

Japan Yin Thwe: A Film Directed by U Nyi Pu  
— A Study of U Nyi Pu's Experiences in Japan in 1935 —

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# Japan Yin Thwe: A Film Directed by U Nyi Pu — A Study of U Nyi Pu's Experiences in Japan in 1935 —

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## Introduction

In this paper, I focus on how the Myanmar film industry was started and how a film was produced with Japan-Myanmar cooperation when U Nyi Pu, the first Myanmar actor-director and his younger brother U Maung Maung Soe arrived in Japan in 1935. U Nyi Pu and his brother went to Japan to buy sound film equipment to produce a sound film in Myanmar. After U Nyi Pu reached Japan, apart from buying the equipment, he produced a sound film named Japan Yin Thwe (Nippon Musume) and Four Seasons in Japan with Japanese actors and technicians. While directing the film, he also studied Japan's advanced filmmaking technology. The aim of this paper is to know why U Nyi Pu wanted to visit Japan, what he learnt during his trip, what knowledge he acquired from Japan, why he was interested in the Japanese film industry, and how he applied that knowledge after he returned to Myanmar. I use the articles of A1 Yoke Sone News and Japan Lan Nyunt by U Saw from the National Library of Myanmar as the primary sources for the study. Other materials and books from Universities' Central Library, University of Yangon Library, University of Maubin Library, Internet archives, and interviews were used as the secondary sources.

## Myanmar Film Industry: The Beginnings

The Myanmar film industry began as the first silent picture during the British colonial period in 1920. U Ohn Maung created the documentary about the funeral of U Tun Shein, a leading politician of Myanmar, and was screened at the Royal Cinema, near Scott market together with an English picture.<sup>1</sup> In 1901, U Ohn Maung joined the association of still pictures as a salaried worker and studied the production of foreign films from the studio apartments and he

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<sup>1</sup> University Khin Maung Zaw, *Domestic and Foreign Trips (Myanmar's Music, Film, Drama and Literature)*, p. 106 (Khin Maung Zaw, *Domestic and Foreign Trips*)

also tried to produce a film by studying the guide books on shooting it. He resigned in November 1914 and opened the London Act Studio at Pansodan Street in Yangon. Prior to 1914, there was only one English film camera and it could not be used because the magnifying glass was incomplete. In 1916, this camera was the only useful one that could be bought. However, it was a small camera and could take only fifty celluloid films. Moreover, various difficulties were faced because the instruments were incomplete and there was no information about how to make a copy of a film. However, he started experimenting with film production by studying guide books and his invention.

After 1916, U Ohn Maung started searching for a script to direct a complete film based on his short pictures, which he made incessantly. He received the story, *Myitta Ne Thura* (Love and Liquor) written by Pi Moe Hinn with the help of Ko Nyi Pu, son of U Ba Nyunt, owner of Myanmar Aswe Departmental Store and U Pu, manager from Pyinnya Ahlin Newspaper and magazine press.<sup>2</sup> In 1918, U Ohn Maung shot the first silent Myanmar film, *Myitta Ne Thura* with U Nyi Pu as the actor and Ma Yi as the actress, who was from Kyi Myindine. This film was screened at the Royal Cinema on 6 November 1920. The audiences welcomed the film and it was screened to a full house.<sup>3</sup> Many film production companies were founded after Myanmar's cinema gained success. These included British-Burma, Myanmar Aswe, Parrot, Shwe Myint Mo, Shwe Pyi Soe, Yangon Film, Thet Hinn Brother, Zabyu Meik Swe, and Budget-Burma.<sup>4</sup>



Figure 1, U Ohn Maung (Photo courtesy by Min Yu Wai, *The First Myanmar Peoples*, p. 104)

<sup>2</sup> *Myanmar Film Symposium Bulletin*, Yangon, The Board for the Publication of Myanmar Film Symposium Bulletin, 1969, p. 29 (*Myanmar Film Symposium Bulletin*, 1969)

<sup>3</sup> University Khin Maung Zaw, *20<sup>th</sup> century trends of Myanmar Film Industry and the Classical Myanmar Artists* (20), p.1 (Khin Maung Zaw, *20<sup>th</sup> century trends*)

<sup>4</sup> Khin Maung Zaw, *Domestic and Foreign Trips*, p. 107

At its nascent stage, the Myanmar film industry developed from producing silent to recorded song and sound films. In the silent film, the recorded words were captioned on the screen without the actor's tone. The background music and songs were directly played by a musical troupe in the cinema when the film was being screened. The sound recorded film was like the silent film, only difference being that the melodies for the background music and songs were recorded on the film. In the song film, the actors' tone was recorded directly on the film and screened at the cinema.<sup>5</sup> The first sound film was *Ngwe Pay Lo Ma Ya* (Money can't buy it) directed by U Toke Kyi, which was produced by the Burma Imperial Film Company and screened at Plaza cinema on 18 May 1932.<sup>6</sup>

### U Nyi Pu's Biography

U Nyi Pu was born in Pyay District on 12 September 1900, to U Ba Nyunt and Daw Nyein Shin. In his childhood, he was called Maung Ba Then. He had nine siblings and most of them worked in the film industry for a living. U Nyi Pu studied at Ye Gyaw Methric School and Government High School near Yangon General Hospital when his parents were transferred to Yangon. In 1920, U Nyi Pu was a student leader in the student strike against the British colonial education system. He also served as an officer in charge of *Dagon Magazine* published from Myanmar Aswe Company and occasionally composed the articles. He wrote poetry against the British government, primarily about the 1300 uprising, and published them in this magazine.



Figure 2, U Nyi Pu

(Photo courtesy by A1 Yoke Sone News, August 1935)

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<sup>5</sup> Aye Kyu Lay, *Records of Myanmar Film Silver Jubilee*, p. 100 (Aye Kyu Lay, *Records of Myanmar Film Silver Jubilee*)

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. 94

Consequently, the British government shut down the magazine offices and arrested U Nyi Pu. First, he was sent to the prison cell near Bar Street in Yangon and then, to the Thayarwaddy Jail. Moreover, when the British re-entered Myanmar after the Japanese retreated in 1945, U Nyi Pu along with his spouse Daw San Yin and his younger brother U Maung Maung Soe was arrested by the government for contacting the Japanese.<sup>7</sup> U Nyi Pu was recognised as the father of the Myanmar film industry and the first Myanmar actor. Besides, he was an active member of Myanmar Motion Picture Association, Film Council and Motion Picture Association. He also served as the chairperson of the Myanmar Motion Picture Association from 1968 to 1975 and as patron continuity. He went to Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Germany, Japan, and China for studying the about the film enterprise and production.<sup>8</sup> He fell in love with Ms. Takako Suzuki, a hotel cashier, and married her in 1935 while taking the movie Japan Yin Thwe.<sup>9</sup> Ms. Takako Suzuki followed U Nyi Pu to Myanmar and lived there by the name of Daw San Yin. U Nyi Pu and Daw San Yin parented five children, namely Ma Pyi Thein, Ko Aung Pe, Ko San Maung, Ko Pan Hla, and Ma Pyi Nyein. He died on 1 September 1996, while serving as a patron of Myanmar Motion Picture Association.<sup>10</sup>



Figure 3, U Nyi Pu and Daw San Yin (Mrs. Takako Suzuki)

(Photo courtesy by [www.ayeyarwady.com/n\\_musume/](http://www.ayeyarwady.com/n_musume/))

1993年ヤンゴンの ウー・ニープのご自宅で

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<sup>7</sup> Kay Myue, *The Fifteen Pictures of Early Myanmar Film Directors*, Yangon, Sarpay Beikman Press, (Kay Myue, *The Fifteen Pictures*) p. 93

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 94

<sup>9</sup> Kyaw Than Myint (Bhamo), *The Pictures of Myanmar Film Actors*, Yangon, Shwe Yi Myint Myat Press, 2007, p. 16 (Kyaw Than Myint (Bhamo), *The Pictures of Myanmar Film Actors*)

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p. 19

### U Nyi Pu and Myanmar Film Industry

U Nyi Pu started to enter the world of film making in 1916 with the help of U Ohn Maung. U Ohn Maung, who tried to direct Myanmar films, assisted U Nyi Pu by supplying resources, such as labour and money.<sup>11</sup> In 1918, U Nyi Pu acted in the first silent Myanmar film, Myitta Ne Thura; he became the first famous actor in Myanmar.<sup>12</sup> The second film wherein U Nyi Pu acted was Kyay Taw Thu Ma Nu (A girl namely Ma Nu from the village), which was directed by U Ohn Maung. To shoot this film, U Nyi Pu studied books about movies. At that time, the actors and actresses smeared the Insein Pharmacy on their faces, which was dissolved with sugar, to get pure white skin on the screen. The lip was rubbed with the red papers which were used to pack the sticks of incense and the red fan so that it could be reddened. The Chinese ink sticks were used for drawing the eyebrows. This second film was produced within three months and screened in March 1921. This film received the public's encouragement. Thus, it can be seen that Myanmar film technicians endeavoured to acquire the knowledge of filmmaking within a short time because the interval between the first movie and the second movie was only four months.<sup>13</sup>

Being a rich man and the owner of Myanmar Aswe, U Ba Nyunt wanted to send his sons, U Nyi Pu and Maung Maung Soe, to Britain for studying economy and commerce. Before leaving, U Nyi Pu made Taw Myaing Son Ka Lwan Aung Phan (The jungle creates nostalgia), the third film, with the help of his elder brother, U Tin Nwe. This film was screened on 12 May 1923 and it was successful and liked by the audiences. Thereafter, U Ba Nyunt did not send them abroad to become a scholar; he permitted them to start film production because they wanted to succeed in this field. U Nyi Pu was only 19 years old when he acted for the first time in the first film, and only 23 years old when he directed the first film.<sup>14</sup>

At that time, the foreign capitalists predominated Myanmar economic enterprises and the foreigners overshadowed the film enterprises.<sup>15</sup> During this period, all the cinemas in Yangon were owned by the Indians. There were ten film companies in Myanmar and thirty-six motion pictures were produced on the average.<sup>16</sup> Among these film companies, Burma Film Company, which was owned by U Ohn Maung's family, existed on the length of time. Before New Burma

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<sup>11</sup> Aye Kyu Lay, *Records of Myanmar Film Silver Jubilee*, p. 55

<sup>12</sup> Kay Myue, *The Fifteen Pictures*, p. 94

<sup>13</sup> Aye Kyu Lay, *Records of Myanmar Film Silver Jubilee*, p. 12

<sup>14</sup> Kay Myue, *The Fifteen Pictures*, p. 84

<sup>15</sup> Khin Maung Zaw, *The 20<sup>th</sup> century trends*, p. 2

<sup>16</sup> Pyae Sone, *Movie and Myself*, Yangon, Thwe Thauk Press, 1976, p.38 (Pyae Sone, *Movie and Myself*)

Film (A1 Film) was founded, Burma Film Company discontinued film production because of the differences of opinion among U Ohn Maung and the shareholders. Consequently, it was reformed as the Myanmar Aswe Company owned by U Ba Nyunt. Thus, U Nyi Pu decided to hand over the management of the Burma Film Company to his brother, U Tin Nwe, which continued as the New Burma Film Company from 1923 to 1931.<sup>17</sup> From 1932 to 1939, it was called the Myanmar Aswe A1 Film Company Ltd. From 1940, they continued film production under the name of A1 Film Company. Their later generations also produced films under this banner.<sup>18</sup>

Su Htoo Pan (Praying for a good thing), which was produced by U Nyi Pu as a director-actor in 1929, was the first picture to become famous in the Myanmar film industry and was screened in a foreign country. This was the eighth film that U Nyi Pu produced and directed. He translated the world-famous novel, *The Lady of the Camille*, into Myanmar language, and made it into a picture. This was named *Lady Prefer Bond*; it was captioned in English language and was screened in London and other European countries.<sup>19</sup> The sixteen sound pictures, seven musical pictures, seventy-four silent pictures, and seven historic pictures have been lost because the A1 Films store caught fire in July 1950.<sup>20</sup> The following table enlists films acted and directed by U Nyi Pu and produced by Burma Film, New Burma Film, and Myanmar Aswe A1 Film (A1 Film);<sup>21</sup>

Before go to Japan (1920 - 1935)			After returned from Japan (After 1935)		
1.	Myitta Ne Thura (1920)	Actor	1.	San Yae Sin (1936)	Joint Director
2.	Kyay Taw Thu Ma Nu (1921)	Actor	2.	Chit Thu Yaung (1937)	Joint Director
3.	Taw Myaing Son Ka Lwan Aung Phan (1923)	Actor-Director	3.	Pan Thitsar (1954)	Joint Director
4.	Kyar Thit Mal (1923)	Director	4.	Koe Yin Thwe (1955)	Joint Director
5.	Pauk Kyaing (1924)	Actor	5.	Chit Than Tha Yar (1957)	Joint Director
6.	Ta Khaing Lone Shwe (1924)	Actor	6.	528 (1957)	Joint Director
7.	Hmaing Wai Wai (1925)	Actor-Director	7.	Nan Htat Pan Takhat (1963)	Joint Director

<sup>17</sup> Kay Myue, *The Fifteen Pictures*, p. 83

<sup>18</sup> J. Kyaing, (M.A, History), "The Pictures Directed and Screened by A1 Film Company", *Yoke Shin Aung Lan Magazine*, No. 391, 1989, p. 60 (J. Kyaing, "The Pictures Directed and Screened by A1 Film Company")

<sup>19</sup> Kay Myue, *The Fifteen Pictures*, p. 87

<sup>20</sup> J. Kyaing, "The Pictures Directed and Screened by A1 Film Company", p. 150

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*, pp. 64-66

Kay Myue, *The Fifteen Pictures*, pp. 95-96

8.	Pa Loke Tote Tote Sat Kyar Shin (1925)	Director	8.	Ma Hmung Thaw Alin (1965)	Joint Director
9.	Shwe Min Won (1926)	Director	9.	Tha Mann Kyar (1970)	
10.	Mya Tha Bat (1926)	Director			
11.	Mya Aye Yin (1927)	Director			
12.	Su Htoo Pan (1929)	Actor-Director			
13.	Myaing Nan San (1929)	Director			
14.	Shwe Hnin Si (1931)	Actor-Director			
15.	Thamine Nyunt Paung (1933)	Actor-Director			
16.	Than Ka Mout (1934)	Joint Director			
17.	Chit Yae Sin (1934)	Joint Director			
18.	Japan Yin Thwe (Nippon Musume) (1935)	Actor-Director			
19.	Four Season in Japan (1935)	Director			

### U Nyi Pu and Japan

In April 1935, Mr. Furuhata announced in the Thuriya and other newspapers that anyone who has the desire to visit Japan could contact him. Mr. Furuhata was the Japanese merchant who had been living in Yangon for more than 20 years.<sup>22</sup> Galon U Saw, U Nyi Pu, and U Tin Nwe was friend. After they read this announcement, U Nyi Pu contacted the Thuriya newspaper to follow up with Mr. Furuhata because they aimed at going abroad and buying the equipment for sound film production.<sup>23</sup> U Nyi Pu and U Maung Maung Soe prepared to leave for Japan along with U Saw, the leading politician and reporter from Thuriya newspaper, and other colleagues on 13 May 1935.<sup>24</sup> They arrived in Moji in Japan on 10 June 1935.<sup>25</sup> While the seven colleagues had different purposes for going to Japan, U Nyi Pu and U Maung Maung Soe was interested in knowing more about movies and filmmaking.<sup>26</sup>

When they arrived in Japan, they had to attend a dinner party at the invitation of the

<sup>22</sup> U Saw, *Japan Lan Nyunt*, Yangon, Thuriya Press, 1935, p. 7 (U Saw, *Japan Lan Nyunt*)

Ei Thandar Aung, "Study of Galon U Saw's Experiences in Japan in 1935", *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Okayama University*, Vol.47, 2019, pp. 209-229

<sup>23</sup> Interview, U Thein Htut (A1 Family) (11 October 2019)

<sup>24</sup> U Saw, *Japan Lan Nyunt*, p. 17

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p. 108

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, p. 154



Chamber of Commerce in Kobe on 10 June 1935.<sup>27</sup> U Saw served as a representative of Myanmar. U Nyi Pu and U Maung Maung Soe showed a documentary film portraying Myanmar.<sup>28</sup> Moreover U Saw held a public lecture at Myo kin Gyi monastery in Kyoto on the night of 15 June 1935 and 3000 people attended the lecture. At the meeting, U Nyi Pu showed a documentary film directed by himself which portrayed the Shwe Dagon Pagoda in Myanmar, but it was unsuccessful because of the incompleteness of instruments. However, the documentary film which portrayed the pagodas, the method of playing Myanmar Chinlone, and the country's traditional dances was screened in other towns and the Japanese audiences were instantly taken by it.<sup>29</sup>

On 21 July 1935, the meeting of the world's Buddhist association was held at Tsukiji Hongan-ji (Sakagi Hongan-ji),<sup>30</sup> which was a Buddhist monastery in Tokyo, based on Ceylon construction style. Forty representatives from Buddhist countries, including U Nyi Pu and U Maung Maung Soe attended that conference. This meeting, which had been held for two years, was the last one.<sup>31</sup> At that meeting, everyone, young and adult included, came to embrace Buddhism and U Nyi Pu ordered 10 robes from Myanmar to initiate a boy into the Buddhist order before he went back. He also offered a typewriter to a monk from Ceylon named Sīrijīnavansa Ñānachvāmi Mahāthera for the publication of Buddhist literature. The cost for this typewriter was forty Yens and it was equivalent to thirty-five Myanmar Kyats.<sup>32</sup> U Nyi Pu held the ordination led by the monks from Ceylon while he was in Japan. The eight articles required by the Buddhist monks were donated by U Nyi Pu and other donators from Myanmar.<sup>33</sup>

### U Nyi Pu and Japan Yin Thwe

U Nyi Pu was famous in the Myanmar film industry as a person who produced pictures in Japan, maintained the Japan-Myanmar relations through film industry, and ensured cooperation between Myanmar-Japan film technicians. In 1935, U Nyi Pu went to Japan to buy the equipment for directing a sound film. While he stayed in Japan, he produced Japan Yin Thwe.<sup>34</sup>

The history of Myanmar motion pictures started with the silent film, and in 1932, the

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<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p. 122

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p. 125

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, p. 142

<sup>30</sup> U Nyi Pu wrote this temple name is wrong in his article.

<sup>31</sup> *AI Yoke Sone News*, September 1935, p. 41

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, p. 50

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, p. 52

<sup>34</sup> Kay Myue, *The Fifteen Pictures*, p. 89

first sound film was screened by the Burma Imperial Film Company. Although Myanmar Aswe Film Company was experienced in film production, it was left behind in the age of sound film. However, New Burma Film (A1 Film) tried to produce unique pictures. To further this cause, U Nyi Pu and his younger brother, U Maung Maung Soe went to Japan to purchase the instruments for sound film production. In Japan, they studied about sound film equipment and film studios.<sup>35</sup> Although they came to Japan to buy equipment, they became interested in the Japanese film industry because among the Asian countries, the Japanese technology and industrial sectors had advanced rapidly within a short span of time.<sup>36</sup> While studying filmmaking, they had a sudden idea to direct a film with a Japanese actress. Therefore, they took permission from their father and elder brother and produced and directed a film named Japan Yin Thwe with cooperation from P.C.L (Photo Chemical Laboratory) Company (写真化学研究所).<sup>37</sup> It was the biggest film company which employed 1,000 workers, along with 600 actresses and 20 directors.<sup>38</sup> All the participants in this film were from Japan film association except U Nyi Pu, U Maung Maung Soe, and U San Nyunt. U San Nyunt lived in Japan then.<sup>39</sup> Mitsuko Takao, the film's Japanese actress, later changed her name into Aye Mi San.<sup>40</sup>

This is the film's story in brief: Two Myanmar brothers arrived in Japan to carry an airplane named Myanmar Gon Yi and they fell in love with a Japanese girl. In this film, certain sequences were exciting to direct, such as skilfully flying the airplane, falling from the plane as it crashed, and landing on the ground with parachutes. Moreover, the beautiful scenes of Fuji Mountain, Japanese traditional dances and festivals were produced together with Japanese traditional music.<sup>41</sup> The P.C.L Company from Japan conducted the indoor and outdoor film shooting and sound recording. U Nyi Pu took over editing and recording the background music. There were two crucial scenes in the play and the film: In the play, when a Myanmar actor spoke in Myanmar language, it was accompanied by Japanese subtitles for the local audiences; in the film, when the Japanese actor spoke in Japanese, it had Myanmar subtitles for its audiences.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Aye Kyu Lay, *Records of Myanmar Film Silver Jubilee*, p. 85

<sup>36</sup> *A1 Yoke Sone News*, September 1935, p. 58

<sup>37</sup> 会社沿革 (<https://www.toho.co.jp/company/info/history.html>) (1 October 2019)

<sup>38</sup> *A1 Yoke Sone News*, August 1935, p. 56

<sup>39</sup> Aye Kyu Lay, *Records of Myanmar Film Silver Jubilee*, p. 85

<sup>40</sup> Interview, U Thein Htut (A1 Family) (28 September 2019)

<sup>41</sup> Kay Myue, *The Fifteen Pictures*, p. 90

<sup>42</sup> *History of Myanmar Film Industry, 1920-1945 (Silver Jubilee)*, Yangon, Myanmar Motion Picture Association, 2004, p. 206 (*History of Myanmar Film Industry*)



Figure 4, U Nyi Pu, Maung Maung Soe, and Ms. Mitsuko Takao  
(Photo courtesy by U Thein Htut - A1 Family)

U Nyi Pu's *Japan Yin Thwe* was his first production abroad. His ability to direct the characters perfectly earned him praises from the experienced Japanese film technicians.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, the Japanese newspaper and magazines wrote about U Nyi Pu and U Maung Maung Soe, as the Myanmar film technicians who penetrated into the world of Japanese movies successfully.<sup>44</sup> The Japanese Film Company offered the brothers 1000 Yens to cooperate with the Japanese film enterprises. However, they did not accept the offer. At that time, Japanese Yens 1000 was equivalent to Myanmar Kyats 1500.<sup>45</sup>

During this period, the average income of Myanmar film technicians was as follows. The salaried actor and actress were paid 125 to 150 Kyats. The director had a salary of 75 to 100 Kyats. The actor and actress who acted as contact system had a salary of 500 to 600 Kyats for one film and director had a salary of 125 to 400 Kyats.<sup>46</sup> The sound film, *Japan Yin Thwe*, was screened at Bayint cinema and Olympia cinema in Yangon on 25 November 1935, simultaneously. As this film was a joint effort by Myanmar actors and Japanese actress, the public response to this film was impressive as they went in huge numbers to watch the movie. Therefore, this film

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<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, p. 210

<sup>44</sup> *Asahi Newspaper*, 12 September 1935, p. 7 (morning news)

<sup>45</sup> *History of Myanmar Film Industry*, p. 210

<sup>46</sup> Pyae Sone, *Movie and Myself*, p. 78

was successful in encouraging the people.<sup>47</sup> As this film was screened in Myanmar and Japan at the same time, it can be assumed that it supported the development of Japan-Myanmar relations. People in Japan also showed interest this film.<sup>48</sup> It was also shown in Thailand, in 1937.<sup>49</sup> Besides, this film was also screened at the Southeast Asia Film Festival held in Japan in 1992.<sup>50</sup>



Figure 5, (Photo courtesy by A1 Yoke Sone News, September 1935)

U Nyi Pu and U Maung Maung Soe produced a documentary film on Japan which has four seasons: The onset of the dry season, dry season, beginning of the cold season and the cold season. The seasonal festivals, cultural festivals, sports competitions, musical concerts, Japanese traditions, and sports activities were portrayed in this film. This documentary film was jointly shown with Japan Yin Thwe.<sup>51</sup>

While Japan Yin Thwe was directed in Japan, the song Mya Khwar Nyo by U Maung Maung Soe was recorded with assistance from Philippine musicians. This tape was distributed all over the country from Myanmar Aswe Studio, after they returned to Myanmar. Before U Nyi Pu left for Japan, Thabin Won Studio was founded in Myanmar and they took training to sing Mya

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<sup>47</sup> Aye Kyu Lay, *Records of Myanmar Film Silver Jubilee*, p. 88

<sup>48</sup> *History of Myanmar Film Industry*, p. 211

<sup>49</sup> Nay Chi Zaya, *A Dictionary of Myanmar Film Industry*, Yangon, Sar Pay Law Ka Press, 2015, p. 87 (Nay Chi Zaya, *A Dictionary of Myanmar Film Industry*)

<sup>50</sup> Kay Myue, *The Fifteen Pictures*, p. 90

<sup>51</sup> *History of Myanmar Film Industry* p. 211

Khwar Nyo for studying tape production in Japan.<sup>52</sup> When U Nyi Pu returned from Japan, he hired two Japanese recording technicians, Mr. Yano and Mr. Watanabe.<sup>53</sup>

### U Nyi Pu and the experiences of directing Japan Yin Thwe

U Nyi Pu also visited Kobe, Osaka, Kyoto, Nagoya, and Tokyo in Japan. Galon U Saw and other colleagues returned from Tokyo to Myanmar, but U Nyi Pu and U Maung Maung Soe stayed back. Thereafter, they started to talk to Film production companies for direction opportunities. Then, they coordinated with the P.C.L Company for shooting Japan Yin Thwe.<sup>54</sup>

The Japanese Government supported U Nyi Pu's endeavours and made the required arrangements. On 3 August 1935, U Nyi Pu went to the Japanese foreign office, responding to their invitation. At that time, no other country had shown interest in producing films in Japan, so U Nyi Pu was the first foreigner who tried to direct a film there. Therefore, the Japanese Government thanked U Nyi Pu for publicising Japan worldwide, through a motion picture.<sup>55</sup> Japan Yin Thwe's direction started on the first week of September.<sup>56</sup> Although there were some disturbances with a crowd gathering around to watch the direction, the police contained the situation. The Japanese Government also supported the participants.<sup>57</sup> After the film's direction was complete, U Maung Maung Soe started for Myanmar on 18 October and arrived on 6 November. This was the first sound film produced by Myanmar Aswe A1 Film (A1 Film).<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Kay Myue, *The Fifteen Pictures*, p. 91

<sup>53</sup> Dagon Pa U Ba Tin, *The World of Myanmar Movie and Myself*, Yangon, Sapay Beikman, p. 51 (Dagon Pa U Ba Tin, *The World of Myanmar Movie and Myself*)  
Khin Maung Zaw, *Domestic and Foreign Trips*, p. 167

<sup>54</sup> *AI Yoke Sone News*, Special Issue, No. 7, p. 8

<sup>55</sup> *AI Yoke Sone News*, September 1935, p. 55

<sup>56</sup> *AI Yoke Sone News*, Special Issue, No. 7, p. 8

<sup>57</sup> *ibid*, p. 2

<sup>58</sup> *ibid*, p. 8



Figure 6, (Photo courtesy by AI Yoke Sone News, Special Issue, No. 7)

Although U Maung Maung Soe returned to his country on 18 October, U Nyi Pu stayed back to screen the film in Japan. During this time, the Japanese recording engineers carefully tested the equipment which was to be exported to Myanmar for the first time.<sup>59</sup> The film industry in Japan was far more superior to that in Myanmar. The electricity used in directing a crucial scene in the film at night had enough power to light up whole of small town in Myanmar. Japanese machines used for washing films which resulted in clearer and cleaner pictures. The sound films were also excellent; the ones produced in Myanmar did not sound clear because of the absence of suitable technology.<sup>60</sup>

In Japan, a good film costs one million Kyats. One foot of good film costs ten to fifteen Kyats and that of an ordinary film costs five Kyats. In Myanmar, it costs three Kyats for one foot. It was estimated that the picture directed in Japan by U Nyi Pu cost fifteen to twenty Kyats for one foot. As this picture was brought to Myanmar, it cost twenty-five to thirty-five Kyats for one foot of film, inclusive of customs duty. Although the expenditure for one film cost one million Kyats in Japan, the return to the investment was good because numerous people watched the picture. There were 2,000 cinemas in Japan and Osaka Cinema was the most popular. The same picture was showed simultaneously in all the cinemas and screened five times per day. The cinema received 3,100 to 6,000 Yens per one-time show. The admission fee was 1.5 to 5 Yens per

<sup>59</sup> *AI Yoke Sone News*, Special Issue, No. 7, p. 16

<sup>60</sup> *AI Yoke Sone News*, August, 1935, p. 57

person which was equivalent to 1 to 4.80 Kyats.<sup>61</sup> The admission fee in Myanmar was one to two Kyats per person.



Figure 7, (<https://www.nfaj.go.jp/exhibition/unesco2019/>)

U Nyi Pu preferred to produce a good film, without caring much for the expenditure. It cost four times more to shoot Japan Yin Thwe in Japan compared with what it could have been in Myanmar. Through the direction of this film, the quality of the Myanmar people became evident.<sup>62</sup> The other tasks carried out by U Nyi Pu and U Maung Maung Soe in Japan were as follows:

- (1) Recording the Mya Khwar Nyo song by U Maung Maung Soe in PCL
- (2) Achievement of directing a play named four seasons in Japan
- (3) Achievement of directing the sound film, Japan Yin Thwe
- (4) Learning the technology of new recording equipment by U Nyi Pu and buying the instruments
- (5) Learning modern photography and buying the necessary materials for Dagon studio
- (6) Buying the new machines for the publication of Dagon magazine<sup>63</sup>

### U Nyi Pu's Return from Japan

In his lifetime, U Nyi Pu shot ten films as an actor, ten films as a director, twelve films as a joint director, and six films as an actor-director. After he returned from Japan, he shot the

<sup>61</sup> *AI Yoke Sone News*, August, 1935, p. 58

<sup>62</sup> *AI Yoke Sone News*, Special Issue, No. 7, p. 15

<sup>63</sup> *Myanmar Film Symposium Bulletin*, 1969, p. 32

films by applying what he had learned in Japan. The quality of pictures and sound systems also progressed. Moreover, he invented certain techniques which contributed to the development of filming technology. His inventions consisted of various camera twists, special effects, dual-role shoots, the transformation system from still image to the film, different film productions, and different silent films. After his father, U Ba Nyunt, died in December 1945, U Tin Nwe managed the company and U Nyi Pu served as a director. The people in Myanmar wanted to escape from the clutches of their British rulers. Therefore, the country's nationalist leaders searched for help outside to fight for Myanmar's Independence and they found an ally in Japan; this marked the emergence of the Thirty Comrades. The Japanese army came to Myanmar as an ally with the Thirty Comrades; then, the Japanese conquest and occupation of Myanmar lasted from 1942 to 1945. When the British re-entered Myanmar after the Japanese retreated in 1945, U Nyi Pu, Daw San Yin, and U Maung Maung Soe were arrested by the government for contacting the Japanese. In 1953, U Nyi Pu handed over the works of A1 Film Company Ltd to his brothers and sisters and founded his own Mahawizardo Film Company and Studio. Even when U Nyi Pu became old, he continued to produce and direct films and made a copy of photographs from Mahawizardo Film Company and Studio.<sup>64</sup>

### Conclusion

During the colonial period, in 1920, the Myanmar film industry began with the silent picture directed by U Ohn Maung. English films dominated the film industry, and all the cinemas in Yangon were owned by Indians. When the first Myanmar film started to show, the audiences fully supported the venture. Therefore, many film companies appeared after 1920 owned mostly by the Myanmar people. After 1935, there was a remarkable progress in the standard of the Myanmar film industry, and this was because of the efforts of the filmmakers, including U Nyi Pu. From 1936 to 1941, Myanmar film industry's standard reached at par with Indian films. Besides, the first cinema owned by a Myanmar was opened in Yangon on 1 January 1938. U Nyi Pu was the first Myanmar actor and director who tried to direct a film in a foreign country. Their technology was advanced and they were sharp and bright like the westerners. Prior to 1935, Myanmar people held a positive view of Japan because most of the newspapers described Japan's progressions. Due to these factors, U Nyi Pu became interested in visiting Japan and he decided to buy the equipment for producing sound film from there. When he arrived in Japan, he

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<sup>64</sup> Kay Myue, *The Fifteen Pictures*, p. 85



studied about the advanced filmmaking technologies, sound film equipment, and film studios. His interest in the Japanese film industry was rooted in finding out how, among other Asian countries, they had advanced so rapidly within a short span of time. Besides, he also wanted to promote the Myanmar film industry in the foreign countries. To this end, he directed Japan Yin Thwe with Japanese actress and technicians. When the film was screened, it was supported by the audiences of both countries. He also directed a documentary film named four seasons of Japan. Japan Yin Thwe and four seasons of Japan were shown together in Myanmar. These films played an important role in strengthening the cultural relations of Myanmar and Japan and cordialised the countries about their social and cultural lives. Japan Yin Thwe represented the cultural relationship between the countries in the past and it continues to do so in the present. A press conference was held on 18 July 2019 in Yangon Film Development Centre, Shwe Taung Kyar, Bahan to restore Japan Yin Thwe to a digital version. This process was carried out with the cooperation of Japanese and Myanmar technicians. Mr. Yoshiro Irie of the National Film Archive of Japan stated that this film was to be shown at the Nagase Memorial Theatre OZU (2nd floor), Tokyo on 26 October 2019, and then at the Myanmar Film 100 years Festival in October 2020.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Interview, U Thein Htut (A1 Family), (28 September 2019)

『日本の娘』 [デジタル復元版] 特別上映会 (<https://www.nfaj.go.jp/exhibition/unesco2019/>) (12 October 2019)

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