

# Thant Myint-U

## Where is Myanmar advancing forward in the 21st century? : Dialogue on the country's past, present, and future

● Myanmar / History

■ Date: Saturday, September. 19, 2015 (13:00-15:00)  
■ Venue: Main Hall, ELGALA HALL  
■ Participants: 250

〈Part 1 Keynote Speech〉

### Cooperation by Japan and the Rest of International Society is Essential in Advancing Democracy in Myanmar



Myanmar is in a period of dramatic change, and there is enormous hope for these four years. The change in government has made possible a new constitution, and the political environment enjoys new freedoms. Economic reform is also advancing, and things are progressing peacefully. Following a prolonged "black hole" of isolation, the rapid changes in recent years are a miracle.

November 28, 1885 was an important day in the history of Myanmar. It was the day that

the thousand-year old dynasty was toppled by the British, and until about 1940, Burma was governed as a part of India. Myanmar is a fertile land, and over the years hundreds of thousands, millions, of immigrants from China, India and elsewhere came. Most of the Burmese were reduced to the lowest rungs of society, and they held considerable enmity against the immigrants and foreign corporations above them.

After independence, the military gained strength, and military rule took effect in 1962 to suppress domestic reaction to external influences. The nation grew poor under dictatorship and international isolation. From about 1988, however, movements began to gain strength to end military rule.

We transitioned to a civilian government in 2011, and are now working to return to the community of nations. Myanmar is today open to the world, and undergoing dramatic change. With many minorities, one of our pressing issues is how to nurture a sense of national identity.

Democracy, peace, and economic development are all interconnected. To make possible a peaceful, stable advancement toward democracy, we must continue to advance peace talks with 20 different armed groups, while investing into infrastructure such as electricity and rail, as well as health and education. Our proximity to both India and China raises the potential for rapid development.

International cooperation is as important as international competition. There is a long history of interaction between Myanmar and Japan, and the government is also interested in personnel exchange. I am confident that relations between our nations will grow stronger in the future. I hope that you will all visit my country as tourists, and meet the non-government organizations, universities, and common people of Myanmar.

〈Speech by AKASHI Yasushi〉

As the first Japanese employee of the United Nations, I worked under the third Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. U Thant, who was the grandfather of laureate Dr. Thant Myint-U. In the 1990s, when I was in charge of crucial peacekeeping activities, one promising staff working under me was Dr. Thant Myint-U. He brilliantly described the complex history of his nation in his lecture just now, expressing confidence that if international society would provide aid and assistance, democracy would assuredly succeed in Myanmar. I hope that Japan will support their efforts, and take appropriate action to fulfill its own role and responsibility toward that end.

〈Part 2 Dialogue〉



● Speaker  
**AKASHI Yasushi**  
Chairman,  
International House of Japan



● Coordinator  
**TAKENAKA Chiharu**  
Professor, College of Law and Politics,  
Rikkyo University

### Participation in International Society : Issues and Potentials

The dialogue between Dr. Thant Myint-U and his former superior at the United Nations, Dr. AKASHI Yasushi, was moderated by Professor TAKENAKA Chiharu.

Dr. Thant Myint-U explained some of the changes in Yangon, pointing out an explosion in smartphone users from 500,000 to 1.2 million people recently. "As the people of Myanmar, especially the young generations, become global consumers, it is crucial to consider what elements of Myanmar we need to preserve," he commented. The discussion touched on the effects of Buddhism, and Dr. AKASHI opined that "Buddhism is one way of deepening mutual understanding and friendship between Japan, and Myanmar and the other nations of Southeast Asia." Dr. Thant Myint-U continued that his nation needed "improvements in government employees, in the land ownership and use system, and in national energy strategy," and expressed his hopes for elections, the first after transfer to civil rule.

In response to a query from the audience as to what Japan can do to help Myanmar, Dr. AKASHI replied that "The entry of Japanese corporations into Myanmar will be to the benefit of both parties. Japan can also make contributions in education and social welfare. It is important to provide aid with sincerity, to support long-term development."

#### School Visit

■ Date: Friday, Sep. 18 (14:00-15:00)  
■ Venue: Fukuoka Girls' High School

Dr. Thant Myint-U introduced his work at the United Nations, and his efforts today, together with reminiscences about his youth, to about 120 students in the International Culture Course. He talked of the fascination and significance of working within international society, stressing that "The fact that you are Japanese, and are women, are both to your advantage

when working in the international scene." One student asked what they could do to help preserve peace, and he replied "Youth can make an enormous contribution in cybersecurity."



#### School Visit

■ Date: Friday, Sep. 18 (17:00-18:00)  
■ Venue: Kyushu University

Dr. Thant Myint-U introduced the state of Myanmar today, with references to its long history, and stressed key points such as issues in transferring to civil rule and implementing democracy, and the effects of its powerful neighbor, China. When asked why he decided to get involved in the preservation of historic buildings, he replied that

many old buildings in Bangkok were torn down for redevelopment when he lived there, and he didn't want to lose the beautiful architecture and cityscape of Yangon.

