

Buddhist Method for Monastic Educational Preservation and Inheritance of Rāmañña Nikāya in Myanmar



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ABSTRACT

The article is to explore the Rāmañña Nikāya, the Mon sangha in Myanmar through preservation and inheritance the Mon monastic education. The study shows that the Rāmañña Nikāya preserve and inherit the origin and development of the monastic education through learning and teaching with the oral and palm-leaf tradition, and the roles of the Rāmañña Nikāya in preserving and inheriting the monastic education through learning and teaching, publishing and translation and examinations in Mon language have been discovered. Learning and teaching process in Mon language and studying through bi-languages in Mon and Myanmar have been suggested. Then, the methods of preserving and inheriting the monastic education through learning to practice in accordance with the Vinaya and the Dhamma for Saṅgha have been presented.

Keywords: Method, Monastic educational preservation and inheritance, Rāmañña Nikāya

Introduction

The Rāmaññadesa of the Lower-Myanmar was the Centre of Buddhist education and religious development, where Buddhist scholars from local and foreign countries came to observe the taste of monastic education, and once the Mon monastic education had been initiated and developed for many centuries and have been surviving again in recent centuries and continuing to the present day of its Buddhist education under the Rāmañña Nikāya. Accordingly, the paper will be traced through the history of the Rāmañña Nikāya, the origin and development of monastic education, the roles of Mon Saṅgha of Rāmañña Nikāya, and then presented with Buddhist method for monastic educational preservation and Inheritance of Rāmañña Nikāya in Myanmar.

The Rāmañña Nikāya

The claims are strongly affirmed by Mon monk scholars as Rāmañña Nikāya is the oldest Nikāya or still exists in Myanmar though Myanmar government excluded it from the nine official Nikāya in 1980. Nai Pan Thar argues that the Saṅgha who has been ordained under the two elders Soṇa and Uttara can be considered as Rāmañña Nikāya.¹ Venerable Nyarneinda strongly affirms that it was well-known earlier in the countries of Thailand in 1583² and Sri Lanka in 1863.³

Furthermore, Venerable Za Wa Na also mentions various occasions as “Rāmañña Nikāya before Pagan, Rāmañña Nikāya during Pagan (10th to 14th centuries) and Rāmañña Nikāya after Pagan”.⁴ Oppositely, Venerable Sei La Te Za criticizes that “the term Rāmañña Nikāya is a later conceptual development, and to say that the sect has existed since the time

¹ Nai Pan Thar, *A history of Rāmañña Nikāya and Mon Buddhism*, (Yangon: Nan Tha Zin publication, 2016), p. 23.

² Venerable Nyarneinda, *A Study of the Rāmañña-Nikāya in Rāmaññadesa (Southern Part of Burma) and Sri Lanka*, Colombo: Buddhist and Pāli University of Sri Lanka, 2011), p. 197.

³ Ibid., p. 238.

⁴ Venerable Za Wa Na, *The Trend of the Role of Rāmañña Nikāya in the Next Decade in Mon State*, (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 2017), p. 28.

of Dhammacetī would be misleading”.⁵ However, it is clear to us that Rāmañña Nikāya came into existence in the second part of twentieth century A.D. in the form of local Nikāyas due to the Upper-Myanmar Saṅgharājā’s influence and the 1980 sangha reform.

The Origin and Development of Monastic Education

The origin of monastic education came to know to the local people of Suvāṇṇabhūmi in Rāmaññadesa as soon as Buddhism was introduced by the Theras, Soṇa and Uttara, in third century B.C. since those time onwards, The origin of monastic education was developed through the oral tradition, and the advent of the Pāli Tipiṭaka brought by Buddhaghosa marked the important era through the form of palm-leaf manuscripts. It is believed that we are using of the then manuscript of palm-leaf being handed over down from generation to generation in Myanmar.

The vicissitudes of Buddhism along with the Mon monastic education had been developed in three main kingdoms of Suvāṇṇabhūmi, Muttima and Hamsavatī, but after the fall of last kingdom Hamsavatī, the Mon literature and the Mon monastic education became less supported, instead oppressed by some rivalry Myanmar governors between 1757 and 1826 A.D. Fortunately, the Thai-Mon Saṅgha came to make the Mon monastic education developed at the starting point of Thou-Plaung, where it was known as the latest the Mon monastic education was reincarnated during the British colonial administration. From that starting point, the Mon monastic education of the Rāmañña Nikāya have been developing till the present day of the Mon monastic education in Rāmaññadesa of the Lower-Myanmar.

The Roles of Mon Saṅgha of Rāmañña Nikāya

Most scholars do not notice as the Rāmañña Nikāya involves in monastic education in Mon language, for they believe all monastic educational learning and teaching is in Myanmar language, but actually, the Mon Saṅgha participate in state monastic education is only based on their own mother-tongue language. The roles of the Mon Saṅgha involve with the following fields as Dhamma dissemination role as department of translations and publications (Rāmañña Dhammācariya), education assessment role as department of conducting

⁵ Venerable Sei La Te Za, A Comparative Study of Monastic Funeral Traditions Between the Dhammayuttika Nikaya and the Rāmañña Nikāya in Mon State, Myanmar, (Bangkok: Mahidol University, 2018), p. 107.

examinations (Rāmañña Nikāya Pariyatti) through different kinds of examinations known as dying oral examination, local examination, Rāmañña Nikāya Pariyatti examination, State examination, modern education role from Rāmaññaraththa Buddhist university (Rāmaññaraththa), and the social role of the Mon Saṅgha (Rāmañña Nikāya Parahita). As corollary, as well as the Mon Saṅgha performing the monastic education in Mon or taking state examination in Mon under the role of the Mon Saṅgha of Rāmañña Nikāya, the longer and stronger the Mon identity will be remained in the Mon society in Myanmar.

Buddhist Method for Monastic Educational Preservation for Rāmañña Nikāya in Myanmar

Having explored the history of Rāmañña Nikāya through the origin and the development of the Mon monastic education and the roles of the of Rāmañña Nikāya in preserving and inheriting the Mon monastic education, the method in preserving and inheriting the Mon monastic education are enclosed with the Dhamma and the Vinaya.

The Buddhist education is the teachings of the Buddha that is known as the Dhamma and the Vinaya in the Theravada texts. That the Dhamma and Vinaya are required to preserve by the four assemblies (*cattāri parisāni*) and according to the Buddhist literature, these four assemblies are responsible to preserve the Buddhist education after the Buddha passed away since more than two thousand and five hundred years ago and Saṅgha education is not just the inherited knowledge transmitted down the generations to monastic learners for religious ends and the preservation of Buddhism.⁶ The Buddhist education without the four assemblies could not be able to survive and here, the conversations between the Buddha and the Māra from the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta come into our interesting. When the Māra requests the Buddha to pass into the Parinibbāna, the Buddha replies to the Māra that as long as the four assemblies are not well established, I, the Buddha, does not pass into the Parinibbāna.⁷ the Buddha's reply to the Māra proves us to preserve His teachings through the four assemblies after He passed into the Parinibbāna.

⁶Phibul Choompolpaisal, Political Buddhism and the Modernisation of Thai Monastic Education: From Wachirayan to Phimonlatham (1880s–1960s), **Contemporary Buddhism**, Vol.16, No. 2, (Online Publication: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), p. 428.

⁷D.II.104-106.

Furthermore, it is undeniable to say that the Vinaya is the life of the Saṅgha society in order to sustain the life of the Buddhasāsanā; because if the Saṅgha society are not obedient the Vinaya, it will cause the Saṅgha society disorder and through its result makes the Buddhasāsanā weak. Though the other two Piṭaka of the Suttanta and the Abhidhamma are in decline, the Buddhasāsanā remains further if the Vinaya Piṭaka is in practice by the Saṅgha community. It is considerable that the reason why the Vinaya is significant to the life of the Saṅgha community, and the account of purification of the Saṅgha in Rāmaññadesa supported by king Dhammaceti is exemplified us as an interesting exploration, and during the reign of king Dhammaceti in fifteenth century A.D., the king really knew that the Vinaya is the most important theme to maintain the Buddhasāsanā in his region by making the Saṅgha unified in a single sect through purification of re-ordaining the community of the Saṅgha within the whole Rāmaññadesa under his domains.⁸ As corollary, it should be concluded that the Saṅgha and the Vinaya is not a separate unit, but it must be stuck as the body and mind under a particular single unit in preserving the monastic education.

In order to preserve the Vinaya, the lecturers acquire to remind the student-monks to practice the Vinaya. Even a tiny minor rule of the Vinaya that is committed by any monk makes the status of the monkhood changeable into lay-life, because of the suffering of committing, not to say how he is famous and learned in monastic education. Whether student-monks who learning monastic education or not, no one must not ignore the Vinaya; or if any student-monks committed even a minor rule of the Vinaya, he will be anxious in the future.⁹ Furthermore, if a monastic student committed the Vinaya through cheating examination, he will suffer sooner or later, then disrobe from the status of the monkhood, for he is unhappy from the impact of cheating the examination.¹⁰ As a student-monks, the

⁸Taw Sein Ko, **The Kalyāṇī Inscriptions**, (Rangoon: Government Printing, 1892), pp. 68-71.

⁹Interview with **Most Venerable Bhaddanta Candobhāsa**, the former secretary of Rāmañña Dhammācariya, the incumbent of Rāmañña Nikāya Kyaik monastery, Pong, Mon state, Myanmar, December 02, 2019.

¹⁰Interview with **Most Venerable Bhaddanta Nandasāra** (Aggamahapandita), vice president of Rāmañña Dhammācariya and vice president of Saṅgha Mahayaka of the state, the incumbent of Rāmañña Nikāya Bae La-doo-Don monastery, Kyaik-kha-mi, Mon state, Myanmar, September 09, 2019.

Vinaya is always required to remind by the lecturers in order to prevent the committing a minor rule of the Vinaya.

In recent century of 19th and 20th century, the method of preservation is mostly based on the Vinaya even though it was followed by the modern education system, because the most Mon oral examination such the Vinayādhika of Yangon, Vinayādhika of Rāmañña Nikāya Pariyatti, and Vinayādhika of Blue Island and so on become the evidences of the monastic educational preservation in the Mon Saṅgha community. In addition, when we look to the method of preserving the monastic education of venerable Janakabhivamsa, we are clear that he eagerly inspired the student-monks to preserve the Vinaya than the examination, and in one of his works, it mentions that in learning the monastic education, the student-monks require to have good-will and respected the Vinaya as a priority of among ten methods of learning monastic education.¹¹ Thus, the method of the Mon Saṅgha of the oral examinations and the method of Venerable Janakabhivamsa are exemplary us as significant methods which are based on the prior to the Vinaya.

The method of preservation the monastic education through the modern system of examination could not be able to maintain the Buddhasāsanā, but the method that could be able to sustain the monastic education is prior to preserve the vinaya. It is the purpose of the Vinaya to regulate the life within the community (Saṅgha) of monks (bhikkhu) and nuns (bhikkhuni) as well as their relation to the laity.¹² It is impossible that without the Vinaya, there could be able to endure the monastic education. In the Vinaya commentary, it mentions that the Vinaya is the age of the Buddhasāsanā; and as long as the Vinaya is sustainable, there exists the Buddhasāsanā.¹³ When there is no the Vinaya, there is no, too, the Saṅgha who practice it; when there is no the Saṅgha, not only the Vinaya, but also the Sutta and the Abhidhamma from which the people and deva receive benefits of life no longer live in the long term.¹⁴ If we preserve the Vinaya, it will also refer to what we could

¹¹ Ashin Janakabhivamsa, **The Sāsanā 25, 26 century khit: Shin Mahabuddhaghosa, or Ashin Janakabhivamsa May Myo Moe Kyi**, (Yangon, Seik Kue Cho Cho Publication, 2016), p. 29.

¹² Oskar Von Hinuber, **A Handbook of Pāli Literature**, (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2008), p. 9.

¹³ VinA.I., p. 13: *vinayo nāma buddhasāsanassa āyu; vinaye thite sāsanaṃ thitā hoti*.

¹⁴ U Vicakkhanabhivamsa, **Vinayānuggaha of Yangon: 75th Jubilee Anniversary of the Oral Examination**, (Yangon: Aung Kyaw Kyint publication, 2007), p. 60.

be able to sustain the Buddha's teaching, which makes long standing to the duration of five thousand years as believed by the Buddhists.

Thus, in order to sustain the monastic education for Rāmañña Nikāya, it should not ignore the previous method of Mon Saṅgha that are based on the Vinaya as a priority and the method of preservation monastic education of the Mon Saṅgha's student should enhance through the method of prior to the Vinaya in accordance with being appropriate to the present situation. As corollary, the modern method of monastic educational preservation through modern examination and the effort of the Vinaya should go hands in hands without being divided from part to another as the body and mind.

Buddhist Method for Monastic Educational Inheritance for Rāmañña Nikāya in Myanmar

Having mentioned the Buddhist method for monastic educational preservation for the Mon Saṅgha, now in this section, we will present the Buddhist method for monastic educational inheritance for the Mon Saṅgha in regarding with how to inherit through the Dhamma that are to be both received and giving what we have received as an inheritance. Accordingly, the method of inheritance the monastic education should be divided into two categories as the method of inheritance through receiving and the method of inheritance through giving after receiving.

Inheritance is not only receiving, but also giving, and it is mutually reciprocal so, to understand clearly, it should refer as "to receive is to give and to give is to be received". When we receive something from someone else, mutually, we will give something to someone else again. For example, the Buddha inherited us the Dhamma that what he discovered at the age of thirty-five year under the Bodhi Tree and He transferred to the community of the Saṅgha, and at a time when the very first the establishment of the Saṅgha community after the Saṅgha received the Dhamma inheritance from the Buddha, the Buddha encouraged them to deliver to the world, for the purpose of the welfares and benefits of the world, do not go in group, but go alone in each direct, for the purpose of inheriting the Buddha's teaching to the world.

The Mon Saṅgha of Rāmañña Nikāya themselves inherit the Buddha's teachings in Mon language as well as to their lay-Buddhists in Mon language. It is very suitable method that is commented by a Mon historian, Nai Maung Toe as the method that the Mon Saṅgha of Rāmañña Nikāya inherit the Buddha's teaching through the Mon monastic education in Mon language is an appropriate method, because the Mon lay-Buddhists in majority are

habitually influenced by the Mon language, so that the Mon lay-Buddhists could be able to understand the Buddha's teaching in which the Mon Saṅgha of Rāmañña Nikāya provide in Mon language.¹⁵

Supposedly, it is better if the Rāmañña Nikāya could be able to inherit the inheritance of the Pāli Tipiṭaka in Mon version and its translations to the Mon Saṅgha generations, because the inheritance of the monastic education through examinations, in some times or days, will be gradually decrease when the number of the Mon Saṅgha are reducing, or when the government are not allowed the Mon Saṅgha to take examination in Mon language. The monastic Saṅgha, whose way of life is devoted to wisdom development, act as a receptacle, preserving and transmitting the Buddha's teachings (*dhamma*). The monks pass on the 'light of truth,' and share the teachings with the wider public, guiding people in all facets of spiritual development.¹⁶

In inheriting the Buddha's teachings, it is of significance that it should be inherited by the Dhamma regardless of oneself or others, for the purpose of the method of inheriting the Dhamma such as studying monastic education, delivering the Dhamma-talk, practicing meditation and so on to oneself and others is praised by the Buddha. *Dhammadāyādā me bhikkhave bhavatha mā āmisadāyādā*;¹⁷ *bhikkhus, be my heirs in dhamma*, not my heirs in material things.¹⁸ The *dhamma* should be inherited to liberate oneself and others from the world

Inheriting with the Dhamma is the most superior in Theravada Buddhism, because even the Buddha himself encourages us to be inherited by the Dhamma, and the Buddha gave his own son Rāhula the inheritance with the Dhamma by making him ordained as the Samanera or Novice when the inheritance was asked by His son, Rāhula.¹⁹ And also, the

¹⁵ Interview with **Nai Maung Toe**, A Mon Historian and Former Director of National Archive Department, Ta Mwe, Yangon, Myanmar, December 17, 2019.

¹⁶ P.A. Payutto, **Prelude to Buddhaddhamma: Noble life – Healthy Society – Delightful Nature**, (Bangkok: Phliddham Publishing, 2018), p. 27.

¹⁷ V., Trenckner, **The Majjhima-Nikāya**, Vol. I., (London: Pali Text Society, 1979), p. 12.

¹⁸ M.I.12; Bhikkhu Nanamoli; Bhikkhu Bodhi, **The middle length discourses of the Buddha: a new translation of the Majjhima Nikāya**, (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 2009), p. 97.

¹⁹ Vin.I.82.

Buddha gives us two main inheritances that are the Dhamma and the Vinaya as the teacher of our own after the passing away of the Buddha.²⁰ Furthermore, evidently, it should finger to Venerable Buddhaghosa who did translation of the Pāli commentaries and wrote some famous works in previous centuries and Venerable Aswo who did write the Pāli Tipiṭaka and its translation into Mon language and wrote many works based on the Buddhist literatures including the Mon accounts during his life-time, and they are still available to use, because of the inheritance of them. Such prominent inheritances of the Buddha's teaching through translating numerous works are the most important inheritance, and from such works, it makes us understand the Buddha's teaching perfectly.

As the Mon Saṅgha of Rāmañña Nikāya, the Buddhist method of monastic educational inheritance of the Dhamma through delivering the dhamma-talk, teaching and learning the Buddha's teachings, translating the Pāli Tipiṭaka and its translation in Mon language necessitate under what we receive are to be what we are to give; and what we give are to be what we are received as an inheritance of the Mon monastic education of the Rāmañña Nikāya in Myanmar. It is the most important to understand the process of the inheritance that we received from someone else as our own property and that we require to share to someone else again as their own possessions.

Conclusion

In preserving the Buddha's teachings from the side of the Saṅgha community, an integrated method focuses on the method that is required to preserve the Vinaya as priority, while having based on the Vinaya, the Saṅgha necessitate to inherit the Dhamma to themselves as well as the others, for when the Vinaya disappears the Buddhasāsanā will disappear as soon as possible even though the Suttana Piṭaka and the Abhidhamma Piṭaka are still in practice. In the same method, in accordance with the present situation in Myanmar, as long as the Mon monastic education of the Rāmañña Nikāya survives, the Mon language remains safe from the loss of its identity. What we understand from this study is that the method of preservation and inheritance the Mon monastic education does not only preserve and inherit the monastic education or the Buddha's teaching, but also the Mon language.

²⁰D.II.154: *Yo vo, ānanda, mayā dhammo ca vinayo ca desito paññatto, so vo mam'accayena satthā.*

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