

## Study of U Hla's Experiences in Japan in 1936

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In this paper, I focus on the characteristics of Japan and the Japanese people as portrayed in his writings by U Hla, a trader from Myanmar who studied the Japanese economy and industry, and the behaviour of the Japanese people during his visit to Japan in 1936. The aim of this paper is to know why U Hla wanted to visit Japan, what he learnt during his business trip to Japan, what kind of knowledge he acquired from Japan, why he was interested in the banking system, and how he applied the knowledge he gained in Japan after he returned to Myanmar. The primary and secondary sources for this study came from the National Library of Myanmar, Universities' Central Library, University of Yangon Library, University of Maubin Library, and Internet archives.

### Introduction

This paper deals mainly with Myanmar trader U Hla's study of Japanese factories and handicrafts during his visit to Japan in 1936. At that time, very few people from Myanmar travelled to foreign countries in search of opportunities to earn money through commercial activities. The Myanmar people were reluctant to engage in economic activities in other countries. In fact, they were afraid of visiting foreign countries. However, foreigners not only conducted commercial activities in Lower Myanmar and Upper Myanmar, but also controlled the whole country for 50 years, as a result of which the local people of Myanmar felt economically deprived. Myanmar was anxious that the national race would become extinct under foreign domination if they stuck to old ideas and traditions. While the Myanmar people were not interested in commercial activities, which are the essential elements of economic well-being and prosperity, foreigners who entered Myanmar and influenced the country's economic activities became prosperous. The foreigners in Myanmar benefited financially as the Myanmar people started replacing domestic goods with foreign products. This study examined the commercial and economic activities of Japan, which primarily produced the commodities and goods used in Myanmar, and the behaviours of the Japanese at that time.

## Japan - Myanmar Relations in the Past

Between 1900 and 1940, the Japanese government and the Japanese people had maintained a friendly attitude towards the Myanmar people and some Myanmar politicians. Myanmar was greatly inspired by Japan's achievements and development. The Japanese, on the other hand, wanted to help liberate Myanmar from the British colonial yoke, and gave financial help to pro-Japanese Myanmar politicians like U Ottama, Galon U Saw, and Thakin Mya.<sup>1</sup>

Japan took a keen interest in Myanmar-China border issues. The country also announced that a Japanese Vice-Consulate will be opened in Yangon. Trading between Japan and Myanmar grew steadily, after the British had to accept the opening of the Japanese Vice-Consulate in Myanmar. When the Japanese government announced that a consulate would be opened at No.12, Phayre Street (Pansodan Street) in the Durbar Building and that the first vice-consular officer would be Mr T Fuchi, the British had to agree to it. On 14 April 1920, the Japan Vice-Consulate in Yangon intimated the Chief Secretary to the Governor that one Mr Takeo Ohmai had been appointed to work with and assist the vice-consular officer. The opening of the Japanese Vice-Consulate in Yangon was announced in the Indian Government Gazette on 17 April 1920.<sup>2</sup>

It was likely that there were both economic and political motives behind the opening of the Japanese Vice-Consulate in Yangon. The opening of the Vice-Consulate was soon followed by the opening of Japanese guesthouses, shops, and restaurants in Yangon.<sup>3</sup> In 1933, the Japan Myanmar Association was formed in Yangon. This association worked with the Japanese Vice-Consulate to carry out propaganda and intelligence work, not to promote trade and commerce.<sup>4</sup>

Galon U Saw was a politician and an editor of the Thuriya newspaper, who visited Japan in 1935 to study the Japanese social structure, educational policy, and administrative system.<sup>5</sup> After his return from Japan, U Saw's financial position became strong enough to buy out and control the Thuriya newspaper. Thenceforth, Thuriya became a decidedly pro-Japanese

<sup>1</sup> Phone Myint Kyaw, *Japan - Myanmar Relations (1900-1962)*, p. 96 (A thesis for the degree of Master of Research, University of Mandalay, 2006) (Phone Myint Kyaw, *Japan-Myanmar Relations (1900-1962)*)

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, p.11

<sup>3</sup> Dr Daw Myiny Kyi, *Myanmar Japan Relation : Toward Friendship*, The First (MJC) Forum, Yangon, 2004, p.54 (Myint Kyi, *Myanmar Japan Relation : Toward Friendship*)

<sup>4</sup> U Kyaw, *Myanmar Political Relation with Japan Prior to the World War II*, Magway University, Annual Magazine, 1975, p.246 (U Kyaw, *Myanmar Political Relation with Japan Prior to the World War II*)

<sup>5</sup> U Saw, *Japan Lan Nyunt*, Yangon, Thuriya Press, 1935, p. 1 (U Saw, *Japan Lan Nyunt*)  
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newspaper. Every day the paper carried news and articles in praise and support of Japan and her actions. Japanese Vice-Consul Keneko Toyoji gave a lot of financial support to U Saw to win the 1936 elections to the Lower House of the Legislative Assembly.<sup>6</sup>

Japan-Myanmar trade relations, which began in 1905 with the signing of the Anglo-Japanese Commercial Treaty, did not have any distinctive characteristics until 1936, but reached the highest point in 1937. When war broke out between China and Japan in 1937, China started boycotting Japanese goods, following which Japanese goods began flooding the Myanmar market. The balance of trade between the two countries was in Myanmar's favour in 1937. When the influx of Japanese goods into Myanmar threatened this favourable balance, the British government on 25 March 1937 set a limit on Japanese imports into Myanmar. An agreement was signed, by which Japan was to buy 70,000 viss (962,500 kg) of raw cotton from Myanmar, which in turn would buy 4.2 million yards of fabric. The value of textile imports from Japan to Myanmar fell from Rs. 4.5 million in 1937 to Rs. 3.7 million in 1938. Likewise, exports of pulses, paddy, and raw cotton from Myanmar to Japan had fallen considerably since late 1938. Japan bought more rice from Thailand than from Myanmar because the price of Thai rice was lower. The following table shows the value of trade between Japan and Myanmar from 1936 to 1939. It shows that the value of Myanmar's imports from Japan always exceeded that of her exports to Japan.<sup>7</sup>

Year	Exports to Japan	Imports to Japan
1936-37	Rs. 22.2 million	Rs. 23.9 million
1937-38	Rs.11.4 million	Rs. 20.9 million
1938	Rs. 6.7 million	Rs. 7.0 million
1939	Rs. 2.9 million	Rs. 4.7 million
Total	Rs. 43.2 million	Rs. 56.5 million

As Japan came to possess more and more powerful manufacturing plants and factories, she wanted to freely sell her textile products to Myanmar. Hence, the country was against the limitations imposed by the British on her exports to Myanmar. She also wanted unlimited supply of raw materials like cotton from Myanmar to feed her textile factories.<sup>8</sup>

Just like the pre-war days, Japan-Myanmar trade revived to some extent, with Japan

<sup>6</sup> U Kyaw, *Myanmar Political Relation with Japan Prior to the World War II*, p.246

<sup>7</sup> Phone Myint Kyaw, *Japan – Myanmar Relations (1900-1962)*, p.20

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*, p. 21

exporting cotton yarn and textile products to Myanmar, and the latter selling mainly rice to Japan. There have been times when Myanmar needed Japan and vice versa. The period between 1905 and 1920 was a time when Myanmar was in urgent need of Japanese help to drive out the British imperialists and to acquire development technology. From 1920 to 1940, Myanmar was an important country to Japan. In the 1940's, Japan and Myanmar were in a position to help fulfil each other's aspirations.<sup>9</sup>

### U Hla's Biography

U Hla's parents were U Hmat Kyi and Daw Thar Lan, and he was born in the village of Duyindubo, Shwedaung in Pyay District.<sup>10</sup> He was a merchant specialising in silk, and owned a silk house and loom factory. He opened the Lun silk house in Shwedaung. After he married Daw Hla Yin, they relocated to Yangon, Merchant Road. He resettled his business in Yangon and attempted to make inroads into overseas markets. Therefore, U Hla decided to visit Japan to study the economic life of the Japanese and explore the textile business in Japan.<sup>11</sup>

### U Hla's Meeting with Galon U Saw Before the Trip

On 8 June 1936, U Hla, on receiving his passport, met with U Saw, who had visited Japan in 1935 to study the Japanese social structure, educational policy, and administrative system, to enquire about the costs of travelling by ship, procedures for travelling, and the behaviour of the Japanese. As U Saw and his colleagues encouraged U Hla and offered him assistance in travelling to Japan, the purpose of U Hla's visit, which was to help the development of his country's economy, was confirmed. Moreover, Japanese Vice-Consul Mr Kaneko Toyoji wrote letters to departmental officials in Japan introducing U Hla to them. U Hla decided to leave for Japan via Singapore by steamship although there was a direct route between Yangon and Japan.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid*, p.100

<sup>10</sup> Interview, U Tint Maung (18 May 2019 at Duyindubo village, Shwedaung)

<sup>11</sup> Interview, Daw Kyu Kyu (18 April 2019 at Yangon)

<sup>12</sup> U Hla, *Myanmar – Japan Gyi Pwar Yaee Mattan*, Pyay, Pyinsa Yupan Press, 1939, p.7 (U Hla, *Myanmar – Japan Gyi Pwar Yaee Mattan*) Myanmar – Japan Gyi Pwar Yaee Mattan mean Myanmar – Japan Diary (This book title literally advises Myanmar business people how to promote the nation's economy in the future, especially by emulating Japan)

## Travel to Singapore

U Hla left for Singapore from Yangon Port by KARAPARA, a ship owned by BI Company,<sup>13</sup> on the morning of 31 July 1936.<sup>14</sup> U Hla was the only passenger on the steamship from Myanmar, while the others were English, Indians, Chinese, Chettiars, and Egyptians.<sup>15</sup> U Hla arrived in Singapore at 6:00 a.m. on 5 August 1936.<sup>16</sup> On his arrival, he was welcomed by local businessman Mr Lee Chee Shan, who had migrated to Singapore from Myanmar in 1929 and was the son-in-law of Aw Boon Par of the Aw family, which founded the apothecary Eng Aun Tong (The Hall of Eternal Peace).<sup>17</sup> This pharmaceutical shop was successful in Singapore and was owned by Myanmar people.<sup>18</sup>

## Arrival in Japan

After leaving Singapore, U Hla reached Kobe, Japan, at 4:30 p.m. on 20 August 1936. U Hla left for Osaka after staying one night in Kobe.<sup>19</sup> He hired a motorcar for four yen to travel from Kobe to Osaka. However, he paid five yen because the journey took a longer than expected time as U Hla had to exchange currency at the bank and drink tea on the way to Osaka. This amount was equivalent to 3.5 Myanmar kyats.<sup>20</sup> At that time, 100 kyats could be exchanged for 130 yen.<sup>21</sup>

By the arrangement of the Osaka Chamber of Commerce, U Hla stayed at Dobi Hotel in Osaka on 22 August 1936. This Japanese hotel was a ten-storey building that cost four yen per day in rent.<sup>22</sup> Following the Osaka Chamber of Commerce's invitation, U Hla met with some traders and was shown samples of Japanese goods. As U Hla wanted to study commercial affairs, he made an appointment with Hasegawa Company.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>13</sup> British India Steam Navigation Company Limited

<sup>14</sup> *Thuriya newspaper*, 7 August 1936

<sup>15</sup> U Hla, *Myanmar – Japan Gy Pwar Yae Mattan*, p.8

<sup>16</sup> *Thuriya newspaper*, 7 August 1936

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.academia.edu/31998133/TIGER BALM HISTORY AND TIM CHIN TSONG PALACE HISTORY IN MYANMAR](http://www.academia.edu/31998133/TIGER_BALM_HISTORY_AND_TIM_CHIN_TSONG_PALACE_HISTORY_IN_MYANMAR) (9 August 2019)

<http://www.selectbooks.com.sg/getTitle.aspx?SBNu=015148> (25 September 2019)

<sup>18</sup> U Hla, *Myanmar – Japan Gy Pwar Yae Mattan*, p.21

<sup>19</sup> *Thuriya newspaper*, 24 August 1936

<sup>20</sup> U Hla, *Myanmar – Japan Gy Pwar Yae Mattan*, p.102

<sup>21</sup> *Thuriya newspaper*, 24 August 1936

<sup>22</sup> *Thuriya newspaper*, 27 August 1936

<sup>23</sup> U Hla, *Myanmar – Japan Gy Pwar Yae Mattan*, p.116

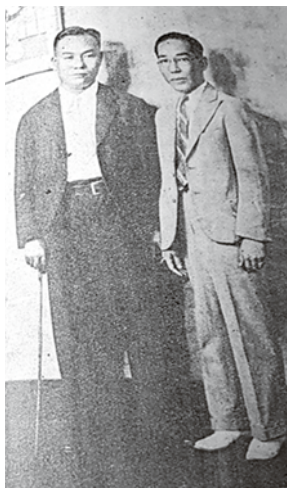


Figure 1 – U Hla and T. Nishikawa

(Photo courtesy by U Hla, Myanmar – Japan Gyi Pwar Yaee Mattan, p.128)

#### U Hla's Visit to the Asahi Press

U Hla took assistance from a guide in order to travel in Japan. Although an Act regarding tourism had not yet been passed by the Government, an interpreter's wages were set at ten yen per day. However, by the arrangement of the hotel, Mr T. Nishikawa, a Japanese instructor who had studied in the US, was hired on 24 August 1936 for five yen per day.<sup>24</sup>

U Hla, after connecting with his interpreter, visited the Asahi Press, where he met with Mr Sebechirino and other journalists. He then studied the newspaper printing process.<sup>25</sup> He was impressed by the machines used for printing newspapers of the Asahi Press. The Asahi head office was located in Osaka and branch offices were established in Nagoya, Tokyo, Kobe, Yokohama, and Shanghai. There were arrangements in place to ensure synchronous delivery of the newspapers all over the country. The Osaka office sent the same photographs to the branch offices by the Telephoto system.<sup>26</sup> There were two machines at the Asahi Press, one made in Germany and the other made in Japan using the German technology. This Japan-made machine was operated more easily at a lower cost than the German machine. U Hla wanted to learn more from Mainichi Press and other print media companies, but was unable to do so due to lack of

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<sup>24</sup> *ibid*, p.126

<sup>25</sup> *Thuriya newspaper*, 30 August 1936

<sup>26</sup> *ibid*

time.<sup>27</sup>

### Visit to Hasegawa Company

Keeping his appointment with Hasegawa Company, U Hla on 25 August 1936 visited the company workshop in Hamamatsu that produced machines for the weaving industry. The factory manager and officer showed him the whole process of building weaving machines, starting with dissolving the iron to putting the parts together. He observed that they had made 600 weaving machines ordered from South America and 150 from Belgium. The manager said that first-class garments can be produced if the weaving industry used these kinds of machines. U Hla wanted to buy ten weaving machines for Myanmar, but did not know how to operate them. Therefore, he asked the manager to train Myanmar people, and the manager promised to do so. If someone visited Japan, it was necessary that they understood the Japanese language. Therefore, he requested the manager to send the price of the machines and required materials.<sup>28</sup>

### Meeting with the Secretary of the Nagoya Chamber of Commerce

On 28 August 1936, U Hla travelled to the Nagoya Chamber of Commerce and met with the chairman and secretary. The secretary warmly welcomed him and explained that there were many traders and industrial enterprises. Moreover, the law book of the Chamber of Commerce was presented to U Hla. The secretary introduced him to the other factories that U Hla wanted to visit. The World Trade Fair was to be held in Nagoya the next year. The secretary invited the Myanmar people to the event. U Hla replied that the Myanmar Chamber of Commerce had announced the trade fair in the New Burma Newspaper and other local newspapers, and that he would also urge his country people to attend the trade fair. The secretary said that transport charges will be subsidised for the Myanmar people and Indians. U Hla said that Myanmar traders should study commercial business.<sup>29</sup>

### Visit to the Toyota Weaving and Textile Factory

On 29 August 1936, U Hla travelled to the Toyota weaving and textile factory located in Nagoya. This factory was at that time Japan's most important plant.<sup>30</sup> One machine at the facility

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<sup>27</sup> U Hla, *Myanmar – Japan Gyi Pwar Yae Mattan*, p.130

<sup>28</sup> *Thuriya newspaper*, 30 August 1936

<sup>29</sup> *Thuriya newspaper*, 2 September 1936

<sup>30</sup> *Thuriya newspaper*, 5 September 1936

could weave the same amount of products as ten hand spinning machines. U Hla thought that 90 percent of workers would become jobless if the machine was introduced in Myanmar. If hand spinning machines were operated, the unemployment problem will be resolved and cotton produced in Myanmar will be used. Therefore, he called for using hand spinning machines rather than the machine. After studying all the factories, U Hla returned to Osaka.<sup>31</sup>

#### Meeting with Mr. Tiban

On 1 September 1936, U Hla travelled to Kobe by train. He discussed about the textile industry with Mr Tiban at the Chamber of Commerce in Kobe. Mr Tiban explained that Kobe businessmen were more interested in and gave more attention to the production of slippers and airplanes than textile products. The majority of traders bought products from Osaka and exported to foreign countries.

Mr Tiban also said that there were 700 stores owned by Indians, and that 8,000 Indians lived in Kobe. Mr Tiban added that he could arrange for U Hla to meet the entrepreneurs who had rubber slipper manufacturing operations in Kobe. As U Hla wanted to meet the businessmen and study the slipper industry in Kobe, Mr Tiban telephoned the slipper traders to introduce him.<sup>32</sup>

#### Visit to Rubber Slipper Factory

Mr Sato, the owner of a rubber slipper factory in Kobe, warmly welcomed U Hla and explained the process of making slippers from crude rubber. Over 400 workers were employed at his factory, which produced 1,500 pairs of slipper per day. U Hla found that Egypt had ordered over 100,000 slippers to be made at this factory. At the end of the visit, Mr Sato told U Hla that slippers produced at his factory were bought by an Indian trader from Myanmar via a Japanese store, but a small quantity was exported to Myanmar. Therefore he wanted to contact other traders from Myanmar. The samples and prices would be sent to the hotel where U Hla stayed in Osaka. Mr Sato said that U Hla would be given as much assistance as possible.

U Hla replied that he has seen slippers produced at this factory in Yangon and even bought them for personal use. 'The products are excellent in quality'. He said that he would be glad to help. U Hla then returned from the factory.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> U Hla, *Myanmar - Japan Gyi Pwar Yae Mattan*, p.167

<sup>32</sup> *Thuriya newspaper*, 8 September 1936

<sup>33</sup> U Hla, *Myanmar - Japan Gyi Pwar Yae Mattan*, p.170



As a British colony, Myanmar only exported raw materials for the benefit of British imperialists. The British rehabilitated industries in Myanmar, but the purpose of this rehabilitation was to exploit the benefits by producing resources in Myanmar at low costs and selling them at high prices in overseas markets. Therefore, the British did not attempt to build Myanmar into an industrialised country. With the annexation of Myanmar by the British, many Indian and Chinese traders migrated to Myanmar and monopolised trade by importing foreign products. Particularly, they monopolised retail trade. In this period, indigenous Myanmar people could not buy and sell local food products and handicrafts by themselves.<sup>34</sup>

During the colonial period, silk and cotton cloth from England, India, and Japan were imported into Myanmar without any barriers. Therefore, the Myanmar weaving industry gradually declined. However it did not totally disappear as a traditional craft. The Myanmar people continued to engage in cotton cultivation and cotton exportation to other countries.<sup>35</sup> During the colonial period, China, Britain, and Japan were the countries that bought a considerable quantity of cotton from Myanmar. Germany, Australia, Hungary, Belgium, Italy, and Spain also bought cotton from Myanmar.<sup>36</sup> The foreign investments were important for the imperialists in order to monopolise the commercial activities. From the early period of British annexation, foreign investments flowed into Myanmar. Many traders who came to Myanmar conducted their commercial activities by registering an individual company or joint stock company. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these joint stock companies played an important role in the economic development of Myanmar.<sup>37</sup>

### Yasuda Bank

On 3 September 1936, U Hla went to Yasuda Bank to withdraw money with an introduction letter given to the manager by the Lloyds Bank branch in Myanmar,<sup>38</sup> which opened in 1923 and was owned by the British.<sup>39</sup> He met with the deputy manager of the bank. The

<sup>34</sup> Furnivall, J.S, *Colonial Policy and Practice, A comparative study of Burma and Netherland India*, London, Cambridge University Press, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, 1948, p.118 (Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice*)

<sup>35</sup> Christion, John Leory, *Burma and Japanese Invader*, Thacker and Company Limited Bombay, 1945, p.113 (Christion, *Burma and Japanese Invader*)

<sup>36</sup> Dautrmer, Joseph, *Burma Under British Rule*, London, J.F,Unwin, 1918, p.316 (Dautrmer, *Burma under British Rule*)

<sup>37</sup> U Aye Hlaing, 'Trend of Economic Growth and Income Distribution in Burma 1870-1940', *Journal of Burma Research Society*, Vol-XLVII, Part I, University Estate Rangoon, June 1964, p. 97 (U Aye Hlaing, 'Trend of Economic Growth and ncome Distribution in Burma 1870-1940')

<sup>38</sup> U Hla, *Myanmar - Japan Gyi Pwar Yaee Mattan*, p.173

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.lloydsbankinggroup.com/our-group/our-heritage/timeline/1901-1950/> (12 May 2019)

manager was about 30 years old and good-natured. Moreover, he was skilled in the banking business. Myanmar youths did not have knowledge about the banking business and did not know what kind of work was done at banks.<sup>40</sup> In 1828-29, the banking business was introduced in Myanmar. The Presidency Bank of Bengal opened in Yangon in 1861 as the first bank.<sup>41</sup> During the years 1862-1863, the Chartered Bank of India, Australia and China was established in Yangon.<sup>42</sup> After the British occupied Myanmar in 1886, banking businesses were required for capitalist companies.<sup>43</sup>

On 30 June 1940, Yokohama Bank was added to the list of economic banks that operated in Myanmar.<sup>44</sup> This was the only bank that played an important role in the commercial relations between Myanmar and Japan.<sup>45</sup> At the end of the Second World War in 1945, Myanmar had only one bank, U Kyaw Thu and Company Limited that was managed by the local people. This bank was first established with an investment of 1.821 billion rupees in Sittwe in 1924-1926.<sup>46</sup> U Hla wanted the Myanmar people to become like the Japanese. Among the commodities imported from many countries, nearly half came from Japan, including soaps, bicycles, and shoes. Therefore, more benefits could be gained if the Myanmar people established business centres in Japan and exported the materials to Myanmar.<sup>47</sup>

### Visit to the Japan Trading Company and Takashimaya Departmental Store

U Hla also visited the Japan Trading Company located in Yamato Gawa, Kansai region, Osaka on 3 September 1936 in response to the company's invitation. At this factory, over 2,500 workers made first-class weaving machines or looms. The process of making a loom from wood included at least ten steps. Over 15,000 looms were made per day. These looms were made for weaving silk and cotton. As Myanmar had not invented a weaving machine yet, it could acquire general knowledge by studying this machine.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> U Hla, *Myanmar - Japan Gyi Pwar Yae Mattan*, p.173

<sup>41</sup> U Tun Wai, *Burma's Currency and Credit*, Orient Longmas, New Delhi (in India), 1953, p. 23  
(U Tun Wai, *Burma's Currency and Credit*)

<sup>42</sup> Daw Tin Aye, *Currency and Banking Enterprises*, Yangon, University Press, first edition, 1969, p. 78  
(Daw Tin Aye, *Currency and Banking Enterprises*)

<sup>43</sup> U Tun Wai, *Burma's Currency and Credit*, p. 23

<sup>44</sup> Daw Tin Aye, *Currency and Banking Enterprises*, p. 78

<sup>45</sup> U Tun Wai, *Burma's Currency and Credit*, p. 26

<sup>46</sup> Daw Tin Aye, *Currency and Banking Enterprises*, p. 89

<sup>47</sup> U Hla, *Myanmar - Japan Gyi Pwar Yae Mattan*, p.173

<sup>48</sup> *Thuriya newspaper*, 13 September 1936

He then visited a departmental store called Takashimaya in Osaka. At the restaurant in this departmental store, U Hla order Japanese food. The Japanese cuisine contains seafood and vegetables together with a dish of soup. He was surprised to see the Japanese drink from the dish without using the spoon. The Japanese were very civilised people and they always said 'Arigato' or thank you.<sup>49</sup>

### U Hla's Visit to a Bicycle Store

With an introduction from the Chamber of Commerce, U Hla visited a bicycle store, which distributed bicycles to global markets. The store supervisor showed him different kinds of bicycles for children and adults. These bicycles were sold in the US, China, Thailand, India, and Myanmar. The bicycles exported to Myanmar were poor in terms of quality and were inexpensive. The bicycles exported to America were expensive and of the best quality. Although the bicycles exported to Myanmar were not of the best quality, the quality was not lower than that of bicycles made in England. If the bicycles exported to the US were sold in Myanmar, they would have fetched a price of not more than 70 kyats. As Indian traders imported and sold low quality bicycles in Myanmar for their personal benefit, the local people had to pay high prices for these products.<sup>50</sup>

After studying the bicycle store, U Hla ordered one bicycle with accessories for sale in Myanmar. He wanted to pass the cost advantage to the Myanmar people by selling the bicycles at a low price. He decided to consider any profit potential later. The purpose of doing this was to help the Myanmar people have access to the best quality bicycles at relatively low prices.<sup>51</sup> At the time of his visit, rickshaws were no longer used in Japan, where the use of motorcars, motorcycles, and bicycles was more prevalent. The reason was that using bicycles was quicker and more cost effective. As the use of bicycles was increasing in Myanmar day by day, the number of bicycle traders had also increased. However, bicycle imports by the Myanmar people were very few. Therefore, Myanmar should import and sell bicycles in Myanmar. According to U Hla's study, a retail bicycle business could be started with an investment of 2,000 kyats.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> U Hla, *Myanmar – Japan Gyi Pwar Yae Mattan*, p.180

<sup>50</sup> *ibid*, p.181

<sup>51</sup> *ibid*, p.182

<sup>52</sup> *Thuriya newspaper*, 26 September 1936

## Bicycles and Japan

In Japan, bicycles were used extensively for various purposes. The Japanese used the bicycle for not only riding but also carrying baggage.<sup>53</sup> In fact, bicycle use was more common in Japan than other countries in the world. Cars were used extensively in towns, but bicycles were used for various other purposes. Therefore, the bicycle industry was the most important business in Japan. Japan produced 3.6 million bicycles annually and exported to other countries. Japan's bicycle industry had advanced greatly and many western nations emulated Japan's success story. It was important for Myanmar to achieve economic prosperity by emulating the Japanese example. Therefore, technology should be studied in one's mother tongue like the Japanese did.<sup>54</sup>

Japan, like Myanmar, used motorcars that were imported from America. However, the Japanese themselves were engaged in the importation and purchase of cars. Therefore, the prices of motorcars were cheaper in Japan than in Myanmar. U Hla thought that it was unfortunate that it was the foreigners in Myanmar, and not the local people, who were involved in and thereby benefited from the importation of bicycles into Myanmar. He noted that this business would require cooperation as it could not be conducted by one person.<sup>55</sup>

## Visit to Ito Company

U Hla visited the Ito Company on 9 September 1936 with an introduction from the manager of the Yasuda Bank. This company employed 150 clerks and exported textile products to other countries. When the person in charge showed U Hla sample clothing, U Hla found that they were being sold by Indian traders in Myanmar. The company manager asked U Hla whether the retail shops in Myanmar were all owned by Indians and Myanmar women worked for these foreign traders. U Hla replied:

'Myanmar people own many shops at present although most of the shops used to be owned by foreigners in the past. Not only Indians and Chinese, but also Myanmar people purchase materials from retail and wholesale shops owned by Indians'.

It was necessary to consider why Myanmar people could not engage in trade in their own country. Moreover, it was time for Myanmar to reoccupy all commercial enterprises legally.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> ibid

<sup>54</sup> *Thuriya newspaper*, 7 July 1935

<sup>55</sup> U Hla, *Myanmar – Japan Gyi Pwar Yae Mattan*, p.185

<sup>56</sup> *Thuriya newspaper*, 28 September 1936

Peasants in Myanmar had been practising traditional methods of cultivation without any innovations for many years. Traditional methods were used for fertilising the farm, and cultivating and harvesting the paddy. In Japan, new techniques had been invented to improve cultivation. For instance, farmers lighted lamps after fertilising the paddy fields to prevent insects from destroying the crop at night. Therefore, paddy plants were thriving and developed. After harvesting the paddy, winnowing machines were used for separating grain from chaff unlike in Myanmar, where buffalos and cows were used. U Hla bought five winnowing machines for Myanmar peasants. This machine could winnow 500 baskets of paddy per day at no great expense. String-making machines were invented for twisting straw produced from winnowing into rope. U Hla also bought a string-making machine as a sample for Myanmar.<sup>57</sup>

### Visiting the Mitsubishi Company

On 11 September, on the invitation of Mitsubishi Company, U Hla visited its factory where fabric was dyed and colour was set. This factory was huge and magnificent. It had 500 workers who were involved in dyeing the clothes and setting the colour. After studying the factory, U Hla asked about garments produced from jute as he knew that the Japanese government's supervision of the factories was good. The person in charge of the factory replied:

“The Japanese government specifies the products that can be made at a factory. This factory has permission only to produce cotton fabric. These specifications help prevent competition between one factory and another and losses that could arise from producing the same products’.<sup>58</sup>

This showed the effectiveness of the Japanese government administration. Moreover, the Japanese government gave capital loans with low interest rates for rehabilitation of public enterprises. Occasionally, the government even offered interest-free loans to factories. Thus, Japan became prosperous within a short time.<sup>59</sup> In Myanmar, textile industry players in Shwedaung and Mandalay produced the same products and competed with each other. Governmental departments that were supposed to encourage the weaving industry in Myanmar had not made any effective contribution thus far.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> U Hla, *Myanmar – Japan Gyi Pwar Yae Mattan*, p.219

<sup>58</sup> *Thuriya newspaper*, 30 September 1936

<sup>59</sup> *ibid*

<sup>60</sup> U Hla, *Myanmar – Japan Gyi Pwar Yae Mattan*, p.233

### Visit to Straw Mat factory

At the invitation of a company that distributed weaving machines, U Hla on 12 September visited a factory that produced weaving machines and looms used for making mats from straw. Straw mats were used as a container to store charcoal and paddy in Japan. Poor people used straw mats as flooring. Raw materials that were not useful were rare in Japan. Responding to an invitation, U Hla travelled to a village called Miyakemura. After arriving at the village, he travelled by foot from the administrative office to a weaving facility located on a field, where he studied the production of straw mats. A mat with a width of three feet and length of six feet was produced in this factory within 15 minutes.<sup>61</sup> After observing the making of straw mats, U Hla bought a machine with the purpose of helping peasants make surplus income after completion of the harvest.<sup>62</sup>

### Interview with Reporter from Shūkan Nipponsha Press in Kyoto

Kyoto is the ancient capital city of Japan and the land of Buddhist heritage. U Hla donated five Buddha images to Japan. A reporter from Shūkan Nipposha Press in Kyoto met with U Hla on 12 September to interview him on the donation. This publication was the only one that particularly focused on the Buddha's teachings. When U Hla met the reporter, the reporter said that religious and secular affairs could be explored. Then, U Hla asked how Myanmar youths who wanted to study in Japan would be assisted. The reporter replied:

‘Myanmar youths will be taught the Japanese language in a Buddhist monastery in Japan and Japanese Buddhist monks will help them to continue their study’.

Regarding the donation of the Buddha images, the *Asahi Press* also interviewed U Hla at 8 p.m. on the same day.<sup>63</sup> The Osaka Chamber of Commerce arranged for the donation of the five Buddha images to three monasteries located in Osaka on Tuesday, 15 September 1936.<sup>64</sup> Three Buddha images were donated to three famous temples in Osaka, Shitenno-ji temple, Honpa Hongan-ji temple, and Otani-ha Hongan-ji temple, and one to Manshu-in temple in Kyoto. As U Hla was set to return to Myanmar on 17 September, the remaining image was placed at the Chamber of Commerce because a monastery had not yet decided on whether to accept the donation.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> *Thuriya newspaper*, 30 September 1936

<sup>62</sup> *ibid*

<sup>63</sup> U Hla, *Myanmar – Japan Gyi Pwar Yae Mattan*, p.244

<sup>64</sup> *ibid*, p.246

<sup>65</sup> *Thuriya newspaper*, 3 October 1936



Figure 2 - U Hla's donations of Buddha images to Japan

(Photo courtesy by U Hla, Myanmar – Japan Gyi Pwar Yae Mattan, p.148)

After donating the Buddha images, U Hla said:

'Carrying the five Buddha images, U Hmat Kyi and sons, who live in Shwedaung in Myanmar, arrived in Japan for commercial affairs and donated one Buddha image to this monastery with the purpose of establishing cordial relations between Myanmar and Japan based on the Buddha's teachings. May Buddhism flourish in the world.'

Mg Hla  
U Hmat Kyi and Sons  
Shwedaung, Myanmar  
(1298 Myanmar Era,  
1 Waxing of Thadinkyut,  
Japanese Era - 2596,  
Showa Year 11,  
Tuesday, 15. 9. 1936.)<sup>66</sup>

### Visiting a Torch Light Company

At the invitation of a torch light company, U Hla visited its factory.<sup>67</sup> All the machines used in this factory were produced in Japan. The torch light production process comprised 90 steps. According to him, there was one major reason why Japan became prosperous so quickly.

<sup>66</sup> *Thuriya newspaper*, 3 October 1936

<sup>67</sup> U Hla, *Myanmar – Japan Gyi Pwar Yae Mattan*, p.261

As the technique for melting iron spread from the western countries to Japan, the country developed the necessary equipment to produce commodities and goods, rather than buying such equipment from abroad.<sup>68</sup> When Mr Sato, the foreign secretary of the Osaka Chamber of Commerce, came to meet U Hla in the morning on 17 September, they discussed matters regarding scholars from Myanmar, with Mr Sato saying:

'At present, 300 Chinese scholars, 100 Thailand scholars, 150 Philippine scholars and a small number of German scholars study in Japan. However, there are only one or two Myanmar scholars in Japan, but the country is hoping for more Myanmar scholars. Necessary assistance will be given to Myanmar scholars'.<sup>69</sup>

U Hla replied:

'I will pass on the information to Myanmar people who want to study in Japan and tell them that they can make the necessary enquiries with you. In western countries, scholars can study only western techniques. As scholars can study both western and eastern techniques in Japan, it is a wonderful opportunity for Myanmar. Thanks for your invitation'.<sup>70</sup>

U Hla left Kobe for Myanmar on board the Hakusan Maru on the evening of 17 September.<sup>71</sup> He arrived at the port of Moji in Kyushu on the morning of 18 September. At the Moji port, export commodities and goods destined for Germany, Norway, and England were being placed on cargo ships. Various kinds of liquor were produced in Moji in Japan. Moji, a prosperous town, could be seen first while travelling to Japan via water way. U Hla left Moji at 12 p.m. on 19 September 1936<sup>72</sup> and arrived in Yangon at 6 a.m. on 6 October 1936.<sup>73</sup>

### U Hla's Return from Japan

After U Hla arrived in Myanmar from Japan, he wrote articles in the Thuriya weekly newspaper about his experiences in Japan with the purpose of raising public awareness in Myanmar. Myanmar people who had visited Japan so far had done so with different objectives, such as tourism, scholarship, and political affairs. Some wrote their experiences and published

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<sup>68</sup> *Thuriya newspaper*, 9 October 1936

<sup>69</sup> U Hla, *Myanmar - Japan Gyi Pwar Yae Mattan*, p.265

<sup>70</sup> *ibid*, p.265

<sup>71</sup> *Thuriya newspaper*, 9 October 1936

<sup>72</sup> U Hla, *Myanmar - Japan Gyi Pwar Yae Mattan*, p.270

<sup>73</sup> *ibid*, p.302



them in book form. However, the articles written by U Hla were beneficial for the prosperity and economic development of Myanmar. Therefore the collection of articles was printed by the Pyinsayupan Press in Pyay Township in September 1939 at the request of some people.<sup>74</sup>

U Hla travelled to Japan several times for his business before the war with Japan. The last time he went to Japan was with his wife, but when he returned to Myanmar, he suffered a paralytic attack.<sup>75</sup> When the Revolutionary Council assumed power on 2 March 1962, all industries, large and small, were nationalised. U Hla's business was also nationalised. U Hla's condition became worse after he lost his business, and he died in 1965 in Yangon.<sup>76</sup>

## Conclusion

U Hla went to Japan because he wanted to study the country's textile industry, which was related to his business. Moreover, Japan also produced many commodities and goods that were used in Myanmar. He wanted his people to be interested in commercial activities to ensure the economic well-being and prosperity of Myanmar. U Hla also wanted the Myanmar people who were not satisfied with domestic products to connect with foreign countries directly. U Hla visited and studied many weaving and textile factories. He also bought machines and bicycles, which would be useful for the Myanmar people. U Hla learnt how the Japanese became prosperous within a short time. The factors of economic development in Japan were the living standard, the culture of showing respect to others, the industrious nature of adults, the tradition of engaging in business without dividing family possessions, and a superior education system. U Hla was interested in Japan's banking business because it played an important role in the commercial relations between both countries. He wanted the Myanmar people to emulate the Japanese people's knowledge and experiences in the banking business. After U Hla arrived in Myanmar, he wrote and published a book titled *Myanmar – Japan Gyi Pwar Yae Mattan*. Among eastern countries such as Japan, China, Thailand, the Philippines, and Myanmar, the people of Myanmar in particular were anxious about getting involved in economic activities in other countries. Myanmar had inferior economic, social, and educational conditions compared with other Asian countries at that time. The factors for the poor standard included people's unhelpful

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<sup>74</sup> U Hla, *Myanmar – Japan Gyi Pwar Yae Mattan*, p.1

<sup>75</sup> Interview, Daw San (7 April 2019 in Shwedaung)  
(She did not remember the exact date and year. Other documents were destroyed because of the Japanese bombing of the town during the war)

<sup>76</sup> Interview, Daw San (7 April 2019 in Shwedaung)

attitude, tendency to waste money, laziness, impatience, reluctance to study abroad, and weakness in commercial matters. Therefore, U Hla, in his book, urged the Myanmar people to emulate the Japanese behaviour. The readers would be willing to conduct their business like the Japanese after reading this book.

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2. Daw Kyu Kyu, 56 years old, High School Teacher, Lun Building, Merchant Road, Yangon (before U Hla's owned building), U Hla's niece (18 April 2019 at Yangon)
3. U Tint Maung, 95 years old, Duyindubo village, Shwedaung, U Hla's neighbor (18 May 2019 at Duyindubo village, Shwedaung)

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