

Chapter VI

Conclusion

Myanmar and Thailand have existed through history. Both countries share a long border of over 1300 miles. They are among the five countries which practice Theravada Buddhism in South and Southeast Asia regions namely Myanmar, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Laos and Cambodia. Not only this, Myanmar cultures are quite similar to those of Thailand to such an extent that sometimes it is hard to differentiate between the two.

However, it is natural that there have been some problems and discontents between them as the two countries shares a long border. To make matter worse, fierce rivalry between the two countries broke out for more than four Centuries which in the end led to the fall of Ayutthaya in 1767.

It is no wonder that the sentiments and mind-sets of Thai people are against Myanmar as a consequences of this war. Myanmar has been portrayed as a traditional foe of Thailand by the Thai royalist and nationalist leaders in the early part of the 20th century. Mainly because of that, there is bad blood between the two nations.

Myanmar and Thailand fought many wars before the final destruction of Ayutthaya but the impact of the war of 1767 was most devastating and far reaching. It was a black mark in the histories of the two countries which resulted in bringing about lasting suspicions and distrusting between Myanmar and Thailand. To put it bluntly, we still suffer the after-effects and consequences of this war until today.

In the Thais' perception, Myanmar was at first portrayed as destroyers of Ayutthaya and Buddhism. During the nation building period in the face of the menace of European colonialists in South East Asia in the reign of Rama V, Myanmar was portrayed as the traditional foe of the Thai nation.¹ Furthermore, General Phibun's propagandist Luang Wichitwathakan portrayed Myanmar as an enemy of the Thai nation

¹ Dr. Sunait, *On both sides of the Tenasserim range*, Thailand: Chulalongkorn University, 1995), Page19.

in his works on history and theatrical scripts. This has been reinforced through school textbooks, literature and movies which stressed patriotism.

On the other hand, Myanmar people did not bear animosity against Thai people in the first place. However, frequent mistreatments by Thai people during interaction in the course of time sowed the seed of hatred among Myanmar people towards the Thais.²

One encouraging sign is the new approach held by famous Thai historians of the twenty first century. Among those outstanding scholars are Sunait Chutintaranond, Kusuma Raksamani, Aronrut Wichienkeo, Withaya Sucharithanarugse, Chalong Soontravanich, and Charnvit Karetsiri.

In analyzing the book *Our wars with the Burmese* by Prince Damrong, Sunait Chutintaranond rightly pointed out that "There is no mistaking the fact that Thai Rop Phama is one of the most influential historical works, responsible for popularizing the image of the Burmese as an enemy of the Thai nation."³

Nusara Thaitawat made a remark in an article entitled "The Shadow of an Enemy" appeared in the Bangkok Post in December 2000 that "In films, literature, and media, Burma is Thailand's arch enemy, but there may be little truth to the popular perception."⁴

Those feelings and sentiments are deeply rooted in the hearts and minds of the people. It became a thorn in the side of Myanmar-Thai relations. However, we should deal with this thorn before it pricks us. Failure to do so could have die consequences. In doing so, anti Myanmar or anti Thailand feelings should not be rekindled in the name of nationalism. We must accept that there were merely old rivalries between the neighbors

² Vorapun Srivoranart, "Burmese ties: More the enemy within than the enemy without", Page 75.

³ Prince Damrang Rajanubhab, **The Chronicle Of Our Wars With The Burmese; Hostilities between Siamese and Burmese when Ayutthaya was the capital of Siam.** (White Lotus Co.Ltd. 2001), Page 162.

⁴ Dr. Sunait Chutintaranond and Kanokphan U-sha, **From Fact to Fiction: History of Thai-Myanmar Relations in Cultural Context**, Sunait (ed), (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, April 2001), Pages 55-56.



in which kings fought against kings which has nothing to do with the peoples of both countries.

As stated before, Myanmar literature emerged since time immemorial. With the changing of times, many genres of Myanmar literature such as Eigyin, Igin, Yadu, etc, were grown up and fully developed. Many of them reflect the prevailing situations of the particular times in history. It is noteworthy that in the course of time, some genres have become obscured but Mawgun has achieved some sort of permanence over the last one thousand years or so. Posterity can benefit from studying these genres of Myanmar literature for the historical purposes.

Letwe Nawrahta's Yodayar Naing Mawgun is different from other Mawguns. It gives more emphasis on the clear and straightforward style of writing than high sounding and flowery written style. Needless to say, recording events in poem is far more difficult than in prose. Though written in poetic form, each episode of the Mawgun was composed vividly and in a most comprehensive way.

Letwe Nawrahta achieved high marks in discharging of his duties under six successive kings during those turbulent times in history. He received many titles under these kings and was given the highest title of Mingyi Maha Thiha Thura during the reign of King Bodawpaya.

Previously, Letwe Nawrahta's works were known only to a few scholars. This is because his work had been overshadowed and mixed up with that of another contemporary minister writer Letwe Thondra (1727-1799). They were about the same age, came from the same region and served under the same kings, rising to high positions of ministerial rank under the early kings of Konbaung Dynasty.⁵ Thanks to the efforts of our historians and archeologists and the inscriptions at Tilawka pagoda donated by Letwe Nawrahta in Monywa, we solved the problems distinguishing the life and work of Letwe Nawrahta from that of Letwe Thondra. However, many of his works are still missing and until recently, Yodayar Naing Mawgun was one of them.

⁵ To see more about it, U Thaw Kaung, *Aspects of Myanmar History and Culture*

We have found that the content of the Mawgun is more or less similar to Konbounset Yazawindawgyi written by U Maung Maung Tin during the early British colonial period. It seems that the chroniclers of Hman nan Yazawindawgyi, Second Maha Yazawindawgyi and Konbounset Maha Yazawindawgyi made many references to Letwe Nawrahta's Mawgun and they later added to their chronicles more detailed accounts of the war.

If we look at some discrepancies between the Mawgun and the Konbounset Yazawindawgyi, Letwe Nawrahta mentions in the preamble that the unstable situation in Chiang Mai supported to ensure what Alaungpaya, before his death, enjoined his sons to spark an invasion to Ayutthaya. We could not find it anywhere in the Myanmar and Thai chronicles including Konbounset Maha Yazawindawgyi.

According to the Mawgun, Dawei column was sent to invest Ayutthaya via Tavoy because it stopped paying tribute to Hsinphyushin. Konbounset mentions that in sending troops to Tavoy to attack Ayutthaya, the king said that Ayutthaya with its palace of gold had never been badly defeated before. It is unlikely that Zimmme column alone could achieve the royal aim to overcome the Siamese capital. Only if the strength of Hanthawaddy, Martaban, Mergui and Tavoy could be utilized, will the Ayedaw (struggle) be successful.⁶

Another interesting event mentioned in the Mawgun was that the Siamese used only ropes for entering and exiting of the city as they relaxed no efforts in their defence. Konbounset Maha Yazawindawgyi omits it and the last part of the Mawgun from stanza 36 to 46 which mentions the names of the rank and file from king Bayintnaung and Hsinphyushin's armies.

Among the historical writings of Myanmar, Yazawin, Mawgun and Eigyin comprise the bulk of historical facts and figures. According to Hla Pe, Kyauk sa and

⁶ U Maung Maung Tin, *konbaungset Maha Yazawindawgyi*. (Yangon: Yar-pyi Sar-oke Taik, 2004), Page 276.

Yazawin are chronicles in prose and Mawgun and Eigyin are chronicles in verse.⁷ Owing to their nature and the circumstances under which they had to be composed, there are many panegyric writings in these documents. We can say that one of the flaws in Myanmar literature is none other than panegyric writing. The more panegyric writing is contained, the less historical value or facts will be in it. But if we look at it from a different angle, some of them are useful for historical purpose because they are eulogies of kings in praise of royal cities, palaces, regalia, etc.

One important factor in the study of historiography is its reliability. In Letwe Nawrahta's Yodayar Naing Mawgun, there is no evidence to prove that the author was an eyewitness to this war of 1767. Thus, the Mawgun is not an account of a single observer. However, as his account is a distillation of interviews with several rank and files from the armies who participated in the war, it may enhance the balance and dependability of the Mawgun.

Moreover, his knowledge on king's behavior and attitude, inner working of the court, military campaigns, ceremonial and religious affairs would surely contribute to the writing of the Mawgun.

With regard to the reliability of the chronicles, it is a common practice that Myanmar and Thai chronicles like other Southeast Asia chronicles were written or amended with bias and distortions under the influences of kings and the prevailing situation at that time. I would like to cite two examples from the history of Myanmar.

The first example concerns the reliability of U Kala's Yazawin. Some western scholars thought that his chronicle was a fairy tale published in a book form. Victor Lieberman, after checking U Kala's chronicle with the reports of two Jesuits priest at that time, concluded that besides the part of pre Bagan period, U Kala's chronicle is a reliable source supported by textual and archeological evidences. One of the important reasons for this is U Kala's private and unofficial character. Because of his wealth, he was able to

⁷ U Hla Pe, **Burma: Literature, Historiography, Scholarship, Language, Life and Buddhism**, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Heng Mui Keng Terrace, Pasir Panjang, Singapore 0511, © (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1985), Page 37.

devote himself to a scholar's life. His writings were free from the excessive moralizing of the monks and the subservient tone of the ministers⁸.

The second example is that though King Bagyidaw ruled the country up to 1837, the writing of Hmanan Yazawindawgyi ends in 1821. The reason is that the first Anglo-Burmese war broke out in 1824 and ended with the defeat of Myanmar armies. The inclusion of this episode would have been embarrassing to the king so that the compilers may have felt that 1821 was a convenient place to stop the chronicle.⁹

I would like to add another interesting event that commenced after the 1st Anglo-Burmese war in 1826. When the war was over, the British envoy John Crawfurd (1763-1868) came to the capital to observe whether a permanent British resident should reside in Innwa. In his record, he mentioned that;

"This the Court Historiographer had recorded in the National Chronicle his account of the war with the English The strangers had spent vast sums of money in their enterprise; and by the time they reached Yandabo, their resources were exhausted and they were in great distress. They petitioned the king, who, in his clemency and generosity sent them vast sums of money to pay their expenses back, and ordered them out of the country."

The existence of such a historiographer or palace record became a bone of contention between Myanmar historians. Dr. Htin Aung, U Tet Htoot and British resident Henry Burney rejected Crawfurd's proposition but Dr. Hla Pe consented to agree with it.

Likewise, according to Victor Lieberman, the Pali Jinakalamali chronicle written in Chiang Mai in 1516, and the Luang Prasert version of the Ayutthaya chronicles written during Narai's reign (1656-88), boast a high degree of demonstrated chronological and narrative accuracy. However, the Luang Prasert chronicle was composed by a court

⁸ U Tin Ohn, "Modern Historical Writing in Burmese", 1724-1942, in **Historians of South East Asia**, D.G.E. Hall(ed) (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), Page 85.

⁹ U Hla Pe, **Burma: Literature, Historiography, Scholarship, Language, Life and Buddhism**, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, heng Mui Keng Terrace, Pasir Panjang, Singapore 0511, © (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1985), Page 58.

astrologer with access to official records, possibly to answer foreigners' questions about Siamese history and the author of the *Jinakalamali* was a monastic exponent of a scholarly, textually-oriented school of Buddhism for whom contemporary political affairs were peripheral to his concern for universal Buddhist history.¹⁰

Yodayar Naing Mawgun is *Letwe Nawrahta's* masterpiece of simplicity as well as a work of high literary merit in the history of Myanmar literature. It is unique in terms of historically and literally.

From the historical point of view, it was written like a treatise on history. One significance of the *Mawgun* is the author's mentioning of the names of the places such as nine htars region and fifty seven districts of Chiang Mai and the date of the conquest. Apart from the detailed episodes of the war, he duly recorded the ranks and files of the Myanmar armies to put their place in history. It clearly shows not only author's attitude towards these events or the peoples but also his mastery of recording events.

From the literary point of view, scholars of Myanmar literature observed that as the author gave more emphasis on the description of the war and the record of the events, his style of writing and use of language is not so splendid as *Pon Taung Naing Mawgun* by Shin Maha Rata Thara and *Assam Naing Mawgun* by second Nawaday. However, they conclude that the author's power of description is immense.

In conclusion, this thesis is unique in a sense that *Mawgun*, one of the Myanmar literary forms, has been used for the first time in the area of Thai Studies. Since this *Mawgun* provides integrated knowledge for understanding the shared history of Siam and Myanmar in the context of eighteenth century relations, it would be beneficial to the peoples of both countries.

¹⁰ Victor Liberman, *How Reliable is U Kala's Burmese Chronicle?*, (Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, September, 1986), Page 255.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

This thesis mainly concerns the war of 1767 between Myanmar and Siam in the 18th century described in the Mawgun written by Letwe Nawrahta. However, in order to round off the study of the influence of this war on people to people relations in the latter centuries, further analysis on Myanmar-Thai relation is recommended.

As the Mawgun reflects the shared history of Myanmar and Thailand, a closer examination is needed of Myanmar and Thai literature which contained related histories and the influence of them on the people of both countries. In this regard, comparative studies of Myanmar-Thai relations should be pursued.

Though there are numerous works on Myanmar-Thai relations from King Tabinshwehti's time to the 2nd fall of Ayutthaya, relations concerning both pre Tabinshwehti reign and post Ayutthaya period have received relatively little attention from scholars. Further research is recommended to give intensive study on these two periods.

Finally, owing to the constraints of time and space, the author of this thesis has not been able to elaborate more about Myanmar and Thai Literature. As certain literature reflects the prevailing political, economic and social situation in a particular period in history, it is recommended to explore these areas to be more efficient in dealing with the histories of both countries and the relations between the two countries.