Dr. Than Tun and Myanmar Language & Literature

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Abstract

History, language, and literature are inseparable. Undoubtedly, historian represents the past via language and employs literature as historical evidence. The late Dr. Than Tun, the highly respected and prominent Myanmar historian, was trained in a positivist fashion under the supervision of D.G.E. Hall and G.H. Luce, the leading colonial scholars. Hence, his treatment of literature fundamentally confined to and empirical historical framework, attaching great importance to its factual data and historicity. Nonetheless, some of his writings reveal that he did not neglect discussing how to trace back and interpret Myanmar history from fictional genres of the past, for example, myth, legend and folklore. He suggests that pre-Buddhist elements of pre-literate societies are preserved in those traditional songs, fables, proverbs, riddles and customs. Moreover, to study the history of Myanmar literature is supposed to begin with the earliest form of literature, the oral tradition. While his copious historical research was primarily based on very formal literary evidence, for instance, inscriptions, royal orders, first-hand accounts, contemporary historical documents on tax, revenue, demography and even tombstones, when he wrote his works he preferred to write in the colloquial Myanmar form. He advocated Ludu U Hla’s campaign for simple and accessible writings for people. He also urged his pupils to write theses in the colloquial language. This paper attempts to analyze Dr. Than Tun’s perception of Myanmar language and literature in a light of the historical context of Myanmar society.
Introduction

This paper is a part of the ongoing research project on Dr. Than Tun (1923 - 2005): A Journey of Myanmar historian from the colonial time to the nation-building period. The project receives a grant from the Thailand Research Fund (TRF). The main objectives of the project are to study his life and experience and to analyze his historical concept and explanation. The late Dr. Than Tun was one of the highly respected and prominent Myanmar historians. He greatly contributed to the studies of Myanmar History and Archaeology. Apart from his major fields of interest, he also wrote some pieces concerning Myanmar language and literature in few different issues. For instance, his reading experience and favorite books in his student time, his advocate for simple and accessible writings for people, his critiques of historical fictions and history of Myanmar literature in very early period, his suggestions on interpreting oral literature for tracing back history of Myanmar people in pre-Buddhist and pre-literacy societies. Moreover, he had done many translations into English and Myanmar. His training and profession were not directly in the field of Myanmar language and literature; nonetheless, he shared interesting views and ideas on the subjects from his empirical historical framework.

This paper attempts to analyze his perception of Myanmar language and literature in a light of the historical context of Myanmar society from the late colonial time to the independence period. It partly reveals intellectual debates developing within Myanmar academia on the studies of Myanmar language, literature, and history. In this paper, I will discuss Dr. Than Tun’s reading experience and its influence on his life and the way of thinking firstly; then, his reason for supporting the writing Myanmar language in colloquial style; lastly, his critiques and suggestions on the studies of Myanmar literature.

Dr. Than Tun and his world of literature in the 1930s and the 1940s

Dr. Than Tun was born on 6th April 1923\footnote{Dr. Than Tun’s life and experience presents in the paper is mainly based on his autobiography; the Myanmar version Nga-Pyaw-Chin Tha-mya Nga A-kyautng (2001) and the English version I would say this much (2002a).}. At that time, the Myanmar nationalist sentiment was rising. He came from a well-to-do family in Ngathaiggyaung town, Pathein District, Ayeyarwady Division, Lower Myanmar. His parents were devout Buddhists. He was sent to a monastery in the village to begin his education. He could fluently recite Pali chants before he knew the meaning. His father joined the nationalist campaigns of the Young Men’s Buddhist Association (Y MBA) and later The General Council of Burmese Association (GCBA). He grew up in the nationalistic atmosphere. The Aided National High School of Ngathaiggyaung, at which he had studied, was a result of the National school movement leading by GCBA since the first Rangoon University Students’ Boycott in 1920. Here he firstly entered his literary world through the famous nationalistic Myanmar history textbooks of U Po Kya, U Ba Than, and U Thein Maung. U Po Kya’s Khit-hmi Myanmar Yazawin-agyn [A Brief Modern History of Myanmar] (1936) and Myanmar Gon-yi Yazawin Hpat-sa [Myanmar Pride: History Reading] (1938) were a few examples of those textbooks, which successfully imposed patriotism on him.
Dr. Than Tun had grown up in the time that Myanmar language and literature was on the rise, after its long inferiority to English under missionary schools and modern education the British brought to Myanmar. The profound studies of Professor Anna J. Allott and U Tin Htway on Myanmar literature and important literary figures clearly explains the development of modern Burmese (Myanmar) language and literature in Myanmar society since the early 20th century (Allott, 1996, 2004; Tin Htway, 1972). John S. Furnivall and Professor U Pe Maung Tin played the most important roles in encouraging and developing the use of modern Myanmar in modern forms of writings as well as promoting the studies of Myanmar language and literature. The Burma Research Society, founded in 1910 and its Journal of Burma Research Society (JBR), firstly launched in 1911 and the Burma Education Extension Association, established around 1928 and its two-version literary magazines, namely the World of Books (in English) and Ganda Lawka (in Myanmar) were significant platforms of the studies of Myanmar language and literature, modern Myanmar literature and translations. U Pe Maung Tin took a significant role in establishing the course on Myanmar language and literature at Rangoon University. He also “urged all Burmans to write in Burmese (Allot, 2004, 18). The effort Furnivall had invested in Myanmar scholarship together with Professor U Pe Maung Tin’s tireless training his pupils at the Rangoon University finally bore fruit. His students, especially those of the Khitsan Movement (Time-testing literary movement), later became the leading literary figures of the country, namely Theik-pan Maung Wa, U Thein Han (Zawgyi) Maung E Maung, U Wun (Minthuwun) and Maung Toe Aung (ibid., 18 – 21; Win Pe, 2009, 96).

Dr. Than Tun was contemporary with, yet junior to those important Myanmar intellectuals such as Theippang Maung Wa (1899 – 1942), Thakin Ba Thaung (1901 – 1962), Zawgyi (U Thein Han) (1907 – 1990), Thankin Nu (1907 – 1995), U Thant (1909 – 1974), Min Thu Wun (1909 – 2004), Nwe Soe (U Myo Min) (1910 – 1995), Ludu U Hla (1910 – 1982), Thein Pe Myint (1914 – 1978) and Thakin Aung San (1915 – 1947) etc. Many of them directly took part in the Khit-san movement in the 1930s and Ganda Lawka magazine was a part of their lives. Their writings and translations were published, and some were awarded Ganda Lawka translation prize. Ganda Lawka magazine had ceased its publication in 1942 when Myanmar was under Japanese occupation. It is interesting to find out that the modern literary works of the Khit-san writers and famous Ganda Lawka were of no interest to Dr. Than Tun. He did not mention anything about them in his autobiography and his articles. Books and literature he read and influencing him were of a different genre.

Dr. Than Tun became a bookworm when he was in seventh grade. The Myanmar nationalist movement, which reached its peak in the 1930s, together with his nationalistic education were major motivational factors of his interest in politics. He clearly stated that he read a lot, but he was not interested in literature. His main concern was politics. At that time, his range of reading did not confine only to writings and literature of Myanmar patriotism. He read books on Marxism, Nazi, Fascism, Dobama Asiyone, the 1936 strike, the 1938 strike and the 1300 revolution, etc. He mentioned some specific book-titles in his autobiography such as Grammar of Politics by Laski H.S, Socialist Sixth of the World by Hewlett Johnson, National Socialism by Hitler, My Struggle by Hitler, Communist Manifesto by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, writings of Thakin Htun Ohn, Thakin Kodaw Hmaing, U Then Maung as well as nationalistic novels by Maha Swe. His political interest had extended from nationalism to internationalism. He was determined to equip himself with various branches of knowledge, including History, Geography, Economics and Law. The knowledge would

Most of the leftist books he read were published by the Nagani Book Club. The Club was founded in 1937 by Thakin Nu and U Tun Aye, later other important political figures joined the Club. The Nagani Book Club’s primary aim was to free Myanmar from the colonial rule. It attempted to 1) train Myanmar people to understand thoroughly a valid ideology and to be systematic 2) bring about a selection of political warriors, and 3) to be aware of the tactics and strength of other forces fighting against the colonists (Nyein Nyein Win, 2007, 50 – 51). Leftist books and Marxist ideology had a strong influence on him. When he entered Rangoon University in 1939, he also joined the Communist Partly of Burma (CPB). He got involved in the politics, working with the Anti Fascist People Freedom League (AFPFL) as the first president of the AFPFL Ngathaiggyaung branch to operate an underground resistance movement against the Japanese army during 1942 – 1945. After WWII, he was a president of Rangoon University Student Union (RUSU) and was also an editor of the Union’s newspaper, Student News. He wrote articles slamming the nomination of university executives, criticizing current politics and attacking the Dominion status of Myanmar. In 1946, he was elected the president of the All Burma Student Union (ABSU) in 1946. He led the student demonstration and boycott by following the guideline of the Communist Party of Burma. Because of the conflict within the ABSU, in early 1947 he was “coup de grace politics”. Members of ABSU had elected a new president to replace him. Since 1948 he had decided to cease his involvement in politics and his relation with the CPB.

When Dr. Than Tun was studying at Rangoon University, he also read a lot of western novels. It was not out of his interest in western literature, yet his strategy to improve his English language. Professor U Myo Min, a lecturer at Department of English suggested him this tactics. Dr. Than Tun selected two famous writers, H.G. Wells, and Thomas Hardy and then he read all of their works that he could access. He seemed to appreciate science fiction works of H.G. Wells. The Time Machine (1895), The Island of Doctor Moreau (1896), The Invisible Man (1897) and The War of the Worlds (1898) were his favorite books. This method helped him a good command in English. He had translated a history textbook of James Henry Breasted, Ancient Time-A History of the Early World (1916) into Myanmar in 1951 before he was granted a state scholarship to study the Doctoral degree in History at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in 1952. H.G. Wells’ The Outline of History (1920) was also introduced to use as a textbook for students by D.G.E. Hall. Somehow, these books may have an influence on his perception of history as progressive development and his believe in the power of the scientific method.

“Write as you say it.”

When Dr. Than Tun was ordered to move to Mandalay University in 1965, he had developed a new circle of friends in Anya area. He joined the Upper Myanmar Writers’ Association led by Ludu U Hla. He became good lifelong friends with Ludu U Hla and Ludu Daw Amar. Dr. Than Tun took part in the literary activities of the Ludu Kyibwayay Press. He also advocated Ludu U Hla’s campaign for simple and accessible writings for all people. The Upper Writers group preferred using a colloquial or ‘modern’ form of Myanmar rather than the accepted formal literary style. Dr. Than Tun set off using
the colloquial Myanmar in his academic writings and allowing his students to do the same in their exam paper (Allot, 1997, 93). This campaign could not gain support from major writers’ communities. It could not bring change to the way to write Myanmar language. Nonetheless, it is interesting to analyze the reason Dr. Than Tun advocated this campaign. He gave the reason in his autobiography:

...Man–Ape (Gorilla, Chimpanzee, Orangutan) and Ape– Man (Homo habilis) could communicate each other with voice. They could express anger, fear, happiness and sorrow by using voice together with facial expression and gesture of hand. Speech begun with Early Man (Homo erectus) who had lived between 1.3 million years–30,00 years BP. The art of writing appeared only about 5000 year BP. Don’t ask me how they would write. They wrote the language as it was spoken. If it were so at the beginning why can’t we do it now? It is much simpler than the conventional way. Language is always growing. And please also remember that there is at least a generation (twenty years) gap between the teacher and the pupil whenever a writing lesson is started. Myanmar started writing only nine hundred years ago. They learnt Pa-li and wrote on themes Buddhism. Then they tried the translation of the Ja-takas into Myanma. Recording folk tales, folk medicine and customary law cam very much later... (Than Tun, 2002a, 18 – 19)

From his statement, he rather had a liberal and progressive view in terms of the function of Myanmar language in the society. It is reasonable to assume that he and Ludu U Hla were influenced by Communism. Their political views tended toward leftist blocs. In fact, not only Communist country like China had the policy to simplify the Chinese language in order to increase literacy and to be accessible to all people, Thailand once had this kind of scheme too. The fascist-cum-Thai-ultra-nationalist leader, Field Marshal Phibunsongkram had implemented the Thai-script simplification program in the early 1940s for the purpose of promoting the use of Thai language nationwide. However, it was repealed after the end of WWII.

To my knowledge, I have not yet found any other written documents of Dr. Than Tun mentioning further discussion of the “Write as you say it” campaign. In practice, he kept writing his works, either academic paper or magazine article, in colloquial Myanmar. However, most of the publishers still hold their conservative perception of Myanmar language usage, they often changed Dr. Than Tun’s writings into proper written Myanmar language in publications. I found one of his translated books entitled A-yan Ei-ka-rit A-ku Lu (from Emperor to Citizen: The Autobiography of Aisim” (1997) is in colloquial Myanmar. The reason behind this practice might not come only from the academic rationale, but perhaps from his political perspective and standpoint. Many of his writings showed that he tended toward anti-patriotism and anti-chauvinism, was against particularly academic works written to serve, promote and conform with those nationalistic ideology. It was one of his primary
points when he critiqued any works on history as well as literature (see Than Tun, 1998, 200 – 213, 2002b, 1 – 22, 2004b 141 – 155 etc.).

Under the Colonial rule, Myanmar language and literature were devalued and far inferior to English, the language of the British Empire and the modern knowledge of the colonists. The revival of Myanmar language and literature in the early twentieth century was basically motivated by nationalism. Scholars like John S. Furnivall and U Pe Maung Tin attempted to modernize the use of Myanmar language and to upgrade the studies of Myanmar language and literature to meet the British standard. Myanmar nationalists inclined to perceive Myanmar language and literature as the pride of Myanmar people and nation and utilize them as tools to counter the British. It was a duty of Myanmar people to praise, preserve and protect their Myanmar language and literature. As the motto of Dobama Asiayone or Thankin slogan:

- Burma is Our Country
- Burmese is Our Literature
- Burmese is Our Language
- Cherish Our Literature
- Uphold Our Language (Khin Yi, 1988, 5)

Myanmar language and literature, including history, were positioned as Myanmar’s heritage proving the great civilization of Myanmar. They revived their traditional literary works, yet studied them in a light of modern methodology from the West. They tried to build new vocabularies in Myanmar to replace the transliterated forms of English words and to meet modern knowledge; nonetheless, they apparently systemized Myanmar language’s grammar and syntax in accordance with the traditional fashion of Pali language. Myanmar leading scholars, intellectuals, and political figures during the late colonial time probably were less aware of Myanmar language as a mode of communication. The studies of scholars and the campaign of the nationalists could rouse nationalistic sentiments of Myanmar people, however, they apparently missed an opportunity to utilize Myanmar language in a constructive way as a political tool to connect and unite ordinary people from variety of classes and ethnic languages in general.

Myanmar government after Independence tried to centralize authority in standardizing Myanmar language (Myanmar history as well). After the 1962 coup d’état, the Military Government took control of Myanmar language and literature directly. The Literary and Translation Commission was set up in 1963 charged with “...the urgent publication of an official standard Burmese dictionary, a Burmese spelling book, a manual of Burmese composition, compilation of Burmese terminology, compilation, translation, publication of needed textbooks, reference books, periodicals, etc.,... (Allot, 1981, 15)” With its new University Education System in March 1964, Myanmar language was enforced to be a medium in teaching all subjects at university, instead of English (ibid., 13). Moreover, the Military Government imposed an intensive assimilation policy, “Burmanization”. The Government banned the teaching of all non-Burman ethnic languages and literature in both private and public schools (Pan Nya Mon, 2014, 2). During the Military Regime Myanmar language and literature were exploited to strengthen Myanmar people’s patriotism and to suppress other ethnicities.
Remarkably, the way Dr. Than Tun perceived and used Myanmar language rather opposed to those of the Military Government and the mainstream scholars. He did not take Myanmar language and literature as the national pride, but he emphasized Myanmar language as a medium to communicate and considered literature as a kind of historical evidence to trace back human’s activities and ideas in the past. His idea of using colloquial Myanmar in writing was a part of his main standpoints against the patriotic framework of the studies of Myanmar language, literature, and history. To me, based one his political background, this also implies his political message against the authoritarian regime.

**Dr. Than Tun’s critiques**

Dr. Than Tun was a historian by training and profession. He got B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. in History together with another B.L. degree. The history course he studied at Rangoon University was based on D.G.E. Hall’s curriculum. Professor Hall initially introduced World history to Intermediate level. Myanmar History was offered as a part of History of the Far East/Asia. Professor G.H.Luce was responsible for teaching Myanmar History. These two leading scholars of Southeast Asian Studies left Rangoon University before Dr. Than Tun’s enrollment. Dr. Than Tun met them and became their student when he studied Ph.D. in History at SOAS. His original plan was to study History of Myanmar-Shan relation in the late Konbaung period under the supervision of D.G.E. Hall. It was because of the persuasion of G.H. Luce that he had changed his topic to study the ancient history of Pagan instead. He had to enter new academic realms of Epigraphy and Archaeology in order to enable himself to read and interpret historical evidence of Pagan era.

Dr. Than Tun was trained in a positivist fashion. He had empirical-historical approach and used the scientific method to conduct history research. Therefore, his main concern was primary historical evidence. He attached great importance to its historicity, accuracy and factual data. The accurate historical information would reveal the past directly. It was the historical methodology that he taught his students as well (Than Tun, 1999). He explained what research is:

> Nothing is new. We look for a lost thing that had happened once. Due to the lapse of time we only remember it vaguely or we have forgotten it completely. In science too, the potentials of a certain element is not noticed before. When it is noticed, it could be put in good use.

> Investigations should be thorough. Carelessness when detected would be a great discredit to the person who did the investigation...

> ...Every statement should be supported by evidences. It is hard to believe anything said without documentation.

> An exaggeration with too much imagination is disgusting. Avoid it. Use a little imagination only when it is absolutely necessary.
A bias account is discreditable. A pre-conceived idea is useless. Intense nationalism could be misleading. Only an honest account is permissible...(ibid., 1)

His major works were based on extracting historical fact from the written historical documents such as inscriptions, royal orders, first-hand accounts, primary historical documents on tax, revenue, demography and even tombstones. His Ph.D dissertation entitled *The Buddhist Church in Burma during the Pagan Period, 1044 – 1287* (1956) and series of articles on Pagan and Ava era were based on the studies of contemporary inscriptions. His monumental work of *The Royal Orders of Burma, AD 1598 – 1885* is the ten-volume publications of the primary royal documents with his introduction, note and summary of each order in English (Than Tun, 1983 – 1989).

When Dr. Than Tun came to the field of Myanmar literature, he mainly focused on historical fictions. As a historian with an empirical historical approach, historicity, patriotism, and realistic aspect were his main points to critique Myanmar historical fictions. Daw Khin Myo Chit, one of the countrywide well-known female writers, had written a historical novel on the king of Pagan in 1970 entitled *Anawratha of Burma* (later called *King Among Men* (1996)). Dr. Than Tun stated that Khin Myo Chit came to ask for suggestions from historians like him and Col.Ba Shin, but “…she failed to follow their advice to differentiate myth from reality…” He criticized that historian “…could not write more than thirty lines on Anawyahta but Khin Myo Chit wrote more than 300 pages on him…” He further stated “…[We] have no evidence either to accept or refute the following events, which the chroniclers tell with relish…” Then he pointed out series of mythical events of Anawyahta reign, which were main parts of the main plot. He was rather disapproving as he said “…All these are good material for dramatization. It is, however, absurd to take all of them as real. Too much of an imagination obscured history. History does not allow imagination. We doubt the historicity …(Than Tun, 2002a, 24 – 26).

Dr. Than Tun wrote a long review of Thakin Kodaw Hmaing’s historical novel entitled *Dhammazedzi Wutthu* (1915). He began with giving the criteria for evaluating a book. In general, there were three main points to concern: the author’s objectives, the given background in terms of space and time and the outstanding matter. For historical fiction, he added another two to the checklist. A reviewer has to investigate whether there are historicity and sense of patriotism in the historical narration. To him, *Dhammazedzi Wuttha* was not yet a strong nationalistic historical novel, but it contained some political massages related to the Wunthau Athin, a nationalist village-base organization that Thakin Kodaw Hmaing had participation. Dr. Than Tun long discussed historical inaccuracy and unrealistic aspects of the novel into detail in terms of word usage, custom, costume, device, liquor, place names and geographical settings, etc. He commented that the author was supposed to conduct a good research and consult all books and articles written on this topic before setting off the writing, so the author could make the story realistic. In his conclusion, the novel was not good enough. The title was Dhammazedzi but most of the story was a detailed biography of Queen Shin Sawbu. The author ended the story at the time Dhammazedi was enthroned, without further mentioning important religious activities and events happened in the reign. Though the plot was based on the story in Chronicles, the author ignored historicity in narrating (Than Tun, 2007, 195 – 222).
Dr. Than Tun also reviewed academic writings on Myanmar literature. He gave a comment to Professor U Pe Maung Tin’s *Myanmar Sarpay Thamaing* (1958). He mentioned in his autobiography that “…[I] read the History of Myanmar Literature by Pe Maung Tin and I find it unsatisfactory. I wanted to write my own history of Myanmar Literature but I need the help of someone who has had a good knowledge of Myanmar classics…(Than Tun, 2002a, 50).” It would be very interesting and useful to learn how he critique U Pe Maung Tin, however, it is my own limitation, I could not find Dr. Than Tun’s writings on History of Burmese Literature (1981) and his articles on U Pe Maung Tin entitled “U Pe Maung Tin and History of Myanmar Literature” and “U Pe Maung Tin and Myanma Novels”, the two papers which Dr. Than Tun read in U Pe Muang Tin’s 111th Birthday Symposium, Anglican Church, Archbishop Court on 12 December 1998 (Studies in Myanmar History Volume I: Essays Given to Than Tun on his 75th Birthday, 1999, xxxix). I could access only his article on “Myanmar Sarpay Thamaing A-sa [The Beginning of the History of Myanmar Literature]” (1991-1992/2001b) allowing me to trace Dr. Than Tun’s idea of the early history of Myanmar literature and perhaps his comments against the History of Myanmar Literature of U Pe Maung Tin.

U Pe Maung Tin began the history of Myanmar literature with the literature of Pagan period, inscriptions. While Dr. Than Tun in his “Myanmar Sarpay Thamaing A-sa” suggested that history of Myanmar literature had already started and appeared when people could speak and use their speech to communicate. People learned how to tell their story by oral tradition. Therefore, to study the history of Myanmar literature is supposed to begin with the earliest form of oral literature. In this article, he also suggested the usefulness of oral literature for historical research. I notice some changes in his attitude toward historical evidence. Most of his major writings in the 1960s and the 1970s had attached importance to written historical evidence and archaeological findings. His books on early history of Myanmar such as *Khit Haung Myanmar Yazawin [Ancient History of Myanmar]* (first printed in 1964) and *A-thit Myin Bama Thamaing* [Burma History: New Perspective] (first printed in 1975) provided chapters on prehistory and proto-history of Myanmar heavily based on archaeological artifacts and excavation reports, without mentioning the oral tradition. Moreover, he insisted that the beginning parts of Myanmar chronicles including the reign of Anawratha were myths without concrete evidence, so historians should not rely on when writing history. He may change his idea sometime later after gaining more new knowledge from reading, from field studies and perhaps from his academic experiences abroad after his retirement. For me, it is so interesting to find out in this article that he supported historians to use the oral literature to trace the past. He suggests that pre-Buddhist elements of pre-literate societies are preserved in those traditional songs, fables, proverbs, riddles, myth, legend, folklore and customs. He also gave a brief rough analysis of the oral literature. Nonetheless, I found none of his historical studies based on oral tradition.
Conclusion

Scholars and students of Humanities nowadays may find Dr. Than Tun’s comments on literary works very out-of-date and perhaps provide no any developments in terms of approach, methodology and interpretation. These days, historicity is no longer a prime concern to evaluate or analyze historical novels. His treatment of History and also Literature was somehow a legacy from the late colonial period. His main contribution, as a historian, to Myanmar History is his great studies of Myanmar primary historical sources particularly inscriptions and Royal orders. He also endeavored to educate his students and Myanmar people to differentiate fact from fiction, between history and myth/imaginary narrative. In his days, he once brought some changes and new interpretations to the Myanmar history. But today, his works, besides an abundance of useful factual data of the past, perhaps are merely of “Conventional tradition” to young generation.

So, what is the point to study and analyze his idea whether on history, literature or language, etc.? What do we learn from his discussion? The answer is an Intellectual history of Myanmar. Even though, Myanmar had undergone half-century long dark period of successive Military regime, there was no freedom of speech and the education system was completely destroyed, students of Myanmar History and Myanmar Studies today should not ignore the intellectual debates of the academia inside the country. Not only state discourses or writings of political activists, but scholarly works also have an influence on Myanmar society to a certain extent. Studying Dr. Than Tun’s could reveal the intellectual condition of Myanmar. The international academic community recognized his contribution to Myanmar studies; he was awarded Fukuoka Asia Culture Prize in 2000. In Myanmar, he was undeniably the most respected and influential architect of the professional standard of historical training at the university level. As being isolated under the successive military regime for almost 50 years, the homegrown scholars are inevitably left behind or hardly gain access to any new approaches and up-to-date scholarship worldwide. The empirical-historical approach and scientific methodology of history that Dr. Than Tun had kept training his students and had applied in his research eventually become the mainstream of academic historical studies in Myanmar up to the present day.

It is rather an underestimate to consider Dr. Than Tun as merely a student of G.H. Luce and D.G.E. Hall or just a follower of the old school history of the late colonial period. Their academic influence on him was undeniable, and his historical studies were obviously based on empiricist epistemology. Dr. Than Tun had worked as a history professor and kept teaching, researching and writing articles for entire life in the severe authoritarian circumstances. Under the Military regime, education was not for the purpose of developing citizens’ intellectual ability but was a political mechanism to control people’s mind. History, Language and Literature, were exploited to socialize Myanmar people. Dr. Than Tun passed away in 2005, almost six years before the dramatic change of the country. As a learned scholar with political consciousness, the main arguments he had developed in his works and the propositions he had projected to his students and society were his debates on historical knowledge with the mainstream discourse that dominating people’s perception of Myanmar history in general. For him, patriotism was a great threat not only to the studies of history but also the studies of literature and language. It misled Myanmar people’s understanding.
References


