

ACHIEVEMENTS OF MONASTERIES IN KYAING TONG FOR PROPAGATION OF SASANA

Nwe Nwe Aung¹

Abstract

The monasteries of Kyaing Tong are said to be the earliest ones not only in whole Shan States but also in Myanmar. The monasteries such as *Wat Padaeng*, *Wat Hokhong* and *Wat Comdong* were established by *Yun* Buddhist monks of northern Thailand since about 600 years ago. From that time onward ruling Princes, *Sanghas* and people made effort for the development of *Sasana*. This paper is an attempt to deal with the emergence of the historic monasteries and achievement of *Theras* of these monasteries through ages. A discussion is made on the arrival of *Theravada* Buddha faith into the Eastern Shan State. This paper discusses on aspects of Buddhism in Kyaing Tong by exploring and interpreting important sources.

Keywords: Monasteries Achievements, Kyaing Tong *Sasana*, *Yun* Set Buddhism

Introduction

The local history of Kyaing Tong, like those of Myanmar, begins with the legendary Buddha's prophesy and it is at least 600 years earlier than the date attributed by the historians. The Chronicle of Kyaing Tong begins with the visit of Buddha *Gotama* with his forty-nine disciples after the attainment of Enlightenment for twelve *vassa*. *Jengtung State Chronicle* mentions that Kyaing Tong was then known as *Dammilap*, also as *Ongpu* and also as *Candavajira*. The Lord made a prophesy saying that a king will bring the *Sasana* and this region will always be abundance of food and *Khema* king became the victorious ruler of the state. The names of some areas of present day Kyaing Tong such as *Comsak*, *Comdom*, *ComSiri* derived from the legendary visit of Buddha. Actually the story of Buddha's visit and leaving prophecy were very popular among the ancient Chroniclers of Myanmar, some Shan States, Sri Lanka, Mon, Rakhine and Thai. The early Chronicle of neighbouring Lan Na State also mentions that Buddha visited *Ma SaiDoi Tung-Chaing San* region of Lan Na and also *Lampung* region². It is suggested that the local Chroniclers brought folklore or legends from outside world and adapted locally.

Materials and Methods

Critical approach is used to analyze the archival materials and field-work evidence and to yield explicit information on Buddhism of Kyaing Tong area.

Result

Knowing Kyaing Tong and Trans-Than Lwin area was the center of Buddhist religion which was distributed by learned monks of northern Thailand.

Aim and Objective

Objective of this paper is to trace the origins of Buddhism in Trans-Than Lwin area.

¹ Dr, Associate Professor, Department of History, Taunggyi University, aung.nnwe28@gmail.com.

² Penth,Hans ,*A Brief History of Lan Na*, Chaing Mai, Silkworm Books, 2004,pp9-11

Research Question

Since when did the *Therevada* Buddhism arrive on Trans-Than Lwin area?

How to approach the Buddhist Center in Kyaing Tong during the reign of Lan Na Kingdom.

Finding and Discussion

The Arrival of Buddhism

When traced the prevalence of Buddhism into Trans-Than Lwin area was not earlier than eleventh century A.D. During that time the monks from *Sukhotai* went to Sri Lanka and Ramanya region to study the Buddhist scriptures. They became the first missionaries who propagated Buddhism to *Khemarahta* Kyaing Tong.¹

Indeed, since the establishment of Kaing Tong, the astrologers foretold that there would be unbroken line of royal family; there would be elephants, horses and buffaloes in abundance; there would be glory for the state and radiance of *Sasana*.² There are other statements which argued the advent of Buddhism to Kyaing Tong in the reign of *Nanthum*. One of these statements describe that the Buddhism had already established before the conquest of Kyaing Tong by *PharaMangrai*. Since Chiang Mai stood as the subordinate state of *Dvarawadi* Mons, the founder of Chiang Mai and his successors had intimate relations with Ramanya region some Buddhist missions brought Buddhism to Chiang Mai and from thence to Kyaing Tong.³ The date of the advent of Buddhism was referred to the eleventh century. The learned *theras* of Kyaing Tong told that the *Yunaka* or *Yun* sect Buddhism had arrived to Kyaing Tong since the time immemorial. The earliest monasteries were Kyaing Yin and *WatPha* monasteries.⁴ Even today, *Khun(Gon)* monks from Kyaing Tong unanimously accepted that *Khun* Buddhism had arrived from Chiang Mai.⁵

All rulers of Kyaing Tong from the first *Sawbwa PharaNamthum* to *Sao Sai Long*, excluding first two *Lva* rulers, were Buddhists and they encouraged the Buddhist religion in many ways. However the customary belief on animism and spiritual worship did not perished. Even King *Mangrai* followed these practices. After the coronation at the palace, the king was suggested that *Tai Yun* from Chiang Mai belonged to the *Rahunama* and it was not accord with the horoscope of the city. The king therefore asked the monks who suggested that the group of *Khuns* have come and settle in the southern direction and they are compatible with the state's *namor nama* or name. Then the king summoned the people to give up *Yun* dress and to cut their hair in the manner of the great *Khun*.⁶ Thus the occult science and animistic worship had prevailed in the city since the times of its establishment.

The Establishment of Padaeng Monastery

In the time of *Sawbwa Sao Phayu* (1360-70), the wall of the city was rebuilt and the new palace was also built. He donated jewel studded Buddha image, ivory image, and stone image with a set of *pitaka* scriptures. During that time, *MahaHamsavadiDasaPyinnyo*, *Dhamma Lanka*,

¹ Sao Simon Mangrai, *The Padaeng Chronicle and the Jengtung State Chronicle Translated*, Ann Arbor, Center for the South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Michigan, 1981, 210-12 (Henceforth : Mangrai , 1981)

² Mangrai, 1981, 229

³ AshinDhamma Sami, "Kyaing Tong Buddha SasanaNaukkhanThamaing", (Background History of Buddhism in Kyaing Tong), *PadaengKyaungdaikMulaSasanaThamaingAkyin*, (A Brief History of Padaeng Monastery and Sasana), Kyaing Tong, Padaeng Monastery, 2003, p.52 (Henceforth Dhamma Sami 2003)

⁴ Interview with Ven. U Sanvara, Abbot Sayadaw of Com Dong Monastery, Age 51, Vassa 27, 8, January 2018

⁵ Interview with Ven. BaddandaJotika, Age 80, Vassa 60, Abbot Sayadaw of Ho Khong Monastery, 6 January 2018

⁶ Mangrai, 1981, 230

DhammaTrilok and their twelve resided in Kyaing Tong to propagate *Sasana*. *Sao Phayu* went to the *WatKyaing Le`* where said *theras* resided and donated the city of Kyaing Tong as *Sangha Dana* by pouring libation water into the palms of *theras*. He then made a solemn vow that whoever rule Kyaing Tong, 10,000 ticals of silver (27 pounds) and 1,000 ticals of gold (2.7 pounds) shall donate to the monks annually to fulfill the requisites of the monks. He also pleaded the monks to rule the city if his son ascend the throne and to give sermons for the wellbeing of the people. When *Sao Phayu* passed away, *Sao Cedbantu* (1370-77) ascended the throne. He followed suit of his father and donated 27 pounds of silver and 2.7 pounds of gold to the monks. In addition, he built monasteries; *WatBrakaeu* for Ven. *Dhamma Lanka* for Ven. *DhammaTrilok*, *WatBrakang* for Ven. *Thabyinnyo*, and *WatComdong* for Ven. *MahaHamsa*. The Buddhist scriptures were also donated to the monasteries for ordination, teaching and learning and giving sermon. Every scriptures related to the *Puppharam* Sect¹ were donated to *MahaTon* (Hanthawaddy), the patron of *Puppharam* Sect.² Of the monasteries donated by *Sao Cedbantu*, *Honkhon* and *ComDong* monasteries still exist today at Kyaing Tong. *Hokhong* monastery became the center of Buddhist propagation in Trans-Than Lwin region.

Here, it is needed to make a brief discussion on *Puppharam* Sect. There emerged two renowned Buddhist sects in Kyaing Tong since the early days of the arrival of Buddhism. These sects were Garden Sect and Forest Sect. The former was comprised of *Sondok* (garden of flowers), *Puppharam* (monastery of flowers), and *Yang Gong* (name of a garden sect monastery) monasteries. The latter was comprised of *Padaeng* Monastery (Red Forest Monastery) and *MahaVam* or *MahaVanna* (Black forest Monastery). The Garden Sect originated in Chiang Mai. The ruler named *Kuna Sondokgham* built *Sondokgham* Monastery for *SumanaThera*, the leader of Garden Sect. Similarly, the *Padaeng Sasana* of forest sect stemmed from Chiang Mai and spread to Kyaung Tong and its subordinate states of Mong Yong, Mong Ken MongHlyan and Sipsongbanna.³

As stated above, the rulers and the people of Kyaing Tong followed the Buddhist religion and made efforts for the propagation of *Sasana*. However they still embraced the spiritual worship. Whenever they faced with drought, crop failure or natural calamity, however, they propitiated guardian spirits and arranged some occult science. For example in the reign of *Sao Yi Kham* (1410-16), The propitiation ritual to *Lahu* Frog Spirit was held by *Nam Khon* River to stop the prevalence of drought.⁴ This tradition lasted for centuries. In addition, the propitiation ritual to the goddess of female dragon, the guardian spirit of Kyaing Tong, was held whenever the city faced with danger such as foreign invasion.⁵ However the people occasionally believed that the evil spirits disturbed the city and palace. In such occasion the monks from Kyaing *Yon* monastery, *Kyaing Le`* Monastery and *Yang Gong* Monastery recited the *parita* to drive away evil spirits.⁶ Indeed the spiritual worship of Kyaing Tong *Sawbwas* and people, like that of the kings of Myanmar and *Sawbwas* of other Shan States, was the common tradition to fulfill the secular desire.

Other Buddhist Sects

As discussed earlier on the influence of Chiang Mai on the political and cultural development of Kyaing Tong, the religious and cultural relations between these two states did not ceased. During *Saw-bwa* *SaoSamsiri's* reign (1441-56), the monks from Chiang Mai visited to

¹ *Puppharam* Sect, meaning the sect of blossoming flowers, was the earliest Buddhist sect in Kyaing Tong.

² Mangrai, 1981, 236

³ Mangrai, 1981, 31

⁴ Than Tun, "Kyaing Tong-Myanmar Set-san-ye" (Kyaing Tong-Myanmar Relations), *Ne-hle` Yazawin* (Peripatetic History), Three Volumes, Yangon, Pyi Zone Publishing, 2004, p 41 (Henceforth: Than Tun, 2004)

⁵ Interview with U Sai Lon Gyi, member of MahaMyatmuni Pagoda Trustee Board, Age 72, 27 November 2015

⁶ Mangrai, 1981, 239

Kyaing Tong as the Buddhist Mission. During that time three Buddhist sects existed in Kyaing Tong. The first sect was *Nagravasi* or *Gamavasi*- the monks resided in the city. This sect emerged in the northern Thailand before the conquest of *Haripujara* by Tai. In 1370, this sect was established in Lan Na and lasted for centuries. The second sect was *AranyaVasi*- forest dwellers who accepted the doctrines of *Mahavihara* Sect of *Anuruddhapura* (Sri Lanka). This sect (vinaya) established in Madama of Lower Myanmar in fourteenth century A.D. The royal family of *Sukhodaya* (Sukhotai) encouraged this sect. In 1370, *Ven Mahathera Sumana Sayadaw* brought the doctrine of *Gamavasi* to Lan Na.¹ The royalties of Lan Na worshipped the teaching of *Gamavasi* or Old Ceylon Sect and distributed *GamavasiSasana* to Kyaing Tong.

The forest dwellers of Ceylon *Vinaya* were ordained in Ceylon and established the New Ceylon Sect in 1430 after their return from Ceylon. Owing to their strict adherence to the disciplines, expertise in Pali literature and ability to arrange religious rituals, the monks of New Ceylon Sect were able to organize many followers. In 1448, *Soma VittaSayadaw* from New Ceylon Sect came to *Khemarahta* Kyaing Tong and made efforts for the propagation of *Sasana*. This is the beginning of *PadaengSasana* in Kyaing Tong. After the establishment of *Padaeng* Monastery, a stone inscription was erected, on which the record of the establishment of the monastery was inscribed in *Tai Yun* language. The inscription mentions the name of Kyaing Tong as *Khemarahta*. The main contents of the inscription are the: 1, establishment of a *Stupa* on the model of *JaramandaraStupa* in 1451, 2, three sacred relics of Buddha were enshrined in the *Stupa*, and 3, donation to the *Padaeng* Monastery. *Maha Devi Sridigha*, queen of *Sawbwa Sao Samsiri*, donated every necessities to *Soma VittaSayadaw*.

After the establishment of *Padaeng* Monastery and *Stupa*, Sayadaw went back to Chiang Mai where he continued the works of propagation of *Sasana*. Then he returns to Kyaing Tong under the allowance of the abbot of Chiang Mai.² Soon after its establishment, *Padaeng* Monastery became the large monastery where 200 monks and novices resided. Successive *Sawbwas*, monks and the people made efforts for the perpetuation of *Padaeng* Monastery. About 350 households offered daily food to the monastery. As the Monastery used the scripture written in *Yun* or *Khun* language, the *Padaeng* Monastery was also known as *Yun* Monastery.³ During that time, the efforts of other monasteries such as *Hokhong*, *Comdong* and *Wat Inn*⁴ strengthened the propagation of Buddhist religion. Kyaing Tong became the center of *Sasana* in Trans-Than Lwin Region.

The prosperity of Buddhist religion had continued to prevail in Kyaing Tong even though it was put under the rule of Myanmar Kings. Kyaing Tong extended its relations with Myanmar for religious affairs. Successive Myanmar kings dispatched Buddhist missionaries to Kyaing Tong and donated *pitaka* scriptures. The outstanding example was the offering of a set of *pitaka* scriptures to *Kaeuyodfanarinda* by King *Bayinnaung* when *Sawbwa* visited to the court of Hanthawaddy. In 1580, *Sao Mongkha* (1560-98), the successor of *Kaeuyodfanarinda*, was also offered gifts and a set of *pitaka* scriptures by King *Bayinnaung* for his faithful stance in the wars with *Ayuthia*, Chiang Mai and China by contributing horses, men and elephants. During *Konbaung* period, King *Badon* (1782-1819) dispatched five *SasanabyuSayadaws*-Buddhist Missionaries headed by *Ven. Sri SaddhamavajarajaguruMahathera*. A cave temple was built in Kyaing Tong. *Sawbwa Sao MahaKhanum* (1813-58) sent a delegation to *Amarapura* to copy *pitaka* scriptures. King *Badon* contributed cash to repair ruined *Stupas*.⁵ As regard to the efforts of King *Badon* to propagate

¹ A.B Griswold and PrasertnaNagara, "An Inscription from Keng Tung(1451 A.D), *Journal of Siamese Society*, Volume 66, Pt 1, January 1978, p 66(Henceforth Griswold and Prasert 1978)

² Griswold and Prasert, 1978,69-72

³ Dhamma Sami, 2013,61

⁴ Wat Inn Monastery was established in 1429. Interview with Ven. BaddataGambhiya, Abbot Sayadaw of Wat Inn, Age 67, Vassa 47, 24 december 2017

⁵ ThanTun,2004, 31

Sasana in Kyaing Tong, an argument arose that the king forced to spread *Suddhama Sasana* of *Inwa* and *Amarapura* and to give pressure *Yun* Buddhist monks convert *Suddhama Sasana*.¹ However the efforts of learned *Theras* from *Hokhon* and *Padaeng* Monasteries, successive *Sawbwas* and the people brought about the perpetuation of *Yun* Buddhism in Kyaing Tong.

During colonial period, the Buddhist religion of Kyaing Tong continued to prosper in the region. Owing to the attempts of the monks, the population of Buddhists increased to 133,400 souls while those who followed pre-Buddhist religion or animistic belief totaled only 39,660.² The remarkable achievement for the prosperity of *Sasana* was done by *Sao KhunKiaoIntaleng* (1896-1935) who held *Asadissadana*-or peerless donation in 1929. In addition, in 1921, he casted *Mahamyatmuni* Image with one viss and seventy ticals of gold, seventeen viss of silver, bronze and copper at Mandalay. *Thibaw Sawbwa Sir Saw Che* contributed the half of the cost. After the completion of casting, the Buddha image was brought from Mandalay via *Thibaw* from thence to *Takaw* by carts. The *Mahamyatmuni* Image can be seen at the center of city.³ Nowadays, there are 2381 monks who preparing for monsoon retreat and 60 nuns residing at Kyaing Tong. There are 306 *Suddhama* monasteries and Six *Shwegyin* Monasteries.⁴ The remaining monasteries are supposed to be *Yun* Monasteries.

Conclusion

The aspect of Kyaing Tong Buddhism is significant to some extent. The monasteries and celebrated *Thera* of these monasteries established a close relation with *Theras* of northern Thailand such as *Lan Na* and *Lanphung*. The learned monks from these states also visited Kyaing Tong to propagate *Sasana*. Some monks founded the monasteries. The famous monasteries of Kyaing Tong such as *Wat Padaeng* and *Wat Hokhang* were established by these monks. Some monasteries were established with same name in northern Thailand. For example, *Wat Padaeng*, literally means Red Forest Monastery, was also established in Chaing Mai. Over time, the monasteries of Kyaing Tong became the centers of activities of *Sasana* in whole Trans-Tham Lwin area. The learning of Buddhist scriptures in *Khun* Language, *Pariyatti* and *Padipatti* *Sasana* were handed down from *Theras* to *Theras*. Local people and pious *Sawbwas* of Kyaing Tong encouraged the monks and provided every necessity to the monasteries. Although Myanmar Kings made attempt to propagate the way of *Sasana* practiced in Myanmar proper, the *Theras* of Kyaing Tong embraced their way of propagation of faith. Even after the end of *Sawbwa's* rule, the monasteries of Kyaing Tong continued to exist as the centers of *Theravada* Buddhism in Eastern Shan State.

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¹ Dhamma Sami, 2013, 64

² Than Tun, 2004, 25

³ *Mahamyatmuni Phaya Hnint Vihara Kyaungdaw*, (The Mahamyatmuni Image and Monastery, Kyaing Tong), Kyaing Tong, Mahamyatmuni Pagoda Trustee Board, 2012, pp 4-7

⁴ *The List of the Monks who went Monsoon Retreat*, Courtesy of Wat Inn Sayadaw

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Photo One: Ho Khong Monastery (Three Stories)



Source: Photo taken by Dr Nwe Nwe Aung

Photo Two: Ho Khong Monastery (Two Stories)



Source: Photo taken by Dr Nwe Nwe Aung

Photo Three: Ordination Hall Ho Khong Monastery



Source: Photo taken by Dr Nwe Nwe Aung

Photo Four: Drum (Padaeng Monastery)



Source: Photo taken by Dr Nwe Nwe Aung

Photo Five : Padaeng Monastery



Photo Six : Archway (Padaeng Monastery)



Source: Photo taken by Dr Nwe Nwe Aung

Photo Seven : Con Dong Pagoda



Photo Eight : Con Dong Pagoda



Source: Photo taken by Dr Nwe Nwe Aung

Photo Nine : Waisansaria Jakata Festival

Source: Photo taken by Dr Nwe Nwe Aung

Photo Ten : Waisansaria Jakata Festival

Source: Photo taken by Dr Nwe Nwe Aung

Photo Eleventh : Archway (Ho Khong Monastery)



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