

Title	The Role of <i>Sangha</i> Role in Secular Atmospheres During the Reign of King Mindon
All Authors	Aung Myo Tun
Publication Type	Local Publication
Publisher (Journal name, issue no., page no etc.)	Banmaw University Research Journal. Vol.10, No.1, June, 2019
Abstract	<p>The Myanmar Kings through ages wanted the <i>Sangha</i> Order to adhere strictly the <i>Vinaya</i> (codes of conducts for the Buddhist monks). The monks were so adhesive to <i>Vinaya</i> that Buddha <i>Sāsanawill</i>propagate. Therefore the monks of <i>Sangha</i> Order remain isolated from the secular affairs according to <i>Vinaya</i> (code of conducts for the <i>Sangha</i> Order). However the monks through ages involved in the secular atmosphereswhen the country was in a state of emergency. Moreover they engaged in political, economic and social affairs when the king requested them for the development of the country. During the reign of King Mindonthe <i>Sangha</i>Order became more involved in these affairs. On the other hand, King Mindon established the <i>Thudhamma</i> Council (Ecclesiastical Council) led by <i>ThathanabaingSayadaw</i>(head of <i>Sangha</i> Order) because he wanted the monks to adhere strictly the <i>Vinaya</i>. But, on the one hand, the country was experiencing the political, economic and social crises affected by the two Anglo-Myanmar Wars. Under such circumstances, King Mindon had to settle these problems with the help of the monks who influenced over the people. Some monks who wanted to keep aloof from the secular affairs built and resided the forest monastery. Therefore, the <i>Sangha</i> Order was divided into two sects: <i>araññavasi</i> sect called the forest-dweller monks and <i>gamavasi</i> sect known to the town-dweller monks. Nevertheless, <i>gaing-ôk</i> (local monk leader), <i>gaing-dauk</i>(assistant leader of <i>gaing-ôk</i>) and <i>taikôk</i> (abbot <i>sayadaw</i>) and <i>taik-kyat</i>(assistant of <i>taik-ôk</i>) under leadership of <i>Thudhamma</i>Council (Ecclesiastical Council) led by <i>ThathanabaingSayadaw</i> advised and helped the king for the stability and development of the country.</p> <p>This paper will evaluate how the <i>Sangha</i> Order assisted the king for the benefit of the country and people.</p>
Keywords	Thudhamma Council, Thudhamma Sayadaws, Buddha Sasana, King Mindon, Sangha Order
Citation	
Issue Date	2019

Role of *Sangha* Order in Secular Atmospheres during the Reign of King Mindon¹

Abstract

The Myanmar Kings through ages wanted the *Sangha* Order to adhere strictly the *Vinaya* (codes of conducts for the Buddhist monks). The monks were so adhesive to *Vinaya* that Buddha *Sāsanawill* propagate. Therefore the monks of *Sangha* Order remain isolated from the secular affairs according to *Vinaya* (code of conducts for the *Sangha* Order). However the monks through ages involved in the secular atmospheres when the country was in a state of emergency. Moreover they engaged in political, economic and social affairs when the king requested them for the development of the country. During the reign of King Mindon the *Sangha* Order became more involved in these affairs. On the other hand, King Mindon established the *Thudhamma* Council (Ecclesiastical Council) led by *Thathanabaing Sayadaw* (head of *Sangha* Order) because he wanted the monks to adhere strictly the *Vinaya*. But, on the one hand, the country was experiencing the political, economic and social crises affected by the two Anglo-Myanmar Wars. Under such circumstances, King Mindon had to settle these problems with the help of the monks who influenced over the people. Some monks who wanted to keep aloof from the secular affairs built and resided the forest monastery. Therefore, the *Sangha* Order was divided into two sects: *araññavasi* sect called the forest-dweller monks and *gamavasi* sect known to the town-dweller monks. Nevertheless, *gaing-ôk* (local monk leader), *gaing-dauk* (assistant leader of *gaing-ôk*) and *taikôk* (abbot *sayadaw*) and *taik-kyat* (assistant of *taik-ôk*) under leadership of *Thudhamma* Council (Ecclesiastical Council) led by *Thathanabaing Sayadaw* advised and helped the king for the stability and development of the country.

This paper will evaluate how the *Sangha* Order assisted the king for the benefit of the country and people.

¹Dr. Aung Myo Tun, Lecturer, Department of History, Banmaw University

Introduction

The Buddhist monks were halted from participating in the secular atmospheres according to the *Vinaya*, one of the three baskets of Laws, preached by Lord Buddha. However, in time of emergency or in time of war, even Lord Buddha himself involved in politics during his time. In Myanmar history, from Bagan period to Konbaung period the most prominent Buddhist monks who were usually the king's preceptors together with *Thathanabaing Sayadaw* (head of the *Sangha* Order) had to assist the king on the secular atmospheres when the country was seriously encountering the difficulties: political crisis, in time of disorder, in time of war and in time of starvation affected by the drought and in time of foreign invasion and etc. For instance, peace mission led by Shin Disapamauk, a prominent Buddhist monk visited to Beijing to demand the Mongol emperor for withdrawal of the Mongol army from Myanmar during Bagan period. The Mongol forces withdrew from Myanmar soil due to his peace words. The historical materials, records, stone inscriptions reveal that the *Sangha* Order assisted the kings for the development and tranquility of the country in many different kinds of ways through ages: Ava period, Naungyan period and the early and mid-Kongbaung period after the end of Bagan period.

The country was to be more in state of disorder and crises during the latter parts of Konbaung period than that in the ancient times because of the two Anglo-Myanmar Wars. This clearly pushed the *Sangha* Order to involve in the secular atmospheres. The role of the *Sangha* Order was more important than that in the past. Especially the political, economic and social conditions deteriorated during the reign of King Mindon because the people living in Upper Myanmar moved to take refuge in the British Lower Myanmar. This caused the reduction of king treasury. Therefore the king had to settle these problems with the help of the *Sanghas*. On the other hand, King Mindon systematically established the *Thudhamma* Council called *ThathanaSaungAphwe* (Ecclesiastical Council) in order to exclude *alijji* monks (erratic monks) from the *Sangha* Order. Simultaneously, he wanted the monks to adhere strictly the rules of *Vinaya* (codes of conducts). Nevertheless, in practice the rulers through ages had to solve the political, economic and social problems with the help of the *Sangha* Order.

The role of *Sangha* Order in the secular atmospheres

It is found that the Buddhist monks involved in political, economic and social atmospheres during the reign of King Mindon although Buddha demarcated the line between the religious and secular affairs. The people believed that king Mindon was a patron of Buddhism. In practice, during his reign, there were political, economic and social crises due to the two Anglo-Myanmar Wars in the reign of his predecessors: King Bagyidaw and King Bagan. In addition, Lower Myanmar was under the British administration. So Upper Myanmar proper remained under the rule of Myanmar king. As a result, King Mindon faced the different kinds of problems concerning the secular atmospheres: the political, economic and social affairs.

In political atmosphere, there were a number of revolts during the reign of King Mindon. One of these revolts was Myin-gun revolt. It was the most prominent revolt during his reign. After this revolt, King Mindon issued an order on arresting the persons involved in this incident on 18 November 1866. Moreover, a report on the *Sangha* Order was submitted to *Thudhamma Sayadaws* to inform the monks who supported Myin-gun rebellion.

According to the royal order *Myowuns* (governors) and *sit-kes* (regimental officers) had to arrest and persecute the people without evidence.² Therefore the people who did commit the crime were arrested and persecuted. However, some people who did not involve in this revolt were also to be given punishment. Therefore, *Thudhamma Sayadaws* also instructed *gaing-ôks* and *gaing-dauks* to prohibit *myowuns* and local headmen from arresting people by accusing followers of rebel princes.³

In the peripheral areas, *gaing-ôk* and *gaing-dauk* had to surveil whether rebellion movement against the royal government or not. On 4 March 1878, *Thaung-thut gaing-dauk Sayadaws* informed the royal capital that Manipuri Raja and his British advisors organized the levies to invade *Thaung-thut*.⁴ In addition, they enquired and prohibited the people from giving shelter to the thieves, dacoits, and rebels.

The king entrusted the *Sangha* Order on the provincial administration. King Mindon issued an order on appointment of local officials on 30 December 1873. It reads,

“with the recommendation of *gaing-ôk* and *gaing-dauk*, Sagu, Nga San Yin shall continue in charge of Min Ywa, Sagu township.”

So, some local headmen were to be appointed on the recommendation of *gaing-ôks* and *gaing-dauks*. These efforts of *Sanghas* (Buddhist monks) in administrative affairs shed light on the mutual dependency that has firmly existed between the State and *Sangha* Order. Therefore, the king deeply depended on *Sangha* Order in political atmosphere.

In economic atmosphere, during and after the rebellion most people from some villages and towns in Taungdwingyi, Magwe, Nat-mauk and Kyaukpadaung area, suffered the armed clashes between the rebel forces and royal army abandoned their natives and took refuge into Lower Myanmar. This resulted in the economic distress of Upper Myanmar due to the reduction of taxes. So King Mindon appealed to *Thudhamma Sayadaws* of *Sangha* Order to recall the people in Lower Myanmar. *Thudhamma Sayadaws* offered five year exemption from paying taxes to the returnees from Lower Myanmar through *gaing-ôks* and *gaing-dauks*.⁵

² Than Tun “The Royal Orders of Burma (A.D 1598-1885), Part. IX (A.D 1853-1885), Kyoto, The Center for South Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1989 p.632 (Henceforth: Than Tun, 1989)

³ “Thathanabyu A-mein-daw”, Pay MS, Khar (reverse)

⁴ Hlut-taw Parabaik A-hmat-a-tha A-to-kau Hmat-pôn (Catalogue of Hluttaw Records), Vol.II, Yangon, Government Press, 1909, pp.5-6 (Henceforth: *HlutHmat*, 1909)

⁵ “Thathanabyu A-mein-daw”, Pay MS, Khar (reverse)

Gaing-ôks and *gaing-dauks* wrote and sent the epistles in which the local officials were exactly and correctly given the taxes they collected to the king's treasury. It is known that village headmen had to make pledge that they would accept severe punishments like lash, imprisonments and fines if they committed collection of extra-taxes and embezzlement, included in the epistle of *Kanigaing-ôk*.

Kanigaung-dauks also wrote an epistle to the king to inform the all taxes to be collected in the year of 1875 were collected.⁶ According to the above mention the monks of the *Sangha* Order had to participate in the taxation, joining a hand with the tax-collectors.

In addition *gaing-ôks* and *gaing-dauks* ordered the local officials that they shall impose one-tenth of the produce only when the people could afford to pay the tax, shall impose in kind or in cash, and shall exempt to those who were mentioned in the list of *gaing-ôk* and *gaing-dauk*.⁷

Gaing-ôks and *giang-dauks* had the right of inform directly to the king if the local officials disobeyed the orders of the king on taxation. In time of drought or other economic distress, provincial monk leaders wrote to the king to reduce taxation. The local headmen took advices and made negotiations with the local monk for the prosperity and tranquility of their administrative areas.

In social atmosphere, *ThudhammaSayadaws* had to assist the king's administration, receiving the help of *taik-ôks*, *taik-kyats*, *gaing-ôks* and *gaing-dauks*. It is interesting to note that during and after the Myin-gun Rebellion, the source of royal revenue has greatly decreased because the people living in the affected villages and towns moved to Lower Myanmar. *ThudhammaSayadaws*, *gaing-ôks* and *gaing-dauks* had to organize and persuade the people who moved to Lower Myanmar to return to Upper Myanmar.

In doing so, *Sayadaws* guaranteed the returnees that they would be exempted from *Thathameida* tax (one-tenth of produce for taxation), corvee labour for five years and would be cancelled the debts on money-borrowing, land-mortgaging and even crimes of the returnees.⁸

By 1875, serious drought took place in Shwebo. The people, living in it had to face with the hardship and poverty. So the local people could not afford the taxes and other duties to the royal government. Therefore, *gaing-dauk Sayadaw* of Tha-yaing Village wrote a letter to the

⁶Khin May Aung, Dr. "Buddhism in King Mindon's Period," M.A(Thesis), Department of History, Yangon University, 1992 p43 (Henceforth: Khin May Aung, 1992)

⁷"Letter of *Gaing-ôk* and *Gaing-dauk* to *Myo-thu-gyi*", *ParabaikMS*, No.1536, UCLC

⁸ Than Tun, 1989, p. 655-656

king on this case. His letter reveals that the people could not afford for household consumption and cash contribution to the cavalry servicemen called *nauk-htauk-kyei*.⁹

In 1876, Sagu *Sayadaw* also wrote an epistle to Sagaing Myowun, Htaung-hmu- officer in charge of 1000 servicemen and town clerks to exempt from paying tax to the people encountering drought. Under the rule of Myanmar kings poverty-stricken people and handicapped persons were exempted from paying taxes.

The people who returned from Lower Myanmar were collected money by the corrupted local officers. On 14 December 1872, King Mindon passed “*Auk-pyan Upade*” (Law of Returnees). According to this law the local officers were strictly followed not to collect money from the returnees. This law was to make a strict control on the corrupted local officials who collected money from the returnees thorough the supervision of local monk leaders.

Some qualified monks were allowed to leave the *Sangha* Order to get the secular posts ranging from the royal clerks to *Hluttawwun-gyis* (ministers of Supreme Court). Indeed, the monastic education for *Sangha* and lay students was said to be the most perfect one because it produced not only celebrated learned *theras* (respected elder monk) but qualified officials for the provincial and central administration as well as full-fledged members of the community.

While *Thudhamma Sayadaws* and *gaing-ôk* and *gaing-dauk* (local monk leader and assistant leader of *gaing-ôk*) were making their efforts to stabilize and tranquilize the community, a difference of opinions arose within the *Sangha* Order. Some monks who liked to eschew themselves from mundane activities founded *taw-ya-kyaung* (forest monasteries).

However, the reciprocal dependence between the *Sangha* Order and lay community was necessary for every respects, some *taw-ya-kyaungs* developed through the donations of the people vicinity. On 28 June 1865, *Sayadaw* U Sirima and his twenty monk followers founded Shwebontha *taw-ya* on the north of Kywe-swe Village, on the north of Myeidu Township. It is suggested that only a few number of *Sanghas* stood as *araññavasi* (forest dwellers). Even in Sagaing Hill, there were over 60 *gyaungs*- place of religious retreat where over 620 *araññavasi* residing.¹⁰

During King Mindon’s reign, some monks committed the violation of *Vinaya* by engaging in some occupations like farming, commerce, cattle breeding, giving medical treatment, and sooth-saying. Therefore the king established *Thudhamma* Council led by

⁹ Win Maung, U “Buddhism in Yadanabon Period,” M.A.(Thesis), Department of History, Mandalay University, 1978 p64 (Henceforth: Win Maung, 1978)

¹⁰ U Maung Maung Tin, “Konbaungzet Mahayazadawgyi” (The Great Chronicle of Konbaung Dynasty), Vol.III, Myanmar Universities’ Historical Research Center (ed), Yangon, Yabeyi Publishing House, (Fourth Impression), 2004 (Henceforth: Maung Maung Tin 2004 c) 304

Thathanabaing Sayadaw to settle the affairs of *Sangha* Order. The eight *Thudhamma Sayadaws* during King Mindon's reign were as follows;

1. *Salin Sayadaw* who got the title of *kalayanarabhidazadipadipawayamahardhammarajadiraja guru*
2. *San Kyaung Sayadaw* who got the title of *thudhathanadazaatular dipatithiripawayamahardhammarajadi raja guru*
3. *Pukhan Sayadaw* who got the title of *nandarbidazadipatipawayamahardhammarajadiraja guru*
4. *Pyay Sayadaw* who got the title of *maydarbithiripayamakawidazamahardhammarajadi raja guru*
5. *Mattayar Sayadaw* who got the title of *thuzatarbidazadipatipawayamahardhammarajadiraja guru*
6. *Thetpan Sayadaw* who got the title of *neyyadhammabidazathiripawayamahardhammarajadiraja guru*
7. *Maunghtaung Sayadaw* who got the title of *pannatharmakawidazamahardhammarajadi raja guru*
8. *Thigaza Sayadaw* who got the title of *aggadhammaliikarakawidazamahardhammarajadi raja guru*¹¹

They had to settle the serious cases like disputes over monastic property, religious schism, and controversies on theological, philosophical or metaphysical points of doctrines. Although such serious cases were generally settled by *Thathanabaing* and his *Thudhamma Sayadaws*, the king also played an important role in settling disputes or controversies in *Sangha* Order.¹²

The king appointed *Ñyeyadhammarājādhirājaguru* known to Maungdaung *Sayadaw U Ñyeya* as *Thathanabaing* (head of the *Sangha* Order)¹³. Even *Thathanabaing* himself involved in the foreign relation. In 1862 King Mindon received the British embassy led by Sir Arthur Phayre with proper treatment. However, he rejected Phayre's proposal to conclude the commercial treaty. Later, King Mindon concluded a commercial treaty on 10 November 1862 due to

¹¹MyintMyint Than, "Sasana Council during the reign of King Mindon," PyinnyarPadesa, Vol.III, part III, 1971, p13 (Henceforth: MyintMyint Than, 1971)

¹² Win Maung, 1978p63

¹³"*Sasanabaing-khant-A-mein-daw*" (Order on Appointment of the Supreme Leader of the *Sangha* Order), 1853, Parabaik MS, No. 1603, Yangon, Universities Central Library

Thathanabaing's advice.¹⁴ Sometimes, the king took the advice of *Thathanabaing* to make important decisions for secular affairs. *Thathanabaing* also usually made decision in favor of the king wishes.

Thudhamma Sayadaws performed their duties on behalf of the king. They received quarterly reports from *gaing-ôks* and *gaing-dauks* on following situations of provincial areas;

- (1) achievement on purification of *Sāsanā*,
- (2) local stability
- (3) the attitudes and rules of local officials
- (4) emergence of theft, dacoity, and uprising, and
- (5) attempts on assessment of fair taxation¹⁵

By this way, King Mindon was able to know the situation of provincial areas throughout his realm. Thus, *Sangha* Order were entrusted quasi-judicial power on the behalf of the royal government admonishing the thieves and dacoits not to commit their crime again and engaging in the secular atmospheres¹⁶

Conclusion

In conclusion, there were many different kinds of problems such as the Prince Myingon revolt, the affairs of collecting-taxes, the cases of the refugees returned to Upper Myanmar from the British Lower Myanmar, the affairs of whether the thieves and dacoits arose in the remote areas or not that occurred during the reign of King Mindon. King Mindon empowered the monks in order to settle these problems although he systematically established *Thudhamma* Council led by *Thathanabaing Sayadaw* to propagate and purify the Buddha *Sāsanā* to last forever. The difficult circumstances pushed the king to call for the monks who influenced over the people to ease the country's problems. Thus, *gaing-ôk*, *gaing-dauk*, *taik-ôk* and *taik-kyat* under the instruction of *Thudhamma* Council had to assist the king in many ways for the tranquility and development of the country.

¹⁴ Than Tun, Dr. "Ne-hléYa-za-win" (Peripatetic History), Vol. II, Yangon, Nantha Press, 1968, p168 (Henceforth; Than Tun, 1968)

¹⁵ "Ththanabyu A-mein-daw", PayMS, Ki (obverse)

¹⁶ Tin, U, "Myanmar Min-myar Oak-choke-ponSartan" (Papers on Myanmar Kings' Administration), Third Volume, Yangon, Central Publishing House, 1970, Second Edition, p.90 (Henceforth: *OakchonePon3*)

Acknowledgement

I owe my special thanks to Rector (in-charge) Dr. AungKyaw Thin and Pro-rector Dr. Aye Aye Han for allowing and encouraging this research work. I would like to express my heart-felt thank to heads: Dr. Aye AyeThwe (Professor Head), Dr. NawKapaw Say (Professor). Above all, to all who encouraged and helped me in doing this research I owe much gratitude.

References

1. Than Tun “The Royal Orders of Burma (A.D 1598-1885), Part. IX (A.D 1853-1885), Kyoto, The Center for South Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1989
2. Hlut-taw Parabaik A-hmat-a-tha A-to-kaukHmat-pôn (Catalogue of Hluttaw Records), Vol.II, Yangon, Government Press, 1909,
3. Thathanabyu A-mein-daw”, Pei MS, Khar (reverse)
4. Khin May Aung, Dr. “Buddhism in King Mindon’s Period,”M.A(Thesis), Department of History, Yangon University, 1992
5. Letter of *Gaing-ôkand Gaing-dauk to Myo-thu-gyi*”, *ParabaikMS*, No.1536, UCLC
6. MyintMyintThan, “*Sasana* Council during the reign of King Mindon,” *PyinnyarPadesa*, Vol.III, part III, 1971
7. U MaungMaung Tin, “KonbaungzetMahayazadawgyi” (The Great Chronicle of Konbaung Dynasty), Vol.III, Myanmar Universities’ Historical Research Center (ed), Yangon, Yabyei Publishing House, (Fourth Impression), 2004
8. Than Tun, Dr. “Ne-hléYa-za-win” (Peripatetic History), Vol. II, Yangon, Nantha Press, 1968,
9. Win Maung, U “Buddhism in Yadanabon Period,” M.A(Thesis), Department of History, Mandalay University, 1978
10. Tin, U, “Myanmar Min-myar Oak-choke-ponSartan” (Papers on Myanmar Kings’ Administration), Third Volume, Yangon, Central Publishing House, 1970, Second Edition