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6.6 HISTORY AND SOCIAL MEMORY

Thudhamma Council During the Reign of King Mindon

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to examine Buddha *Sasana*, prevailing during the reign of King Mindon. Buddha *Sasana* prospered and was propagated because King Mindon had systematically established the *Sangha* Order. The *Thudhamma* Council, composed of eight *Thudhamma Sayadaws* led by *Thathanabaing Sayadaw*, was established to try religious cases and to propagate the Buddha *Sasana* with the help of the *Thudhamma Sayadaws*. The council also took part in secular affairs, such as political and social affairs, at the request of the king. *Thathanabaing Sayadaw* was an influential monk both over the king and the whole *Sangha*. This paper also evaluates the history of Buddhism during the reign of King Mindon.

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Aim

This paper will show readers how the King settle the political, social and religious affairs with the help of the *Thudhamma* Council (ecclesiastical council) led *Thathanabaing Sayadaw* (head of *Sangha* Order).

Introduction

This council was established in order to promote and perpetuate the Buddha *Sasana* during the reign of King Badon, son of Alaung-min-ta-ya who founded the Konbaung Dynasty. During the reign of King Mindon, this council played a vital role not only in the religion but also in the political and social affairs. The members of this council were considered as learned monks including *Thathanabaing Sayadaw*. Therefore the king conferred titles and awards on them. In addition, the king gave them prime tasks for the perpetuation of Buddha *Sasana*. Thus this council became prominent during the reign of King Mindon.

Discussion

It was made up of the eight venerable monks who were conferred the religious titles. Its primary duty was to assist *Thathanabaing's* activities. They were as well-versed in *tripitaka* and worldly affairs as *Thathanabaing*. In other words, the establishment of *Thudhamma* Council was to preserve the king from danger and to maintain the *Sangha* Order to last forever. Its leader was *Thathanabaing*. It was

also known as the *Sasana-saung-aphwe*. Their qualifications were assigned like *Thathanabaing*. *Thudhamma Sayadaws* were begun to appoint during the reign of King Badon.

Thudhamma Sayadaws, chosen by the king pledged a vow together with the monks. Their vows whereas follows:

1. to serve only for the prosperity of the Buddha *Sasana* without personal interest,
2. to avoid discrimination against young monks and favoritism to senior or elder monks, and
3. to settle disputes without bias.

Thudhamma Council was presided over *Thathanabaing*. It means that at the apex of *Thudhamma* Council stood *Thathanabaing*. The responsibilities of *Thudhamma* Council were,

1. to try religious crimes and disputes taking place among the monks
2. to appoint *gaing-ok* (local leader) and *gaing-dauk*, (assistant leader) and,
3. to notify the *Thathanabaing's* order to *gaing-ok* and *gaing-dauk* in provincial areas.

On 2 March 1865, *Shangalaykyun Sayadaw* issued the orders for the monks to abide by. His suggestions elaborated the duties of *Thudhamma* Council in dealing with the disputes and crimes of the monks, basic regulations in the appointment of *gaing-ok* and *gaing-dauk* and punishments for those monks who violated *Vinaya*. *Thudhamma Sayadaws* issued orders to *taik-ok* (Abbot *Sayadaws*), *taik-kyat* (assistant of *taik-ok*), *gaing-ok* and *gaing-dauk* to administer and take care of the disciplines of the monks of their respective areas. Local monk leaders had to admonish the young monks to avoid such *alijji* acts like consuming cigars, and betel-quit, roaming in the town, shooting fireworks, sooth-saying, riding horse, etc.

In addition, *Thudhamma Sayadaws* had to give advice not only to take care of the violation of *Vinaya*, but on the other religious affairs to the king. They had to examine the procedures of building religious edifices, ceremony of ensuring the relics, to supervise the religious examinations, to examine the dates of the beginning and the ends of Buddhist lent and to arrange to dispatch *Thathanabaing Sayadaw* to the towns and villages of provinces. The formation of *Sangha* authority, similar to that of civil administration, was divided into the *Sangha* Council in the royal capital and provincial authorities headed by *gaing-oks* and *gaing-dauks*. Besides these organs, qualified learned monks were selected to appoint assistants of *Thudhamma Sayadaws*. These assistant *Sayadaws* were known as *Anu-viccaka Sayadaws* (assistant *Sayadaws*). The king also appointed *Hta-na-choke Sayadaws* and their assistants, *Hta-na-ok Sayadaws* (assistant of *Anu-viccaka Sayadaw*) at the four quarters of the capital. Their responsibilities were to make preliminary investigations on the crimes committed by the monks and then to hand over to *Thudhamma* Council or *taik-ok*, *taik-kyat Sayadaws*.

Taik-ok and *taik-kyat Sayadaws* had to follow the orders of *Thudhamma Sayadaws* and sometimes they had issued additional orders and penalties to those who violated *Vinaya*. In the areas outside the capital and other provinces *gaing-oks* and *gaing-dauks* were appointed by the sealed orders of *Thathanabaing* and *Thudhamma Sayadaws*. During the King Mindon's reign, over 160 *gaing-ok* and 204 *gaing-dauk* were performing the duties of imposing the rules of disciplines and administering all affairs of local monks.

As the *Sangha* Order has developed on the hierarchy, the *Sangha* authorities were appointed down to the grass root level. In the village community *kyaung-htai Sayadaws* (abbot *Sayadaws*) were responsible to *gaing-oks* and *gaing-dauks* of respective regions. The qualifications of abbots were properly prescribed. However, the donor of monasteries had the right to appoint abbot *Sayadaw*. Generally the years of monkhood or seniority determined who became abbot. The senior monk who possessed both at least experience of successive ten years and able to give instructions to student monks might become abbot *Sayadaw*. *Giang-oks* and *gaing-dauks* took special care to inspect the qualification of abbot. They also gave instruction to *thu-gyis* (village headmen) to give penalty to those who worshipped the unqualified monk as abbot.

Thudhamma Sayadaws were sentenced into a punishment if they broke the principles which were prescribed for them. These principles were concerned with the election of the *gaing-ok* and *gaing-dauk*, and trying of the religious cases. The main duty of *Thudhamma* Council led by *Thathanabaing* was the propagation and purification of the *Sasana*. Therefore eight *Thudhamma Sayadaws* had mainly to perform the religious duties. They were also helped by the *Anuwaiska Sayadaws* and *Htarnachoke htarnarok Sayadaws*. It can be seen that *taik-choke*, *taik-ok*, *taik-kyat*, *sar-cha Sayadaws* for the administration of each monastery, located in the capital and *gaing-choke*, *gaing-ok* and *gaing-dauk* for the remote areas were appointed to promote the religion.

During the reign of King Mindon, the eight *Thudhamma Sayadaws* were as follows:

1. *Salin Sayadaw* who got the title of *kalayanarabhidazadipadipawayamahardhammarajadirajaguru*
2. *San Kyaung Sayadaw* who got the title of *thudhathanadazaatulardipatithiripawayamahardhammarajadirajaguru*
3. *Pukhan Sayadaw* who got the title of *nandarbidazadipatipawayamahardhammarajadirajaguru*
4. *Pyay Sayadaw* who got the title of *maydarbithiripayamakawidazamahardhammarajadirajaguru*
5. *Mattayar Sayadaw* who got the title of *thuzatarbidazadipatipawayamahardhammarajadirajaguru*
6. *Thetpan Sayadaw* who got the title of *neyyadhammabidazathiripawayamahardhammarajadirajaguru*
7. *Maunghtaung Sayadaw* who got the title of *panna tharmakawidazamahardhammarajadirajaguru*
8. *Thigaza Sayadaw* who got the title of *aggadhammalikarakawidazamahardhammarajadirajaguru*

Therefore it is obviously seen that only the King had the right to appoint both *Sasanabaing* and *Thudhamma Sayadaws*. In reality, only the King had to manage the religious affairs in spite of the establishment of *Thudhamma* Council led by *Thathanabaing*. *Thudhamma Sayadaws* had to give an instruction to *taik-ok*, *taik-kyat*, *gaing-ok* and *gaing-dauk* to guide the novices to keep the pure morality. *Thudhamma Sayadaws* passed the order concerning with the smoking, the sending of the fireworks, the roaming in the town, the watching of the puppet and the *zat* (the show of the dance and performing), the boxing, the magic show, the rush donating, the fighting, handing with stick and

knives among them, the counterfeit of the gold and the silver, the learning of the black medicine, the talisman and the magic commentaries, and the wearing of the slipper and the curing, the fortune-telling and the riding of the cart. The *gaing-ok*, *gaing-dauk*, *taik-ok* and *taik-kyats* strictly abide by these orders, passed by *Thudhamma Sayadaws*. In addition, *Thudhamma Sayadaws* had to give an advice the king on the religious affairs.

Therefore they participated in political, administrative and social affairs according to the King's request. They appointed and settled the administrative posts and the taxing affairs. In 1871, according to the king's insistency, *gaing-ok* and *gaing-dauk* gave a sermon to the government services neither to do torture on the people nor to collect more taxes on them.

On 18 November, 1866, King Mindon released an order in which *myo-wun* (governor) and *sitke* (deputies of *myo-wun*) had no right to arrest the poor people who were accused of the followers and the supporters of treasures of the Myingun revolt without being authenticated evidences. They were sentenced into punishment if they arrested the poor people. *Gaing-ok* and *gaing-dauk* persuaded the escapees who took refuge in lower Myanmar during the revolts to repatriate into Upper Myanmar, giving incentives to them. The incentives included the exemption of five years tax-collecting. Ones, who repatriated Upper Myanmar, were permitted to receive these rights. *Gaing-ok* and *gaing-dauk* sent a report of the repatriate's lists to *Thudhamma* Council. Therefore *Thudhamma Sayadaws* was to follow the King's demand if the *Vinaya* permitted them. However, in practice, they involved in the political, administrative, social and economic affairs at the request of the King whether the permission of *Vinaya* or not.

Thudhamma Council at the capital decided to settle the unfinished *alijjiduthila* cases which were not settled by *gaing-ok* and *gaing-dauk*. It is visible that the *Sangha Order* was systematically established, appointing *taik-ok*, *taik-kyat*, *gaing-ok* *gaing-dauk* who were under the control of *Thudhamma* Council led by *Thathanabaing* during the reign of King Mindon. *Thathanabaing's* order for unsheltering of *alijjiduthila* explained: "*lijji* monks harmoniously defeated *alijji* monks who revolted. *Lijji* monks (monks who are conscientious and well behaved) give a report at the capital on the domination of *alijji* monks."

According to this order, it is seen that the domination of *alijji* monks in the districts were strong. The monk who broke *Vinaya* should be assigned *alijji* monk. Therefore there were many *alijji* monks though the King wanted to purify the *Sasana* with the help of *Thudhamma* Council.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *Thudhamma* Council led by *Thathanabaing Sayadaw* played a vital role in the *Sangha* Order. In addition, it involved in the secular affairs at the request of the King. It is seen that *Thathanabaing Sayadaw* decided to try the religious cases and other social affairs, taking the advices of *Thudhamma Sayadaws*. There were also *alijji* monks although *Thudhamma* Council passed *Dhamma Vinaya* Order for the purification of *Sasana*. However, it is clearly seen that the king placed a reliance on this council for the propagation and the purification of Buddha *Sasana*. Thus this council became an important one in King Mindon's reign.

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Figure: Thudhamma Hall (congregation hall) at the foot of Mandalay Hill, [photograph]
(Dr Aung Myo Tun's own private collection).

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