

Enrichment of relationship between Myanmar and Japan through Culture, Education and Economy

Hla Myat Mon
EC Member, MAJA
Science Curriculum Officer
CREATE Project, JICA
The Republic of the Union of Myanmar

Abstract

Relationship with Japan is essential for ASEAN countries including Myanmar. Myanmar Association of Japan Alumni (MAJA) takes part in enrichment of relationship between Myanmar and Japan in significant role apart from government sector of Japan and private sector. MAJA has been established comprehensively in 2001 with the objectives including promotion of the relationship with ASCOJA and ASJA in the fields of education, culture and economy. Assistance in education sector is one of the significant supports by Japan in Myanmar. Japan supports the improvement of basic education aiming for the completion of primary education as well as the enrichment of quality education in Myanmar. Japan also supports the improvement of higher education to strengthen the human resource development. Cultural exchange programs as well as strengthening enhancement of cultural sector between Japan and Myanmar through MAJA, have also been carried out. Japanese economic assistance to Myanmar began in the form of war reparation in 1955. MAJA would like to continue cooperation with ASCOJA and ASJA and to fully participate in their activities including those of cultural, educational and economic sectors in the coming century.

Introduction

Relationship between Japan and ASEAN countries has long been established. Myanmar and Japan also have strong ties during the post-World WAR II period and it can often be referred to as a “special relationship” or a “historically friendly relationship”. Establishment of alumni associations in ASEAN countries organizing the people who had studied or trained in Japan makes the friendship smoother between Japan and ASEAN nations. Myanmar Association of Japan Alumni (MAJA) is also one of the mainstays to have stronger partnership and friendship between Myanmar and Japan as well as with other ASEAN countries through education, culture and economy. Together with the celebration of 50th anniversary of ASEAN, regional commitments among our nations will bring better prosperity and stronger relationship.

Myanmar Association of Japan Alumni (MAJA)

Myanmar Association of Japan Alumni (MAJA) was established on December 2001, on the National Day of Myanmar, with 49 founding members. Most of them were patrons who studied in Japan during the Second World War years of 1943-1945. During war time military and civilian scholars went to the Imperial Military Academy in Zama and at Kyoto, Tokyo, Nagasaki Universities. Before the establishment of MAJA, former Japan Alumni has been quite active, sending trainees to Japan and neighboring countries under the programme of Association for Overseas Technical Scholarship (AOTS). MAJA was officially recognized by the Ministry of Home Affairs of the Union of Myanmar on 28 February, 2002. Since then, there has been increasing number of members with more than 2000 at present and widened activities of the association.

There are various alumni under the umbrella of MAJA namely HIDA (The Overseas Human Resources and Industry Development Association), Hiroshima alumni, Kobe alumni, Nagoya alumni, Okayama alumni and Tokyo alumni. These alumni take part in carrying out some activities related to education and economy.

MAJA and ASCOJA

ASCOJA (ASEAN Council of Japan Alumni) established in 1977 acts as a regional association comprising major alumni organizations of all 10 ASEAN nations plays a main role for scholarships and exchange programme between ASEAN and Japan. Birth place of MAJA was in Brunei Darussalam at 7th ASEAN Summit 2001. MAJA becomes 7th member of ASCOJA at the 15th ASCOJA Meeting held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 2003. MAJA has been performing the activities in various sectors in order to implement its objectives to be in success.

As a significant activity, MAJA hosted the 18th ASCOJA Conference in Yangon, Myanmar on 6th and 7th September of 2009.

Objectives of MAJA

MAJA is trying its best for the commitments in relationship with Japan and other ASEAN members by implementing its objectives as follows.

1. To organize Myanmar alumni of educational and training institutions in Japan to participate in economic, social and educational development activities of the country ;
2. To advise, aid and guide Members on their return to Myanmar in respect of resettlement including opportunities and conditions of employment;
3. To advise, aid and guide students intending to study in Japan;
4. To take part in educational activities promoting knowledge of Japanese among Myanmar nationals and knowledge of Myanmar among Japanese nationals;

5. To promote and foster civic, economic, social, educational and cultural activities amongst its Members;
6. To deal directly with ASCOJA as a regular chapter and to participate in its activities;
7. To co-operate with the ASJA International for mutually agreed purposes.

Activities of MAJA (Education)

MAJA conducts Examination for Japanese Universities for International Students (EJU) twice a year. MAJA administers Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) in cooperation with Embassy of Japan, twice a year, in July in Mandalay and in December in Yangon every year. MAJA organizes Japan Education Seminar once a year, in cooperation with officials of Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO) coming to Myanmar to conduct a seminar. Moreover, pre-selection of post-graduate and undergraduate students for Japanese Government (Monbukagakusho MEXT) scholarship is part of the activities of MAJA. There is also selection of post-graduate students for Asia Japan Alumni (ASJA) International every year.

Students' programmes

The following programmes are part of MAJA's activities. They are -

- Selection of Honda Young Engineers and Scientists (YES) Award
- Selection of National Institution for Youth Education (NYIE)
- Selection of Hitachi Young Leaders Initiative (HYLI)
- Selection and interview of Middle School Students (three male and three female students) every year to be sent to Toyota city, Japan, for home stay and education tour.
- Selection of students for Asian-Pacific Children's Convention (APCC) in Fukuoka every year.

Activities of MAJA (Culture)

MAJA organizes Japanese Culture Show and Japan Pwe Daw (Festival) once a year for Myanmar audience. MAJA conducts Japanese Speech Contest and Translation Test (Japanese language to Myanmar language) once a year in cooperation with Embassy of Japan. MAJA publishes quarterly newsletter in Myanmar, Japanese and English languages.

Japan Contribution to Myanmar Education Sector

Education plays a vital role for the development of the nation. Improvement of education not only increases the quality of the students but also acts as a part of a foundation of human resource development for industrial development of the country. For this purpose, Japan supports for the basic education improvement at various levels. JICA plays an important role for the support of educational development in Myanmar. The Project for Curriculum Reform at Primary Level of Basic Education in Myanmar has been carried out since 2014 by Ministry of Education in cooperation with JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency). In-

and Pre-Service Teacher Training is also included in the project in order to build teacher's capacities to be able to teach new curriculum/textbooks. Rehabilitation of Taungoo Education College is part of the improvement of education colleges. Grass-roots human security projects and rehabilitation of disaster-affected schools are part of the support programme.

For higher education improvement, Enhancement of Yangon and Mandalay Technological Universities, Capacity development for medical university to advance medical techniques, research capacity and management for better healthcare serves and Capacity development for Yezin Agriculture University to promote better agricultural productivity and diversification through needs-based research and development and improvement of facilities and provision of necessary educational and research equipment. Scholarships are being granted and sending for short-term training courses. Support for strengthening evidence-based planning and policy implementation and TVET (Technical & Vocational & Education Training) data collection survey in Myanmar are also being carried out for human resource development.

Apart from the support by government sector of Japan, private sector also contributes to improve our education sector. The Nippon Foundation, an iNGO, provided schools in Myanmar. Others include Panasonic Corporation, AEON Company, Fujitsu Company, etc. supporting Myanmar education.

Economical support by Japan to Myanmar

Japanese economic assistance to Myanmar started in 1955 in the form of reparation of war. The first loan to Myanmar was in 1968 with a loan of 10.8 billion yen. ODA played a leading role between the two countries for the betterment of economy as well as political relationship. In addition, investment by Japanese companies gradually increases with time. There were only two Japanese companies during 1960s at the time of nationalization. The number then increased to 15 around the time of 1990s. Expanding investments come along with the change of political system. Investments contribute for the improvement of country's economy.

Future Plans to support ASCOJA

MAJA would like to continue cooperation with ASCOJA and ASJA in order to fulfill the objective of ASCOJA concerning the establishment of working relationship among existing business, professional, social and civic organizations in the member-countries and in other countries for mutual advantages. MAJA also aims to involve in line of ASCOJA for closer study of cultures that promote an Asian orientation in the education of ASEAN youth.

Moreover, MAJA would like to fully participate in activities including those of cultural, educational and economic sectors in the coming century.

Conclusion

MAJA will be standing as one of the chapters of ASCOJA to fully take part in activities related to cultural, educational and economic sectors in the future.