and Ashin U Ah Sarra of the Organization of Buddhist Maha Sanga.¹⁵

On 1st June 1942, a training school for Japanese language was opened at St. Gabriel's High School on Shwedagon pagoda road. Of the 1067 that came to enroll, 543 were accepted for training. Similarly, in Mandalay, a Japanese language training school was opened at the English Methodist Church on 26th B road to the east of electric power generating plant on 15 October 1942. And then, training schools was opened from 18 March 1942 to 1st August 1943 at Maymyo, Sagaing, Patheingyi, Bago, Thabon, Mawlamyaing and respectively. After that, the Japanese formed a dependable unit that is *Letyone Tathpwe* as their reserved forces and recruited new soldiers. Nevertheless, the time is between 1943 and early 1944 that characterization and style of Japanese are simple and clear. Later period, it is the stories of farming families of which daughters were raped by Japanese soldiers and this rouse up the local people to begin resistance movement.¹⁶

For instance, Ba Kyawt and five members were arrested for robbery related offence and were being interrogated by Myanmar police. Nevertheless, the Japan army took them away and drafted them into their *Letyone Tathpwe*. The Shwelaung police had to rescind the case. A robbery took place at Maung Paw Saung residence at Myothitgyi village in the jurisdiction of Mohnyin police station, in Myitkyina district. While the accused faced trial on bandit at the court of Myitkyina, the Japanese demanded them and took them away from respective police stations on 12 August 1943. Once again, the police were interrogating the accused San Tin on the leadership of bandit on 23 November 1943. At that time, the Japanese took him away to use him a porter for the

Japanese army. Such there were many cases of intervention by the Japanese military in various parts of the country.¹⁷

Another factor that a police officer of Khinoo township at Shwebo district had shot the one of his subordinate. Meanwhile, Captain Shinmyitzu, Japanese army officer came up and prohibited the trail.¹⁸ Then recruitment of new servicemen caused strains in Japan-Myanmar relations within 1942 and 1945. Village headmen had to take responsibility of recruiting new soldiers for the Japanese army. There even were plans to arrest and punish the village headman who failed to get recruits for the Japanese army.¹⁹ Moreover, the Japanese army commandeered horses to carry rations and ammunition on 15 January 1945. At that time, limitless recruitment of *Letyone* soldiers and gathering of force labourers emerged in Tharawady district. Those cases were presented to the Department of Labour and General Affairs of Japan-Myanmar Cooperation Committee by Dr. Ba Maw, the Secretary of the Ministry of Internal Affairs on 23 January 1945. Dr. Ba Maw reported his finding as follow:

At present, it was the harvesting season and the task of harvesting would be affected: that there was no one to work as paddy farmers even at the rate of fifty rupees per acre; and that such occurrences as confiscating of horses and oxen, gathering forced labourers (*Heiho*) that matters could be aroused a wave of displeasure. With regard to those cases, the Department of Cooperation made a reply on 9 February 1945 that each of the Deputy Commissioners had been instructed not to include true paddy farmers and cultivators in recruiting.²⁰

On 27 February 1944, some bootleggers were arrested and carried to Zalok police station in Monywa township, *Heiho* troops looted them on the way from the hand of the police. Once again, four drunken men in *Heiho* troops forcibly extracted the police badges from the police uniform and abused and vituperated them on 2 March 1944. A policeman from Monywa outpost in Monywa jurisdiction was hacked with a sword by some *Heiho* troops on 3 March 1944. Those occurrences were reported to the Ministry of

Internal Affairs by the Director General of police of Myanmar on 2 May 1944.²¹

The Japanese entered to Myanmar with two subjects. Firstly, Myanmar politicians themselves earnestly went out to the Japanese and asked for their help. Secondly, Burma Independence Army (BIA) was formed with the help of Japanese. At the beginning, the Japanese trumpeted that they had come to Myanmar to help her liberated under British rule. Thus, the Japanese entered into Myanmar from Thai-Myanmar border. Meanwhile, the Japanese officers instructed and explained to their units that must be observed and followed once they were on Myanmar land. The instructions are; no one must enter alone in the residence of Myanmar, only sergeants and those of higher ranks could ask for or demand provisions and other requirements and looting and burning were strictly forbidden.²² One of the blameworthy factors in Japan-Myanmar relations was the limitless imprint of Japanese currency. Nevertheless, the Japanese currencies were not accepted by the hilly tribes because inflation soared up boundlessly all over the country.²³

Another Japan-Myanmar relation fall through because of Railway of Death, from Thanphyuzayat to Thailand as far as Malaya was being laid by the Japanese. In this construction, all the labourers had to be force-worked. But wages are paid one kyat per day for one person. Then Japan declared to pay the labourers of deadly railway road construction that a head of labourers, administer twenty-five labourers, is paid one kyat and fifty cent per day. A supervisor had ten head of labourers, is paid two kyat per day. A leader supervise ten supervisors, would be given living quarters, ration and the provision of health care. After three months, all labourers would not like to work this job any more that would be sent back home. As Japan did not follow your promises, many labourers ran away from deadly railway road construction. That is why; the gathering of forced labourers was drastic in lower Myanmar. Fleeing labourers were hunted down by the Japanese officers. Catching labourers were regularly beaten and tortured by Japanese officers.²⁴ In the course of event, the hearts of many

people feel deeply hurt and aroused the revolution on the Japanese. As a result, Japan-Myanmar relations fell through.

All above the events could be deduced that Myanmar people hated having to disappoint the Japanese. At that time, Japan was defeated in the war. It could be considered that if Myanmar continued to cooperate with the Japanese, she would have to face evils and dangers. Among the events, there must be some misunderstanding between Japan and Myanmar that generally had their basis on personal affairs.

For instance, on 3 March 1944, while Maung Chin Oh, cart-driver, was stopping awhile on the roadside, he was pulled down from his cart and thrown down onto ground by a Nippon soldier. This event was reported through Director General of police to the Ministry of Internal Affairs on 20 July 1944 by the Pokokku District Superintendent of police.²⁵ Another event was that Maung Ba Tin, a driver of Japanese military department, who lives in Damayon Street, Kandawgalay ward. On 22 November 1944 he got drunk and reviled using obscene words. At that time, the persons in authority of this ward came up and requested him to behave himself. However, he went away and came back with four Japanese soldiers and then they beat up some people of this ward.²⁶ Next case was that Nga Gyi, an accused, had been absconding after committing a crime. Then he had joined the Japanese army at Pyay district and was serving as an escort of Paungdi airfield. Although police officer of Pyay district demanded to transfer the accused Nag Gyi, Takano, Japanese officer, refused to hand him over to the police.²⁷ This case arises a problem between Myanmar soldiers who were serving with the Japanese army and the members of the police force of Dr Ba Maw's Independent Myanmar Government. Moreover, Japan-Myanmar relations fell through. With regard to these events there had been numerous cases of atrocity and ruthlessness committed by the *Kimpeitai* that is secret security organization.

But nevertheless, the Japanese had several factors to thank upon Myanmar. Some of several factors are; the Burma Independence Army (BIA) and Burma Air Force were formed and

trained, helped to struggle free from the British bondage, Dr. Ba Maw's Government of Independent Myanmar and Burma Defence Army (BDA) were transformed from BIA, the Japanese-Myanmar Cooperation Committee had been formed and Bo Moekyo or Colonel Suzuke who had good intentions for Myanmar and so on. I perceived a change in Myanmar people. BIA nursed through the training and produced the spirit of comradeship.²⁸

The situation of the end of the World War II

After the Japanese was defeated in World War II on 2 September 1945, they demanded their government to establish special relations with Myanmar. Similarly the British Government of Myanmar sent a letter to the Supreme Allied Command on 19 February 1946. In this letter, it was suggested to include list of types and quantities of plant and machinery²⁹ which could usefully be taken as advance deliveries on account of reparations from Japan as follow:

- Aircraft Factories
- Aluminium Rolling Mills for Light Metals
- Arsenals, Army and Navy
- Ball and Roller Bearing Plants
- Caustic Soda Plants
- Iron and Steel Plants
- Laboratories
- Machine tools
- Magnesium Plants
- Shipbuilding Plants and
- Sulphuric Acid Plants.

The British government negotiated the reparation with Japanese. Moreover, Myanmar's demand for war reparations from Japan had been made through the British Government in England. One of the demands was to reconstruct the Samaw sugar factory with Japanese reparation. The Secretary of the Foreign Office of Myanmar sent a letter to the embassy at Tokyo on this matter on 27 June 1947. So the British War reparation Mission in Tokyo replied to make the enquiries about the Samaw sugar factory on 3 July 1947. ³⁰ However, the reconstruction of the Samaw sugar

factory had to be temporarily stopped. Another post war industrial reconstruction was made to set up a steel factory in Myanmar with Japanese reparation. But this project was postponed till Myanmar became independent.³¹

On 31st January 1948, Union of Myanmar government demanded to the Japanese government new items for reparations. The new items³² are as follow:

- Medical, surgical and X-ray apparatuses
- Scientific equipment for industrial and college requirements
- electrical machinery and accessories and
- various industrial equipment.

In the latter part of 1948, trade agreement would be concluded between Japan and Myanmar. By looking above evidences, post war relations between Japan and Myanmar can be seen that demand for war reparations from Japan as well as Japan hope for some gain from commercial and investment rights in Myanmar.

In conclusion, the type of relation can be divided into three types between each other. These are friendly relations, hostile relations and diplomatic relations. We can see that depend: three types of relations practiced between the two countries. Between 1900 and 1940, Japan-Myanmar relations had practiced friendship and cordiality. Between 1941 and 1945, the relations between Japan and Myanmar developed hostile relations as well as cordiality. At that period, the two countries' relations were based on gross and inequality. From time to time, as thieves and robbers or bandits were unruliness, the police force of Dr. Ba Maw's government caught them. But these accused were taken away from the hand of police by the Japanese army. With regard to reparations, Japan-Myanmar relations had been deadlocked for a long time because there must be misunderstanding each other. No diplomatic relation existed between Japan and Myanmar after the World War II until November 1951 when Japanese government established her diplomatic office in Yangon, and in November 1954 the treaty of peace was concluded with Myanmar. An

agreement for reparations and economic co-operation was signed concurrently. On the other hand no academic and cultural relations were by no means encouraged between Japan and Myanmar after the end of war.

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