

Translator's Preface

It is with deep regret and sadness that I write this preface to my translation of Nandar Thein Zan's book "အရိပ်ဒွန်မှ တွေးမြင်ချက်၊ ဝိုင်းဝန်းနေဆဲ" on his thoughts inspired while on a visit to the ancient Myanmar city of Bagan for he is no longer with us.

I first came to know Nandar Thein Zan, professor of philosophy, well known author and much admired public speaker, in 1972 when he was a young tutor and post graduate student in the Department of Philosophy of the University of Yangon then known as the Rangoon Arts and Science University. He was one of the very few outstanding students in philosophy but the only one who achieved fame with the publication of his first book "The Meaning of Life and the Truth of Life" based on his Master's thesis. With the publication of this first book he gained recognition as a writer of philosophical and cultural themes and Theravada Buddhist views and never looked back. He wrote in a literary style that was simple enough to reach readers not familiar with philosophy yet his prose was rhythmic but also keen and perceptive. Nandar Thein Zan was a household name in the world of contemporary Myanmar literature yet the subjects he chose to write were profound and philosophical; it made ordinary people want to think and ponder what it meant to be human what morality meant and to appreciate the value system of Myanmar culture. Yet his books were best-sellers.

However, one must not forget that he was also Dr. Thein Zan, a teacher of philosophy who when he died had already retired from the University of Yangon as professor and head of the Department of Philosophy, but was still teaching PhD students as part-time professor. He was also a part-time teacher at the Pariyatti Sāsana University at Kaba-Aye where he taught methods of philosophy to Buddhist monks who respected his knowledge and insight. So, he was also an outstanding teacher of philosophy who made it clear that philosophy was not just an academic subject but was part of every individual's life. The government conferred on him the religious title of Mahāsadhmma Jōtika in the Independence Day Honours List on 4 January 2004. He was also given a life-time award for his work in the field of religious literature the same year by the "Dhamma Beikman Literary Association" and the private Dr. Tin Shwe Literary Foundation honoured him with another award for his book "Where Regrets have no Place" in the Year 2009. He did not seek fame but fame came to him.

His untimely death is indeed an irretrievable loss to the academic and literary world and to his family.

I have never before translated into English any of his books. This book "Bagan Inspirations" is the first. I had already completed the work and had given Dr. Thein Zan the first draft which I am glad to say pleased him very much. But unfortunately there were innumerable delays to publication due to

circumstances beyond our control, so regrettably the author did not live to see his work in book form.

It was not an easy book to translate for it covered many topics from philosophy, culture, Jātaka tales from Theravāda Buddhism to astrology and the occult. It is generally said that a translation of a book or any piece of writing can only be as good as the original. It can however be mediocre. I have done my utmost best to preserve and convey the essence of Nandar Thein Zan's thoughts. If there are any flaws the blame rests entirely on me, the translator, for which I beg the indulgence and forgiveness of the readers.

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