CHAPTER 2

SANGHA STRUCTURE AND MONASTIC EDUCATION IN MYANMAR

In order to understand the Phra Khammai-led movement and its network, one must first understand the *Sangha* structure in Burma. It is also important to view the *Sangha* in Burma as non-homogeneous with a considerable amount of diversity. The diversity of the *Sangha* exists in terms of beliefs, doctrinal interpretations, and practices related to *Vinaya*, the disciplinary code, as well as religious customary preferences. It is commonly held that Buddhists in Burma practice the most orthodox form of Theravada Buddhism, which dates back to a very long tradition from the Ashokan period (c. 268–232 BCE) to the Sinhalese Mahavihara tradition (247–207 BCE) and the legend of Suvarnabhumi, where this particular form of Buddhism was said to have prevailed. In 1057 CE, the Burmese King Anawrahta of Pagan conquered the Mon Kingdom at Thaton, which is believed to have been one of the regions of Suvarnabhumi, and brought the Tripitaka texts and monks headed by Shin Arahan to his capital.

Although Burma is a state composed of diverse ethnic groups unique in terms of language, culture, customs, beliefs, political ideals, and social norms, many of the groups manifest themselves as Buddhists in a Theravada Buddhist society in line with the nation-state, which makes the country unique in its own right. Certainly what I refer to here as "state *Sangha*" is a recent construction, as has been shown in chapter 1. The following background provides a brief history of Buddhism and state relationships during pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial periods in Burma.

2.1 Buddhism and polity in Burma

Pre-colonial Burma is generally considered as the period prior to 1885, before the third Anglo-Burmese War, which saw the last Burmese king, Thibaw, exiled by the British officers to Ratnagiri, in southern India.[15] I do not intend to detail the practices of

[15] The period of British rule in Burma lasted 124 years, from 1824 to 1948, from the Anglo-Burmese wars through the creation of Burma as a province of British India to the establishment of an

Buddhism and the *Sangha* in pre-colonial periods. I would, however, like to highlight the types and conditions of Theravada Buddhism in those days before the arrival of the British.

It has been recorded that King Anawratha of Pagan (*r.* 1044–1077) in 1057 used force to acquire the Tripitaka texts and Theravada Buddhism from Thaton, then the capital of the Mon Kingdom in the far south. Than Tun (1956) dismisses the authenticity of Burmese chronicles' claims that the Ari sect appeared in the latter half of the Pagan dynasty and was alleged to be a debased form of the religion. He wrote, "…as described in the chronicles, [the Ari] had nothing to do with Tāntric Buddhism. Perhaps, it is to offset the purity of orthodoxy that the Ari were depicted as black as black can be (Than Tun, 1956)." Than Tun claims that the Ari sect was never officially suppressed, and Buddhism as practiced in the days of the Pagan period was in general very similar to the Buddhism practiced in Burma today. He acknowledges, however, that the Brahmanical influence on Buddhism at that time was more pronounced than in the present day. He discovered that during the rise and development of the Buddhist monastic order, various incidents upset some of the traditional beliefs of Burma. He further points with great interest the presence of *Bhikkhuni*—female monks—in the monastic order in those days. Nevertheless, since 456 CE, the *Bhikkhuni* Order was discontinued, and most people in Myanmar today maintain that women were never allowed in the order (Than Tun, 1956: v). Attempts to re-establish the female order in Burma, as in Thailand, have faced strong opposition. In Thailand, as the feminist movement becomes stronger with public support, although officially the re-establishment of the *Bhikkhuni* Order is not recognized, it is somehow

independently administered colony, and finally independence. Various portions of Burmese territories, including Arakan and Tenasserim, were annexed by the British after their victory in the First Anglo-Burmese War. Lower Burma was annexed in 1852 after the Second Anglo-Burmese War. The annexed territories were designated as a minor province (a Chief Commissionership) of British India in 1862 (*Imperial Gazetteer of India*, vol. IV (1908), p.29). Following the Third Anglo-Burmese War in 1885, Upper Burma was annexed, and the following year, the province of Burma in British India was created, becoming a major province (a Lieutenant-Governorship) in 1897 (ibid. p.29). This arrangement lasted until 1937, when Burma began to be administered separately by the Burma Office under the Secretary of State for India and Burma. Burma achieved independence from British rule on 4 January 1948.

gaining ground (Gary, 2015). In the case of Myanmar, however, a law has been passed that criminalizes any attempt to re-establish the *Bhikkhuni* Order as a crime of treason.[16]

From the earliest account as to what type of Theravada Buddhism could have been practiced in Burma, I would now like to discuss the late pre-colonial period, the later periods of the Konbaung Dynasty. This is a brief history of the relationship between the *Sangha* and the monarchy of Burma during the reigns of King Mindon (*r*. 1857–1878) and his successor Thibaw (*r*. 1878–1885). During this period, nothing much changed from the Amarapura period (1837–1857) in terms of the relationship between the monarchy and the *Sangha*. The monastic system of ecclesiastical hierarchy and its examination systems remained the same as during the Bodawpaya (*r*. 1781–1819) period, although King Mindon decided to slightly alter the names of the Pathamapyan levels (details in chapter 3).

With the king perceived as the cosmic creator and protector of religion, the *Sangha* enjoyed several privileges, including material supports and protection. In return, the *Sangha* was responsible for offering spiritual well-being and guidance, monastic learning, and training. From among the learned and skillful in practice, the king himself selectively appointed the monks who would become royal tutors. The tutors and the king would meet at the Sudhamma pavilions, which still exist surrounding the Mandalay Palace today. This is where the royal tutors came to be known as 'Suddhammasayadaw.' Suddhamma is the name of the pavilions built by the monarch for the public, while *sayadaw* is a combination of two words: *saya* (tutor) + *daw* (royal). The term *sayadaw* is still in use today to mean 'abbot,' 'venerable *Sangha* member,' 'scholar monk,' 'respected monk,' 'teacher-monk,'

[16] The self-composed story of Saccavadi, a Burmese nun, was made public in 2005 after her release from prison in Yangon. She was sentenced to five years in jail for defiance for giving up her role in the female monkhood, *bhikkhuni*. She was ordained as a *bhikkhuni* in Sri Lanka while studying for a Ph.D in Buddhist Studies, although she received a prior written objection from the SSMC, the governing body of Sangha Order in Burma. During her visit to her ailing father in 2005, she was summoned to appear before the Sangha Council to respond to the charges against her and admit her wrong-doing. She was requested: 1) to bow three times before the council of monks of the SSMC; 2) to remove her *bhikkhuni* robes and replace them with the robes of a nun; 3) to sign a document admitting that she was foolish and wrong; and 4) to read these admissions aloud. Although she acquiesced to the first three requests, she refused to read aloud the admissions statement, and she was sent to jail. She was released with the assistance of some family members who had some military background and the media, which reported on her case widely. https://sujato.wordpress.com/2010/02/16/saccavadis-story/. Accessed: August 2015.

and so on. When the monarch, the protector of Buddhist religion for the nation, was no more, the Burmese *Sangha* had to shoulder the responsibility of the *Sangha* affairs, including protection of the continuity of the *Buddha-sāsanā*.

In *Powerful Learning*, Michael Charney (2006) focuses on pre-colonial Burma's Buddhist literati and the throne, especially during the last dynasty, 1752–1885. Charney challenges the notion of the court and the monastic order as static institutions by examining how competition within and between them prompted a major rethinking about the intellectual foundations of indigenous society and culture. The catalyst for this reformation of indigenous thought was the rise of a small clique of Buddhist monks and laypeople from the frontiers to commanding positions in the state and monastic order over the course of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This clique had a major influence on the creation of state myths, the ways in which the throne ruled and presented itself, and, ultimately, the relationship between the throne and the state. The new state and monastic orthodoxy, however, was challenged by other members of the Burmese literati, who, over the course of the nineteenth century, sought in Western science, technology, and political theory other ways in which to shape Burmese perspectives on state and society.

In the Buddhist history of post-colonial Burma, during 1954–1956, it is well known that with the patronage of U Nu's government, the Burmese *Sangha* convened the Sixth Buddhist Council (*Chaṭṭhasaṅgāyanā*). This was an international event bringing together representatives from Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and the host country of Burma to standardize Theravada texts for the Theravada Buddhist world in modern times. However, the Burma state *Sangha* was officially re-organized and systematically reformed in the early 1980s by a patron of General Ne Win's government (Matthews, 1993). Before this reformation, there could be countless *Sangha* sects or schools (*gaing)* in Burma. Many fractional sects existed in ethnic states and some regions. The Burmese *Sangha* was also known to have many schools that differed greatly in terms of ideologies and practices (Kham Maung, 2004: 38; Mendelson, 1975: 25).

2.2 *Sangha* organizations in present-day Myanmar

The State Sangha Mahanayaka Council (SSMC)

The state *Sangha* organization in Myanmar is known in English as the State Sangha Mahanayaka Council (SSMC)[17] and in Burmese as *Naing-gan-daw Sangha Mahanayaka Aphwe*, abbreviated as '*Mahana*.' The SSMC is a government-appointed body of high-ranking Buddhist monks that oversees and regulates the *Sangha* in the country. The Council was formed after the First Congregation of All Orders for the Purification, Perpetuation, and Propagation of *Sāsana* by General Ne Win's government. The SSMC was formed to consolidate state control of the country's *Sangha* during a meeting held in Rangoon (now Yangon) from 24 to 27 May 1980 (Seekins, 2006). The Congregation developed a hierarchy to regulate monks at the village tract/ward, state/region (division), and national levels via committees, and devised a central governing body of 47 members now called the State Sangha Mahanayaka Council, which would, in theory, be responsible for all the affairs of Buddhist monks in the country (Seekins, 2006). Under the state's regulations, the Council also developed regulations to register all the monks countrywide to obtain separate identification cards (Human Rights Watch, 2009).

The 47-member Sangha Council includes a president, six vice-presidents, one secretary general, six joint general secretaries, and 33 other members, all of whom are appointed by the State Ministry of Religious Affairs. Until 1995, appointment terms lasted five years. Since 1995, the government has cut term lengths, with a quarter of the seats changed every three years (Human Rights Watch, 2009). The Ministry of Religious Affairs was established in order to oversee various functions of the *Sangha* during the period before the country gained its independence. According to the implementation of the new system of administration on 15 March 1972, the Department of Religious Affairs was formed comprising the following departments, which were under the Ministry of Religious Affairs: a) Secretariat of the Ministry of Religious Affairs; b) Division of Religious Affairs Directorate; c) Division of Pali University and Dhammacariya; d)

[17] In some occasions, the State Sangha Mahanayaka Committee (SSMC) is also used. In this research "Council" is used instead of "Committee." With reference to the Sangha Organization in Burma/Myanmar, "Sangha Council" or "the Sangha Council" is used.

Division of Pali Education; e) International Institute for Advance Buddhist studies; f) Buddha Sāsana Council; and g) Tripitakadhara Selection Board.

The Shan State Sangha Council (SSSC)

According to the statement described in the *Theravāda Buddhasāsanasobhanā* (Shan State Sangha Council, 2014), the purpose of founding the Shan *Sangha* governing body was to revitalize Buddhism in Shan State. The statement says, "[W]ith the objectives of the purification and propagation of *Buddha-sāsana* and to make Buddhism accessible to the people of Shan State, *Sangha* from different parts of Shan State gathered together in the Aungsiri Cinema Hall in Loilem, Southern Shan State, in November 1957." The statement further mentions that after careful considerations, it was unanimously decided that a *Sangha* council should be formed and named "The Shan State Sangha Council" (SSSC) (2014).[18] In May 1971, another general meeting was held by the council and it was agreed upon that the secretariat of the SSSC officiants should be based in Panglong. Since then, the SSSC officiates at Wat Pitakat, where major projects such as Shan Tripitaka translations and *Sangha* affairs are administered. Panglong is a historical landmark town where the infamous Panglong Agreement was signed between members of several ethnic groups and General Aung San, as a representative of lowland Burma, in February 1947.

The establishment of the Shan *Sangha* organization was prior to General Ne Win's government's purification of the *Buddha-sāsana* program in 1980. Therefore, the SSSC predates the SSMC and is one of the earliest forms of *Sangha* organizations in the country. The pattern of the SSSC's organization is hierarchically comprised of: a) President and two Vice-Presidents; b) Secretary General and two Assistant Secretary Generals; c) Treasurer and an Assistant Treasurer; d) Accountant; and e) six Coordinators.

As its counterpart the Myanmar 'State Sangha Mahanayaka Council,' the Shan State Sangha Council appoints senior Shan monks as members of the 'Board of Elders' (*Mahanayaka*) as the advisory board to the governing body. According to the statement

[18] In Shan, ငဝ်ႈငုၼ်းမုၵ်ႉၸုမ်းလူင်သင်ၶၸိုင်ႈတႆး (ngao-ngun-muk-jum-luang-sangha-sueng-tai).

in *Theravāda Buddhasāsanasobhanā*, the key objectives of the SSSC are to establish a sub-committee for monastic training and education to meet its aims. The objectives of the Education Committee are: a) To translate Buddha's teachings from Pali into Shan; b) To study and practice Buddha's teachings; c) To hold monastic examinations; and d) To train and produce teachers of the *Dhamma* (*Dhammacariya*).

Thus, even after the 1980s, under the governing body of the Myanmar state *Sangha* administration, the SSSC continued to exercise its own rights as the highest body of the *Sangha*'s order overseeing monk's affairs in Shan State. The SSSC has the mandate to work on all of the above mentioned to meet its objectives. Since the early 1980s, as it exists under the umbrella of the Myanmar State Sangha Organization, it is important to follow the rules and regulations propagated by the state *Sangha* (State Sangha Mahanayaka Council, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c, 2008d, 2008e) and periodically issued by the state, such as the Law Related to *Sangha* Organization (The State Law and Order Restoration Council, 1990). This means, apart from the SSMC's[19] regulations, the Shan *Sangha*, just as any other ethnic or Myanmar *Sangha*, also has to comply with the state's laws. Ironically, monks operating under the very restrictive rules of the state can still sometimes express their displeasure with the state, such as through protests and proposed law amendments (Aung Kyaw Min, 2014b). The SSMC does not operate, therefore, without criticism for its roles in the *Sangha* and state affairs among Myanmar monks and lay-Buddhists. To some, the appointed 47-member board of the country's highest-ranking *sayadaws* was, rather than helping and taking care of *Sangha* affairs, serving as the scapegoats and mouthpiece for successive Myanmar governments. As Myanmar monks were seen participating among regime-defying democratic movements such as the pro-democracy uprisings of 1988 and the monk-led Saffron Revolution in 2007, the SSMC became the focal point of controversy for its supportive role to the government and its attempts to suppress the monks' movements.

The Myanmar *Sangha*, during the period of British rule, was known to have anti-colonial sentiments, but the current monastic education and examination systems still carry several

[19] In Burmese/Myanmar: နိုင်ငံေတာ်သံဃမဟာနာယကအဖွဲ့ (Naing-ngan-daw-thanga-mahanayaka-apwe).

vestiges of colonial heritage. During the 1980s, along with the *Buddha-sāsana* purification program, the monastic learning system was supposed to have been modernized and a number of curriculums were also systematized. Many high-ranking monks were said to have disagreed with the changes. As a result, in the late 1990s, those 'modernized' and 'systematized' monastic learning and examination systems were reversed back to the colonial status.

The governing body of the state *Sangha*, known as the State Sangha Mahanayaka Committee or Council (SSMC), was established in 1981 with a successful resolution to purify and unify all *Sangha* sects in Burma. With the state *Sangha*, the Shan State Sangha Council (SSSC) does not have a direct relationship or cooperation in official terms. The establishment of the two *Sangha* organizations emerged at different times and with different purposes and themes, as will be detailed in the following section. Therefore, today they do not have a significant collaboration regarding the *Sangha* affairs at the state level, although the SSSC is required to comply with the state *Sangha*'s specifications and regulations.

Presently, the SSSC operates three major branch offices in Shan State: the head office in Panglong; the second in Lashio, the northern capital of the state; and the third in Kengtung, the eastern capital. The monastic education project, conducted under its Education Committee and known as the Shan State *Pariyatti Saddhammapala*, started in 1962, is now a half-century old and has 30 centers across townships that have adopted its guidelines for standard examinations in Shan State. This curriculum for the examinations has been reviewed, and as of present is basically the same as that prescribed by the State Sangha Education Committee system with the same types of questions, but differing in naming, level classifications, and the medium of language used in the exams. For the state examinations, Burmese and Pali are used, while the SSSC's examinations accept either Shan or Pali for the answers.

In regards to identity construction, the following questions may be asked: How does the Shan *Sangha* and the SSSC see their roles as important in the development of the Shan State Buddhist University (SSBU), and how prepared are they to face the challenges? While the Phra Khammai-led Shan *Sangha* is more academic and some of the members

may be ready to shoulder the responsibilities of being teaching staff and becoming faculty members, they would not neglect the *Dhammadūta* mission. The SSSC, on the other hand, is based at its local office in Panglong and is concerned more about the members of the Shan State *Sangha* serving the local community with Buddhist culture. The SSSC has been responsible for the *Sangha* affairs for over a half century, which means it has gained experience with the administration of monastic affairs. It is the sole center providing the Shan *Sangha* examinations known as the Shan State *Pariyatti Saddhammapala* Examination (SSPSE) since 1957. The SSPSE has been recognized and adopted throughout Shan State, and it has 30 branches of examination centers so far.

Controversies around the Sangha Council

In theory, the Council oversees violations of the *Vinaya,* the traditional regulatory framework of Theravada Buddhist monks in compliance with the majority Burmese interpretation. This body has been used by the government to curtail monks' involvement in non-religious affairs (Larkin, 2011). The Council has the power to disrobe monks who have violated its decrees and edicts, as well as *Vinaya* regulations and laws, and expel monks from their resident monasteries (Human Rights Watch, 2009).

It has been widely reported that members of the *Sangha* were involved during the 1988 pro-democracy uprising in Burma. The SSMC, nevertheless, sided with the state authority to shun support for a democratic revolution. Likewise, during the Saffron Revolution in 2007, the Sangha Council announced new regulations to prohibit monks from participating in secular affairs.[20] In December 2009, the Council banned advertisements of *Dhamma* talks and lectures held by monks, including posters (Moe, 2009).

U Paññāsiha, commonly known as Shwenyawa Sayadaw, the abbot of the Sadhu Pariyatti Monastery, is a Burmese Theravada Buddhist monk best known for teaching at Yangon Buddhist University in Kyimyindaing Township in Yangon. In February 2012, he was evicted from his monastery by the Council for alleged disobedience after holding a

[20] "State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee has duty to reinforce and observe basic principles and rules and regulations and implement religious matters." *The New Light of Myanmar*. 25 September 2007. Accessed: October 2015.

sermon at the Mandalay office of the National League for Democracy in September, where he had publicly called for the release of political prisoners and the end of ongoing civil wars, despite sending the Council an apology and requesting an appeal (Committee, 2011; Friend, 2012). In December 2011, he met with Hillary Clinton, the U.S. Secretary of State, along with other civil society delegates (Mann, 2012). In February 2012, U Gambira, a prominent monk in the Saffron Revolution, was accused by the Council of committing the offenses of illegal squatting and breaking and entering of monasteries, and subsequently arrested by secular authorities.[21] In June 2014, ironically, under the semi-quasi-civilian government of Thein Sein, the SSMC, using a police force, stormed the Santisukha Monastery at midnight during a high-profile land dispute in Tamwe Township (Aung Kyaw Min, 2014a). The pre-emptive occupation was enacted while the abbot of the monastery was on a religious mission in Japan. The rise of a new nationalist Buddhist movement known as the "969 Movement" headed by U Wirathu is also highly controversial. Many global mainstream media outlets portray the leader as an extremist or ultranationalist Burmese monk who has been backed by some of the highest political entities in the country. The SSMC seems to be silently supporting U Wirathu's cause of "neo-nationalism" during Burma/Myanmar's transition period.

The structure of Sangha Order

The Community of Sangha Order in Burma consists of two major groups: *Bhikkhu* (monk/fully ordained ones) and *Samanera* (novices), plus *Dasa-sila-mata* (*Thila-shin*, or nuns). According to a state report on the population of the *Sangha*, there are 226,508 *bhikkhus*, 25,834 *samaneras*, and 34,365 nuns in the country.[22] The total number of members of these communities is 286,707, and all are governed by the State Sangha Mahanayaka Council (SSMC).

[21] "U Gambhira not only commits offences but also insults national-level Sangha organization after his release from prison: Legal actions to be taken in consideration of religion, Sasana, and purity of Sasana as Dhamma action no more works." *New Light of Myanmar*. 18 February 2012.

[22] Ministry of Religious Affairs. (2005). However, it is not mentioned for which year the figures are given. From the article, it seems to suggest a period during the 1990s. Over the years, these statistics have likely increased. <http://www.mora.gov.mm/mora_department1.aspx>. Accessed: June 5, 2015.

Myanmar consists of seven predominantly ethnic states and seven regions (formerly ‘divisions’). Every state and region, along with each township, votes to elect members of the Sangha Mahanayaka Council, consisting of the chairman (*ukkattha*), secretary (*atwinyehmu*), and Acting *Sangha* Committee (*Sangha Wun-saung Aphwe*). Villages and village tracts may elect their own *Sangha Nayaka* as well, depending on the population of the *Sangha* in the specific areas.

Figure 2.1 This picture shows the 47-member hierarchy of the State Sangha Mahanayaka Council (SSMC), the governing body of monks in Myanmar. Photo: Ven. Pannyabhoga Herngseng.

State and national level

The picture above shows the hierarchical order of the 47-member State Sangha Mahanayaka Council, the highest-ranking order of monks in the country. The highest officiant of the SSMC is the President (*Ukkaṭṭha Sayadaw*) followed by the Secretary

General (*Akyotaw-saung* or *Atwinyehmu Sayadaw*). The SSMC has three major divisions, and each division is organized as an Acting Sangha Committee (ASC). Under each ASC are two vice-presidents and two deputy secretary generals and under them are 11 members. The president (*Ukkaṭṭha Sayadaw*) and secretary general (*Atwinyehmu Sayadaw*) are directly appointed by the state. The remaining 45 *Sayadaws* are either selected, elected, or appointed by the state in consultation with nine *nikayas* from the seven states and seven regions of the country. The role of the SSMC is to govern or to safeguard the well-being of Buddhist monastic order and the affairs of *Buddha-sāsana* throughout the entire country.

The 45 *Sayadaws* are divided into three units and each unit takes a turn in the administrative role (four months each in a year) as officials at the Ministry of *Buddha-sāsana* Affairs at the Kaba-aye Office in Yangon. Each unit also appoints an Acting Sangha Committee (*Sangha Wun-saung Aphwe*).

Under each unit, members are further divided into branches to take responsibility of other affairs and duties, such as:

- Education Sub-committee (*Pyinnyaye Aphwe-nge*), focusing on textual learning and teaching
- Judge and Justice – Judicial Affairs (*Vinaya-viinicchaya Aphwe*), issuing rules and regulations as needs arise
- *Dhammadūta* (missionary), providing special monastic trainings on topics including preaching, ritual performance, monk as an abbot, duty and responsibility, etc.

State/Region level

- Every township of the seven states and seven regions also elects a Sangha Mahanayaka Council, consisting of a chairman (*ukkattha*), secretary (*atwinyehmu*), and Acting Sangha Committee (*Sangha Wun-saung Aphwe*).
- Village and village tracts may elect *Sangha Nayaka* as well, depending on the specific population of each *Sangha*.

Individual Level[23]

- In everyday life the term "*Sayadaw*" (venerable monk) is used to address an abbot of a monastery (Burmese: *Kyaung-htaing Sayadaw*).

- *Bhikkhu* (Burmese: *Yahan-taw* or *Yahan*) is a residential monk in a monastery. However, for informal communication in spoken language, there are variant terms for residential monks, such as *U Pazin* or *Uzin*, which are more familiar terms in common usage.

- *Samanera* (Burmese: *Koyin* or sometimes *Thamane*) is a term derived from Pali used for a residential novice monk.

***Dasa-sila-mata* (*Thilashin* / *Mae chee* / Nun)**

In Burma, *Thilashin* or nuns are not officially recognized as members of *Sangha*. Neither are they recognized as *Bhikkhuni* (fully ordained nuns) as in Sri Lanka and elsewhere. With campaigning for recognition of a *Bhikkhuni* order in Thailand, a leading Thai feminist group is seeking to reform modern Thai Buddhism. In the case of Burma, it seems that the government, as well as the *Sangha*, is less tolerant and may not allow that to happen in the country. *Thilashin*, although they are not recognized as members of the *Sangha*, in some cases do share similar status/privilege as monks. For example, they can receive offerings, donations, monastic learning, meditation practices, and establish nunnery centers. They can also receive religious respects from laypeople and invitations to offer blessings for their homes.

2.3 Buddhist monastic education in Myanmar

In this section, I would like to provide an overview of the monastic education system in Myanmar to offer an idea of how it looks, the levels of comparison with the Thai monastic system, and its structure. This will demonstrate what Phra Khammai has accomplished

[23] In Burmese, there is a common term for addressing Buddhist monks, "*Phone-gyi*," including *Sayadaw*, monk, and novice (except nun). Literally, *Phone-gyi* means "great glory." This term is also used to refer to a monarch if he is powerful and respected, eg. King Anawratha, a monarch of "great glory."

and his educational position in the country. There are two methods or approaches well known for monastic education and learning in Myanmar: Mandalay and Pakokku. Of these two, the Pakokku method is a 'swimming' approach for it emphasizes exploration of the vast ocean of Tripitaka texts in order to facilitate students' understanding and 'meeting' of the Buddha. On the other hand, the Mandalay method focuses more on the grammatical syntax of the Pali language. This approach has the philosophy that once Pali's grammar syntax is mastered, the Tripitaka texts can be easily explored and understood. The Pakokku approach does not require one to sit examinations, but students of the Mandalay method must proceed through several levels of curriculum by completing examinations. Learning through examinations is a modern approach, and necessary for the majority of monks nationwide to gain the same knowledge, as well as for prestige's sake. In modern times, learning by the Pakokku method is in decline. Due to the requirements for certification, the Mandalay examination method is highly favored. Only a small number of monks may choose to study with the Pakokku method as they would not need receive any certification or recognition for their attained knowledge. According to an informant who is knowledgeable in this field, only a few hundred monks have actually followed the Pakokku method in the past several years.[24]

The majority of monastic education in Myanmar does not offer instruction in English language as either a mandatory or elective course in their syllabus or as a major in a program. During the summer breaks, young monk students do, however, often choose to participate in English tuition classes in major cities, such as Mandalay and Yangon. As Burma was a former British colony, many senior monks until recently considered English to be an 'animal science,' meaning that monks should not learn it, as it is contrary to Buddhist monastic principles (Phra Khammai, 2004). An animal science, according to the sentiments of conservative Buddhist monks in Myanmar, is a type of knowledge that may help one to understand something, but is not necessary for Buddhism. Many Myanmar orthodox Theravadin monks still hold this view. *Tiracchāna-vijjā* is a Pali term for animal science, found in *Digha-nikaya* (the Long-Length Sayings) and *Vinaya-pitaka* (the Book

[24] Informant, personal interview, September 2015.

of Monastic Disciplinary Codes) texts.[25] However, neither source suggests that monks should not or cannot learn languages (including English). Knowledge of animal science includes all secular subjects and languages other than Pali, and perhaps Burmese, according to Buddhist conservativism in Myanmar. Phra Khammai, however, argues that in Burma the Sangha's designation of some subjects, particularly English and mathematics, as animal sciences stems from the British presence in Burma (Phra Khammai, 2004: 286; 2007: 17). Clearly, senior Burmese monks held a very nationalistic view toward their colonial rulers. If one wants to understand Buddhism, he/she needs no other language than Pali itself, they asserted.

Interestingly, quoting Sivarak, *Sarm Somdejs* (Three Somdets), p.3, Phra Khammai describes that,

> "… [In] Thailand, although never colonized by any European power, there was the same debate on this issue. We do not know how it all began, but we learn that two of the most important figures in the history of Thai *Sangha* education in the early twentieth century, Somdej Khemacari of Wat Mahadhatu (Mahā-nikāya) and Somdej Nyanavaro of Wat Thep (Dhammayuttika-nikāya), did not allow their students to study English on the grounds that it was 'animal science'; ironically, both were pupils of the English-speaking Prince-Patriarch Vajirayan." (Phra Khammai, 2004:288)

Following the Mandalay approach, the monastic education system is examination-based; therefore it has several levels to complete: *Akhyebyu-mula* (Primary-foundation), *Pathama-nge* (Primary-school) *Pathama-lat* (Middle-school), *Pathama-gyi* (High-school) and *Dhammacariya* (Undergraduate). All these examinations are sponsored by the government. Primary to High school levels are also commonly known as *Pathama-pyan*, a shortened form of *Pathamasar taw pyan* examinations. Under the British government, the *Pathamapyan* continued to be recognized. At the undergraduate level, there are also examinations sponsored by private Buddhist organizations such as *Sakyasiha* in Mandalay and *Cetiyaṅgaṇa* in Yangon. Although they are non-government

[25] Ibid. p. 286. Fn. 36.

sponsored examinations, they are well recognized by the government and respected by the both scholars and the general public. Many young monks in Myanmar, once graduated from the *Dhammacariya* government-sponsored education program, also attempt to earn non-government sponsored degrees, the *Sakyasiha* and *Cetiyaṅgaṇa* degrees. A general perception is that the latter two undergraduate degrees are tougher than the government one, so that if one can achieve an additional or both external degrees, he/she will earn more prestige and scholarly competency.

The current state monastic education in Burma dates back at least 400 years to the eras of King Thalun (1629–1648) and Bodawpaya (1782–1819), who introduced and reintroduced former examinations for the *Sangha*, alas for the monarch's political manipulation purposes. Subsequently, King Mindon (1853–1878) was said to have improved relationships with the *Sangha* in relation to monastic education. Nevertheless, Burmese Buddhism encountered conflicts and tensions between idealists and pragmatists[26] within the Sangha as to how and what should be taught, trained, learned and studied in monastic education (Phra Khammai, 2004: 14). The conflicts between the two camps persisted during Burma's colonial era (1885–1948). The trend of tensions arguably continues to be felt in the present, but perhaps today could be renamed with 'idealist' as 'traditionalist' and 'pragmatist' as 'modernist.'

The state *Sangha* monastic examination has had three levels since it was first introduced in 1784 by King Bodawpaya by royal decree (Phra Khammai, 2004: 85) and named *Pathamapyan sarmepwe*.[27] Bodawpaya's choice of words to name the levels is arbitrary, with the words *ayok* (အယုတ်), *alat* (အလတ်), and *amyat* (အမြတ်) meaning lower, medium, and higher class, respectively. However, King Mindon (1853–1878) decided to abandon these terms and chose more neutral ones, i.e. *gne* (ငယ်), *lat* (လတ်), and *gyi* (ကြီး), meaning

[26] The meaning of 'idealist' or 'idealism' used here is as defined by Dhammasami's thesis. Idealism refers to the monastic ideal that one seeks ordination for the sake of salvation and, once ordained, a novice or monk should fully dedicate himself to the study and practice of the Buddha's teaching and monastic discipline, *Dhamma* and *Vinaya*. When this idealism is applied to education policy, it means that the study of subjects that are not part of the *Dhamma* and *Vinaya*, or are perceived to be against the spirit of monastic idealism, is forbidden.

[27] They were called Pathama sar taw pyan, "excellent candidate for royal examination", which soon came to be known by its abbreviated form Pathamapyan (Dhammasami (2004:85)).

junior, middle, and senior, respectively (Phra Khammai, 2004: 88). This examination was supposed to be continued under the British *raj* during their occupation. As in the time of Burmese monarchs, the British supported not only examinations, but also ecclesiastical titles such as *Aggamahā paṇḍita* ("the Greatest Pundit"), then the highest honorary title, which was conferred to the learned *sayadaws*. D. Litt (Doctor of Literature) was awarded to Ledi Sayadaw, who introduced modern Buddhist meditation to the laypeople. This tradition continues through subsequent successions of the Myanmar government until the present. Under the purification of the *Buddha-sāsana* in early 1980s by Ne Win's government, a new title for one higher than a pundit, *Abhidhaja-mahāraṭṭha-guru* ("the Highest State Tutor") was conferred to *sayadaws* who promote Buddhism. And in the monastic education sector, a new foundational level, primary (*Akhyepyu-mula*), was also introduced and the curriculum for the existing levels was restructured. Under the same program, state monastic education was supposed to be modernized. Nevertheless, such efforts have faced strong criticism from the traditionalists who do not want to change. Still, not only was the new level added, but the curriculum was also largely modified and study of Myanmar literature was made compulsory. After the death of the reformist U Kyaw Lwin,[28] a former monk himself and the chief architect of the new monastic education program, a decade later the *Pathamapyan* examination system was again reversed to its former status and retained only *Myanmar-sar*, the Burmese language literature component. An informant who is knowledgeable in this field told me that since several years ago, the primary level and Burmese literature components have been removed from the curriculum altogether.[29]

A multicultural ethno state, as Burma transformed into a nation-state in modern times, it experienced problems not only in secular affairs, but also monastic. While all of the major ethnic groups possess their own cultural system enriched with their own language and literature, they have also experienced a limited capacity to develop and have received a lack of recognition from the state. Ethno-nationalism has arisen as a result. Phra Khammai

[28] In 1991, when the Junta created a new department for the Buddhist religious affairs known as the Department for the Promotion and Propagation of the Sasana (DPPS), a unit within the Religion Ministry, U Kyaw Lwin was appointed as its head.

[29] Informant, personal interview, August 2015.

acknowledges in his article "Growing but as a Sideline: An Overview of Modern Shan Monastic Education" that there was a danger of threats to cultural identity and religious practices due to national assimilation drives and a decline of non-Burman ethnic languages and literature, leading to fear of insecurities and uncertainties within Burma. This situation has gradually intensified, notably after Burma's independence in 1948. Several Shan educationists in the *Sangha* began to become aware of their cultural consciousness. The following is a narrative story retold by Phra Khammai:

> In 1956, just after the *Chaṭṭhasaṅgāyan*ā, the Sixth Buddhist Council (1954–56), individual efforts by two learned Shan monks led to the founding of *Sangha* examination boards to promote the study of the Tripiṭaka in Shan. Both of them were educated in the Burmese tradition and hold a *Dhammācariya* degree conferred by the Government of the Union of Burma.
>
> One of the two boards of examinations was at the Dhammodaya Monastery in Kengtung in eastern Shan State, and the other in Mong Nang, a village near a town called Kesi in central Shan State. The two founders of the two examinations shared some common characteristics: they wanted to bring Shan monastic education in-line with the Burmese, which emphasized the study of Pali canonical and commentarial literature. Both were amongst the earliest monks in the country to have obtained the *Dhammācariya* degree through the government-sponsored *Dhammācariya* examinations. Besides, both compiled textbooks for their pupils, using materials from Pali and Burmese sources.
>
> In brief, the creation of the examinations by these two Shan scholar-monks was to promote canonical-based Buddhism in the Shan language. …but I think they did not know each other personally when they were setting up examination boards in their hometowns. This is not to say they might not have heard of each other, for both became prominent when the Shan became very conscious of the danger posed to their cultural identity within the Union of Burma. Any movement by the non-Burman minority nationalities, including those in education and culture, at this time could be considered part of that identity-consciousness. This anxiety about the national identity of the Shan was shared by other non-Burman ethnic groups

> in Burma, because they were aware of the problem of assimilation, fearing for the future of their cultural identities. By the time the Shan Sangha was setting up local boards of examination in the 1950s, their Mon counterparts had already successfully adapted to the Burmese cultural dominance by embracing the government-sponsored *Pathamapyan* and *Dhammacariya* examinations, but in the Mon language. (Phra Khammai, 2009: 40-41)

The above story explains why there was a need for Phra Khammai to go abroad to get higher education that was modern, better, competent, and more prestigious than that available in Burma. If he were to remain in the country or in Shan State, he would not have been as he is today, but would have likely ended up with the state *Sangha*'s hegemony in terms of education and practices. For him, going abroad was a must to get out of the cage, something which is not ordinary but is rational. His rationality demonstrates that dynamic form of renovation and reformation of monastic education is an urgent need to start with. This, in fact, is not limited only to the Shan State, but Phra Khammai sees that the educational revival should happen on a large scale for the whole country. Phra Khammai acknowledges changes to Myanmar's state-controlled education system has taken place during the recent decade, as several Buddhist colleges and state-sponsored universities have begun operating. At the same time, he sees these changes as not yet sufficient or up to the level required for true reform.

2.4 *Lik Long* Movement

Lik Long (Great Text) is the term used to refer to the texts covering a wide range and variety of subjects, including local knowledge, religious beliefs, ancient wisdom, astrology, astronomy, history, politics, and Buddhism written in Shan vernacular language either in poetry or prose (*lanka long*). According to Saosra Mongkut, it is believed that the Shan *Lik Long* literature developed around 1200 Myanmar era (1838 BCE) and reached a wider audience around 1240 (1878 BCE) when Sao Kanghso and other five scholars emerged contemporarily.[30] Crosby and Jotika (Crosby & Khur-Yearn, 2010: 2) offer the date of when the *Lik Long* genre of poetry emerged as over 500 years

[30] Personal interview, via Viber chat room, October 2015.

ago, with Sao Dhammatinna, the earliest known poet, born in 1541 CE and died in 1640 CE. Sao Kanghso is widely known as a leading Yuan Buddhist practitioner in Shan State and his writings cover a wide range of knowledge such as: astrology, astronomy, history, Buddhism, politics. *Pārājirājaññā*, *Rājahita Dipani* and *Rājovāda* are among the best-known pieces authored by Sao Nawkham.

'*Bamar Ledi, Shan Kawli*' is a widely known saying among Burmese intellectuals in lowland Burma indicating that the Burman Ledi is the foremost Buddhist scholar for the Burmese, while Kawli is recognized as the equivalent among the Shan. The pervasiveness of this saying is an indication that during the 18th and 19th centuries Shan intellectuals received broad recognition. Ledi Sayadaw (1846–1923), who lived during the colonial period, was foremost in Buddhist literature among the Burmese monks, while Kawli (1847–1910?) was respected with the same status as Ledi, indicating Shan and Burmese intellectuals had a dynamic interaction during which some of the Shans were also educated in Mandalay. In 1911, Ledi Sayadaw was conferred an *Aggamahapandita* (foremost great scholar) title, then the highest offered by the British government of India; he was also awarded a Doctorate of Literature (D. Litt) from the University of Rangoon (Vipassana Research Institute, 1994). However, there is no indication that Shan intellectuals ever received such an award from a high institutional body. Ledi and Kawli were not only contemporaries, but shared some similar interests, both being expert in *Abhidhamma*, and both having experienced the British colonial period in Burma. Upon encountering British colonialism, Ledi was known to have introduced *Abhidhamma* studies and meditation practice among the laity (Braun, 2013). Nevertheless, it is not known if Kawli made use of Buddhism for the promotion of Buddhist practices among the Shan populace.

Born in Mongpan in southern Shan State in 1847, Kawli was famously known as 'Sao Kawli Mongpan' among the Shans. As a child he was called 'Ka Kham' or 'Sai Leik' (Khun Maha, 1986; Terwiel, 2003: 16). At the age of eight he was sent to a local monastery, and one year later he was ordained as a novice and obtained the monastic name 'Koliya.' He received higher ordination at the age of 20 through his skills in Shan and Tai Yuan literatures. Like Ledi Sayadaw, he had deep knowledge of *Abhidhamma*

texts. He resided in various monasteries throughout Shan State and Burma. He was said to have spent one year (according to some sources, four years) in Mandalay at Shwe Min Wun Taike. Koliya won the *Pathama-kyaw*, a famous contest related to Buddhist monastic examinations. His achievements and intellectual skills were reported to King Mindon. The king awarded Koliya the ecclesiastical royal title '*Tripitaka-pandita*' (Khun Maha, 1996), and he was also recognized with the status of 'royal monk' as the king himself became his patron (Ashin Samvarabhivamsa, 2008; Director Saya Myint, 1967; Khun Maha, 1986). In the same year, he returned to Mongpan to see his mother prior to her passing. He then wrote *Sutta Mongpan*, or *Sutta Kawli*, within five days in his mother's memory.[31] On the seventh day of his mother's memorial service, Kawli's masterpiece was read by a *Jare* (traditional Shan scholar), and Kawli was praised and applauded by the audience. Since then, the reading of *Sutta Mongpan* at a Shan's funeral has become a tradition throughout Shan State. This practice is very much alive today, and can even be seen in Chiang Mai among the migrant Shans. Along with many other useful items offered to the monastery during a Shan funeral, people feel like something is missing if the *Sutta Mongpan* is not read and copies offered to attendees.

Being a traveler-scholar who sojourned throughout the year, he later he left the monkhood for the sake of convenience at the age of 39, and then made his living by writing books, many of which were completed during his travels. According to some, Kawli took off his robes due to the conflict between two Buddhist traditions in the region: the Sudhamma and Yuan sects. Local history informs us that Kawli was against the Yuan Buddhist practices as its texts were deemed invalid and irrelevant to the Buddha's teachings (Ashin Samvarabhivamsa, 2008; Director Saya Myint, 1967; Khun Maha, 1996; Terwiel, 2003). As the ruling prince of Mongpan and most people throughout the entire region of what is today central Shan State were followers of Yuan Buddhism, they had good reason to dislike Kawli and discredit his works altogether. He was said to have composed the Tripitaka using the Shan poetic *Dhamma* formula known as "*Samkawng Mongpan*" ("Three Baskets of Mongpan"), a summary of *Vinaya*, *Suttanta*, and *Abhidhamma*

[31] *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta* of *Mahāvaggapāli*, *Dīghanikāya* (Di.2.3). This *sutta* is also known in some English translation as "The Last Days of the Buddha."

composed in poetic style. All these copies were also presented to the *Saopha* (prince) of Mongpan. According to oral history, due to the quality of the works of Kawli, the ruling price was convinced to invite Kawli to return. Although he received the invitation, he never returned to Mongpan, but spent his time at Mongnawng as a writer and *Jare*.

Most Shan scholars composed their works—whether on religion, astrology, history, or some other field of knowledge—in poetic forms. Along with the Burmese, the Shans have developed a variety of poetic prose writing styles. All these forms of manuscripts are what people call *Lik Long* (Great Texts) today. At the same time, the claims of many Shan scholars seem to suggest that these forms of poetic *Dhamma* exist only in Shan language. I believe this assertion is not exactly correct. Ledi, as mentioned above, who was Kawli's contemporary, did actually compose the *Dhamma* in poetic form. For instance, *Nwa-metta-sa* (the beef abstention letter) is well-known. Ledi wrote this to encourage the Burmese Buddhist laity to refrain from eating beef (Braun, 2008: 142-143). Ledi's writing was meant to counter British colonialism as he deemed it necessary to uplift the moral behavior and characteristics of the Burmese. Nevertheless, the Burmese did not develop a tradition of reading or reciting such poetic *Dhamma* in public, nor do they have *Jare*. In typical Shan communities, the reading (*haw lik*) of Shan manuscripts in public by a *Jare* could be witnessed in Shan villages or temples on the occasions of funerals, Buddhist lunar full-moon days, *Poi Sanglong*, and many other religio-cultural cerebrations. According to Samvarabhivamsa (Ashin Samvarabhivamsa, 2008: 246-7), a Burmese *sayadaw* writer, public recitation of poetic *Dhamma* did not develop among the Burmese Buddhist literati because literacy rates were high among the Burman. On the other hand, literacy rates among the Shan was very low. Therefore, the Shans would need to invite a *Jare* to recite poetic *Dhamma*.

Sao Nawkham (1876–1915), Sao Amat Long Mongnawng (1854–1905), Saosra Manyuk, and Sao Kanghso (1787–1881) were among the contemporary Shan scholars recognized by Burmese intellectuals in lowland Burma. Among them, Sao Kanghso was well-known for leading Yuan Buddhist practices in Shan State. Rather than Buddhist teachings, his works are more focused on astrology, astronomy, history, and legendary works. Among the Burmese, Sao Nawkham is nicknamed 'Shan State U Ponnya.' In comparison, they

both were famous for their literary poetic works. Myanmar literary poet U Ponnya (1812–c. 1867), contemporary to the Shans, was one of the greatest literary figures, known for his elegant wit and clarity of language (Hla Pe, Allott, & Okell, 2002). As a Konbaung Dynasty court playwright during the 19th century, he is primarily known for his morality tales (Gillitt, 2003). U Ponnya served as one of King Mindon's court poets. Throughout his prolific career, he wrote seven plays, primarily based on the Buddhist *Jataka* tales, as well as poems and songs, more than 30 Buddhist prose works, and treatises in fields ranging from medicine to astrology.

The state's *Sangha* monastic education since the British colonial period does not seem to have changed much. Looking at the levels of *Pathama-pyan* examinations, they basically remain at three levels today. Although in the mid-1980s, the foundation-level (*Akhye-pyu-mula*) was introduced, it was removed in the late 2000s. This shows that the 'idealists' and 'pragmatists,' as Dhammasami (2007) shows in his analysis of monastic education during 19th century, continue to struggle for an upper-hand position among the Burmese/Myanmar *Sangha* in the present. Certainly, the state *Sangha* monastic education will have to change to be able to address the need of modern society in a rapidly changing world. Today, like the Shan and Mon *Sangha*, the Burmese *Sangha* has received training and educated its members abroad. This means that in the near future, modernization of the state monastic education system will happen, as my informants explained. Phra Khammai and other Burmese foreign-educated monks actually began to discuss how to modernise the state monastic education system in mid-2015.

For the past several decades, in fact, not only has Shan monastic education been on the decline, but state monastic learning itself has also been unable to adapt itself to the rapidly changing modern world. For the Shan system, however, apart from failing to address the need of modern adaptation, it does not even receive recognition among the Burmese *Sangha*. Similar to the Burmese *Sangha*, the tensions between idealism and pragmatism are keenly felt among members of the Shan *Sangha*.

The emergence and development of Shan *Lik Long* was contemporary to the development of Burmese literature. The Shan term *Lik Long* may have derived from the compositions and compilations of Buddhist texts in Shan vernacular language, either in the form of

poetry or prose. While the term '*Lik*' refers to literature, '*Long*' imparts the meaning of something great that may refer to Buddhism or the Buddha himself. However, I suggest that astrology, astronomy, history, magic, mantras or tantric and esoteric forms of practices and local knowledge are later additions to the "Great Texts." Therefore, for this reason, Shan Buddhism has been called a "holistic religion" by Kate Crosby and Jotika Khur-yearn in their research titled *Poetic Dhamma and the Zare* [*Jare*]*: Traditional Styles of Teaching Theravada amongst the Shan of Northern Thailand* (2010). In his paper "Ritual, Moral, and Community Leader: A Study of Funeral Ritual Texts," read at the First *Lik Long* Conference in Yangon in 2013, Phra Khammai does not reject the "holistic approach" to Shan Buddhism.[32]

2.5 Summary

In this chapter, I have related a brief history of Theravada Buddhism and the relationship between the state and *Sangha* in Burma with reference to three distinctive periods: pre-colonial (18^{th}–19^{th}), colonial (1824, 1885–1948), and post-colonial (1948–present). This history reveals that several periods of monarchism and the more modern governments have influenced the affairs of the Burmese *Sangha*, and vice versa. In some cases, the state even made the decision whether to follow the ideology of pragmatist or idealist in the case of monastic education. Buddhism under the Burmese state does not necessarily require belief that there is only one belief system within the Theravada pretext. The country is largely composed of diverse ethnic groups, and although many of them manifest themselves as Buddhists, they are largely, in terms of language, culture, customs, beliefs, political ideals, and social norms, unique in their own rights. I maintain that Buddhism, monasticism and *Sangha*, education, monarchy, and polity during those periods existed in complex relationships. This is one of the key factors that led to the rise of diverse Buddhist movements, the Shan literary movement, and religious movements

[32] Ven. Prof. Dr. Khammai Dhammasami. (2013). "Ritual, Moral, and Community Leader: A Study of Funeral Ritual Texts." First *Lik Long* Conference, Yangon. 24–29 December 2013. The paper offers a comparison of nine *suttas* with different names in Shan written by various *Jare*, Shan traditional scholars, on the same theme, the funeral ritual practices among the Shans.

in Shan State, which will be further explored chapter 6, and to the rise of the transnational Phra Khammai-led Shan Buddhist movement.

Nevertheless, Shan Buddhism, which is in the Theravada texts, and local Buddhism do not necessarily contradict each other. This is because aspects of Shan culture and traditions that people often practice in the present period were originally developed from Buddhism and related practices. A certain Shan Buddhist culture may have developed out of the context of Theravada Buddhism orthodoxy. For instance, one of my informants cites a Buddhist celebration held on the full-moon day of the third lunar month (late-January/early-February) according to the Shan calendar and which is known as '*Machabucha* Day' in Thai Buddhism. This full-moon day festival is known in Shan as '*Poi Luen Sam Moon,*' during which Shans traditionally prepare a delicacy made of mixed groundnuts, sesame seeds, and sugar-cane juice with sticky-rice. This month in Shan State has the lowest temperature, and therefore on that full-moon night people also offer *lo*, a kind of firewood collected during the previous months, beautifully decorated like a stupa. By burning that stupa, the Shan are symbolically offering their "warmness" to the Buddha. However, a certain disciplinary code in the *Vinaya* prohibits monks from warming themselves with fire. People do not actually see this as contradictory as they also want to warm themselves during the cold weather. Therefore, they offer their warmness to the Buddha as a form of veneration.

The important point is that Shan culture and Buddhism are very much intertwined with each other such that they are inseparable in their practices today, and it is impossible to determine which aspects are Buddhist and which are non-Buddhist. In this sense, or in a nationalistic sense, the saying "To be Shan is to be Buddhist" can be understood as a way for Shans to understand their identity, just as is the case with similar Burmese and Thai ways of knowing. Phra Khammai, as a person who lives in both local and transnational worlds, bridges traditional knowledge and wisdom with modern academic Buddhism.