A STUDY ON U SHWE ZAN AUNG, A PROMINENT WRITER WHO MADE THE FIRST TRANSLATION OF BUDDHA ABHIDHAMMA INTO ENGLISH*

Nitra Soe Min¹

Abstract

People of all races throughout the world have different religious beliefs. Their faithfulness in religion can support them to follow the strict code of moral conduct and to preserve their own traditional cultures and customs. Among the world religions, Buddhism is an Asian Religion based on the supreme teaching of Buddha. But increasingly, it is gaining adherents in western countries. The essence of Buddhism is Buddha Abhidhamma or ultra-doctrine. It has been introduced to the worldwide readers by U Shwe Zan Aung with all his pen might. Having mastery of Buddhism, he shared his religious view with the members of religious communities from home and abroad. Many of his books had attracted worldwide attention. This study mainly focuses on the life and works of U Shwe Zan Aung. His biography and his concerted effort to translate books from Pali into English are submitted. One of the highlights of his works is Compendium of Philosophy. Peace keeping is an essential sector in a perfect world. No doubt, only Abhidhamma can show the way to the end of suffering and to enjoy eternal peace.

Keyword: Buddhism, Biography

Introduction

Among the world wide religions, Buddhism is mainly a highly significant discovery in Asia. The teachings of Lord Buddha are indescribable amazing. They have been divided into three collections called Ti-pi-taka (wdyd#uwf). Among them, Abhidhamma Pi-ta-ka (yd#uwf) is the third collection. Significantly, the prefix **abhi** means great or excellent. **Dhamma** is the Pali word meaning the doctrine or the teaching of the Buddha.

In Abhidhamma, the Buddha analyzed mind and matter in minute detail in terms of the ultimate realities known as paramatthas (y&rw¬) in the universe. The principles and causal relations expounded in Abhidhamma

¹Dr, Lecturer, Department of Library and Information Studies, University of East Yangon

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are so natural and logical that they can pin-point the root cause of miseries in the world and the ways to eradicate them.

Additionly, Abhidhamma spotlights the mind which is undoubtedly the most powerful agent in the world. The true ability of every person lies in his / her mind. Abhidhamma is an analysis of the mind. The characteristics and the functions of the mind are also described. Moreover, how to purify the mind from defilements are propagated.

As supplementary information, Abhidhamma also reveals Nibbāna, the highest goal of Buddhism which is free from mind and matter. Only Abhidhamma can show the way to realize the unique peace of Nibbāna. Thus, knowledge of Abhidhamma should be used as the guiding torch for attaining the noble stage of Nibbāna.

Scope of the Study

This research work focuses on the personal profile of the famous Rakhine writer, U Shwe Zan Aung who was the very first translator of Buddha Abhidhamma from Pali into English. His treatise entitled *Compendium of Philosophy* had also become a real hit in the literary world. It had been published for four times in order to make available to the public from home and abroad. Up till now, it has been using as an instruction manual for those who want to gain religious education.

Method of the Study

By using the vital literary search method, the personal data of U Shwe Zan Aung are collected. The required reference books are provided by Universities' Central Library and the University of Yangon Library.

Organization of Research Paper

The contents of this research paper comprise various forms of Myanmar words. For having the correct spelling system, *Myanmar (Burmese) Romanization* published by Library of Congress is being used.¹

In contributing transliteration, the titles of books and the publishing houses are significantly recorded according to the system. However, the titles

¹ Myanmar (Burmese) Romanization. Washington DC: Library of Congress, 1981.

of some well-known magazines and publishing houses are exposed in their original spelling.

eg. Sarpay Beikman (pmayAdrmef)

All personal names and the names of towns are not included in this procedure.

eg. U Shwe Zan Aung (OD; a&TZHatmif)
Sittwe (ppfawG)

Outcome of the Study

Learners can fully appreciate the essence of Buddha Abhidhamma. Moreover, how the outstanding features of Abhidhamma had been exposed to the world by religious experts can attract the attention of the researchers. In evidence, the talented Rakhine writer, U Shwe Zan Aung widely shared his religious views and highlighted the importance of Abhidhamma.

A Study on U Shwe Zan Aung, a Prominent Writer Who Made the First Translation of Buddha Abhidhamma into English

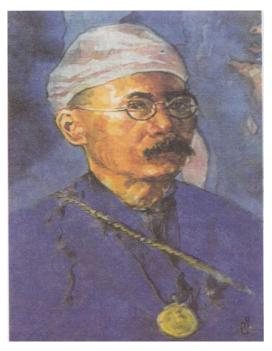


Figure 1: Photo of U Shwe Zan Aung

Childhood Life

U Shwe Zan Aung was born on January 20, 1871 in Akyab{Sittway (ppfawG)}.He was the son of U Shwe Thar {I.S.O, K.S.M, (usufoa&aqmif

a&TpvG, f&rif;) A.T.M (trSlxrf; aumif; wHqdyf&rif;) } and Daw A Phyu Zan. His father was District Superintendent of Police. He had four siblings and he was the second in his family. When he was young, he was thin, fair skinned and tall for his age. ²

Student Life

He was first educated at the Government Middle School Akyab{Sittway (ppfawG)} in 1881. Since childhood, he was the brightest student in the class. In 1885, he won the Middle School Scholarship. He then continued his studies at the State High School Rangoon from which he matriculated in 1887. He joined the Rangoon College and obtained B.A (Bachelor of Arts) in 1891.³

Professional Life

In 1892, he entered Government Service in the Department of Education. In 1893, he served in the Land Records Department. In 1894, he was transferred to Kyaukse (ausmufqnf). After serving for nine years, in 1903, he was transferred to the Burma Subordinate Civil Service, Rangoon {Yangon (&efukef)}. In 1907, he was promoted to Land Requisition Officer of the Provincial Civil Service. In 1909, while serving as Tax Inspector in the Rangoon Collector's Office, he was put on special duty of settling squatter's rents in Rangoon, a task full of difficulties in those days.

² Samuin'" sutesana ū" cī" tḥāna, "U Shwe Zan Aung, Buddha 'Abhidhamma kui pathama chum" English bhāsā pran' chui sū (OD; a&TZHatmif? Ak' "tbd"r®mudk yxrqHk; t*Fvdyfbmom jyefqdkol)," In Khit-yay-zee hte` ka poke-go myar (acwfa&pD; xJuyk*¾dKvfrsm;). Naypyitaw: Department of Historical Research, 2011. 471. (Hereafter cited as Department of Historical Research, 2011)

³ Zeya, Mran'mā myak' pvan'' lū' dhale' (jrefrmhrsufyGifhvlY"avY) (Yangon: Yarpyae Sapay, 2010), 115-124. (Hereafter cited as Zeya, 2010)

His recommendations were accepted, and thus, he was conferred the title of A.T.M (trSlxrf; aumif; wHqdyf&rif;) in 1914. 4

In 1912, he was selected for a very important duty of acquiring lands for the Twantay Canal (wHGaw;wl;ajrmif;) and in 1913, for Special Tenure Enquiry in the rising Town of Syriam{Thanlyin (oefvsif)}. As Sub-divisional Officer, Kyauktan (ausmufwef;), in 1918, he raised a large sum of money for the Second War Loan. He officiated twice as Deputy Commissioner, Hanthawaddy ([HomOwD), Before he was appointed Officiating Secretary to the Financial Commissioner Burma in 1920. After that, he was transferred as Deputy Commissioner, Thaton (oxHk) where he is still remembered as an adorable Officer. He had no easy time, but his administration was successful. The title of K.S.M (usufoa&aqmifa&TpvG,f&rif;) was conferred upon him in 1923.

He was once more selected to serve on the Municipal Taxation Enquiry Committee in India. The President very favourably mentioned his services as a member of the important Committee. He had the distinction of being the first Burman Excise Commissioner, and he was one of those few who rose to the top of his service by sheer merit. After a long and loyal service of over thirty years, he retired from Government Service on the grounds of health, in 1926.⁶

Family Life

In 1893, U Shwe Zan Aung married Daw Tin. Her parents were U Tun Aung, Extra Assistant Commissioner and Daw Htwa. They had two children,

⁴ Who's Who in Burma(Rangoon: Indo-Burma Publishing Agency, 1927), 11.(Hereafter cited as Who's Who in Burma, 1927)

Nhac 'chay' rācu Mran 'mā cāre" charā myā "nhan "cācu carn "" (Ditoua tvai) (ESpfq, f&mpkjrefrmpma&; q&mrsm; ESifYpmpkpm&if; ('kwd, wGJ) (Yangon: Information and Public Relation Department, 2003, 164-167.

⁶ Department of Historical Research, 2011, 471.

Daw Khin Tint alias Daw Khin Tin Myint and U Maung Maung Gyi, Government Advocate. ⁷

On May 11, 1932, he passed away at his resident, "Nanda Wun" (eE´0ef). The exact location was No. 85, Enit Street, Kyimyindaing (Munhfjrifwdkif) Township. While he was on his bed, he listened earnestly to the sermons given by the monks. He looked conscious and mindful and then, he met his end peacefully. Indeed, his death was an irreplaceable loss for the literary world. 8

He had many relations in Government Service. Dr. Thar Noe, (K.S.M, A.T.M) was his first cousin, U Saw Hla Pru, Additional District Magistrate, Tavoy (Dawie) and Dr. Thar Doe, M.B, Ch.B (Edin) {Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor Surgery Degree (University of Edinburgh)}, Assistant Medicine Superintendent, General Hospital, Rangoon, were his nephews. ⁹

Literary Life

In 1894, while he was serving in the Land Records Department, he was transferred to Kyaukse (ausmufqnf). With the aid of some Buddhist monks, he got a big chance to acquire a good knowledge of religion by observances of Buddhist scriptures. Starting from 1895, he pursued to study Buddhist Doctrine under the guidance of the presiding monk of a Buddhist Monastery, U Gandama (OD; *EÅrm) and Ledi Sayadaw (v, fwDq&mawmf). He also took great interest in attaining powers of sorcery and practising alchemy. 10

While he was in Government Service, he enjoyed working non-stop as he had a matured and responsible attitude. He studied English as a foreign language. Moreover, he took every opportunity to learn Latin, Pali and

Mg Zeyar, *Mran'mālūkyo' 100* (Pathama'aup') (jrefrmvlausmf 100 (yxrtkyf) (Yangon: Unity Press, 2010), 190-193.(Hereafter cited as Mg Zeyar, 2010)

[&]quot;Kvay' lvan"anicc rok khran'" (uG, fvGeftedpöa&mufjcif;),"Thuriya Newspaper 12 May 1932, 14.

⁹ Who's Who in Burma, 1927, 11.

¹⁰ Mg Zeyar, 2010, 190-193.

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Sanskrit. He closely observed the essence of Buddhist Philosophy and due to his in-depth study, he became an expert in that field.¹¹

Being a talented translator, U Shwe Zan Aung made translation of "Abhidammattasangaha kyam" (tbd"r®wÅo*F[usrf;) compiled by Venerable Ashin Anuyudra Mahtay (t&SiftEk&k' "grax&f). As he had a desire to propagate Buddhist Doctrines to worldwide attention, he contributed his article to Buddhism, an international magazine that was published and made available to the public once every three months. In 1900, the article entitled "The Processes of Thought" appeared in Buddhism magazine, volume one, part two and had become a literary hit for worldwide readers. It was in the interest of the west that those facts of Abhidhamma (tbd"r®m), Buddhist Doctrine were made known. Mrs. Rhys Davids (M.A, D. Litt) (Master of Arts, Doctor of Literature), President of Pali Text Society, London was one of his enthusiastic readers. With the help of venerable Annada Myittarya (q&mawmfteE'arwå,s), she made personal contact with the writer, and then, they were on intimate terms. Due to her encouragement, U Shwe Zan Aung translated "Abhidammattasangaha kyam" (tbd"r®wÅo*F[usrf;) from Pali into English and sent it to her. It took her for about three years to consider the translation of the treatise over and over again. U Shwe Zan Aung's original manuscript and her own manuscript were sent back to him. After assessing the two manuscripts, he compiled a new book entitled Compendium of Philosophy. In 1910, the first edition was published by London Pali Text Society and the second edition came out in 1925. He won maximal recognition for his translation as it helped to open the eyes of the West. 12

He also won high praise from the learned people from the West. Furthermore, he tried to convey the important treatise from the West to the East. Based on a treatise, *Logic*, compiled by a learned English Professor, G. Bann, he made translation from English into Burmese. The title of the treatise on Logic was *Takkiyanya dīpānī 'amaññ' rhi yutti beda*

¹¹ Ibid

Bagan U Khin Mg Gyi, *Buddha Abhidhamma* (Ak'"tbd"r®m) (Yangon:Aye Aye Press, 1970), 69-70.

trnf&Sd ,kwdÅaA'usrf;.) kyam'" (wudú, e, 'DyeD Without making direct translation, he just referred to its ideology and process. He adapted the terms commonly used in Burmese, Pali and Sanskrit languages. ¹³

He was highly skilled at dealing with ancient literature. He also had considerable expertise in creating poems, lyrical odes and verses. From 1911 to 1920, he constantly contributed many useful articles to JBRS (Journal of Burma Research Society) and some international journals. He held discussions on ancient stone-inscriptions with Bagan Wun Dauk U Tin and U Taw Sein Ko. Moreover, he made exact translation in English about Maijā toń'khre ratu (rJZmawmifajc&wk), a lyrical poem composed by Letwe' Thondra (vuf0JokE'&).14

In concern with Buddhist Doctrines, he had compiled seven treatises. Of the seven treatises, three were written in English and the remaining four were in Myanmar. The years of publication were also expressed.

- 1. Jarā lakkha пā di dīpanī kyam'" (Z&mvu©Pm'd 'DyeDusrf;). Rangoon: Kawi Myet Hman Sapay, 1908.
- 2. Compendium of Philosophy. London: Pali Text Society, 1910.
- 3. Tkkiyanaya dīpanī 'amaññ ʻrhi vutti beda kyam' ,kwdÅaA'usrf;). (wudú, e, 'DyeD trnf&Sd Rangoon: Kawi Myet Hman Sapay, 1910.
- 4. Yamaka: Being the Sixth Book of Abhidhamma Pitaka. London: Pali Text Society, 1913.
- 5. Kāyanga sambhā ra dīpanī (kho') Khandhā 'aim' kyam'" (um, *F orCm&'DyeD (ac:)cE"mtdrfusrf;).Rangoon: Shwe Kyu Sapay, 1915.

Zeyar, 2010, 115-124.

¹⁴ Aye Thein. "Dr. Shwe Zan Aung (a 'qufwma&TZHatmif)." **In** Aye Thein, *Nuin* ' 'akyui"pru ratanāmyā". (EdkifiHtusdK; jyKtzdk; wef&wemrsm;). Yangon: Gon Htoo Sapay, 2007, 126-129.

- 6. Points of Controversy or Subjects of Discourse: being translation of the Katha- Vatthu from the Abhidhamma-Pataka. London: Pali Text Society, 1915.
- Rūpadīpanīkyam'"(&ly'DyeDusrf;).(Discussion 7. with Reference to the Elements). Rangoon: Kawi Myet Hman Sapay, 1915.

1915, In he contributed Rūpadīpanīkyam'" (&ly'DyeDusrf;). The original treatise, Rūpabeda Treatise written by Gant Hnawt (*efYaESmY) had been translated from English into Burmese. ¹⁵

After retirement, he had finished writing Lūmyui" tac' rā' tac' pā kvam'" (vlrsdK; wpf&mUwpfyg; usrf;). However, it was unpublished. Additionally, the treatise entitled 'Abhidammattasangaha kyam'" (tbd"r@wÅo*F[usrf;) compiled by Srilanka Shin Anuyudra (&SiftEk&k'"q) was translated from Pali into English, and then, his book had been translated into German. It became internationally famous especially in England and Germany. ¹⁶

He also took responsibility to write the script for the film Myadabet (jrwbuf) produced by Myanmar Asway (jrefrmtagG) company. U Shwe Zan Aung could be regarded as the world famous writer. In 1932, the Rangoon College Syndicate nominated to award **Doctor of Literature** for his achievement. However, ten days before the ceremonial occasion, the writer passed away. 17

16 "Kyam" pru pugguil' taū" kvey' lvan'le prī

Mg Zeyar, 2010, 190-193.

⁽usrf; jyKyk*34dKvfwOD; uG, fvGefavjyD) ,"Thuriya Newspaper12 May 1932,14.

Nhac 'chay 'rācu Mran 'mā cāre" charā myā "nhan' 'cācu carn' "(Dutīya tvai). (ESpfq,f&mpkjrefrmpma&;q&mrsm; ESifYpmpkpm&if; ('kwd, wGJ) Yangon: Information and Public Relations Department, 2003, 14-167.

U Shwe Zan Aung had made regular contributions to the following magazines and journals.

- 1. The Buddhism Magazine
- 2. The Journal of Burma Research Society(JBRS)

List of Pseudonyms used by U Shwe Zan Aung

- 1. Shwe Zan Aung (B.A)
- 2. U Shwe Zan Aung

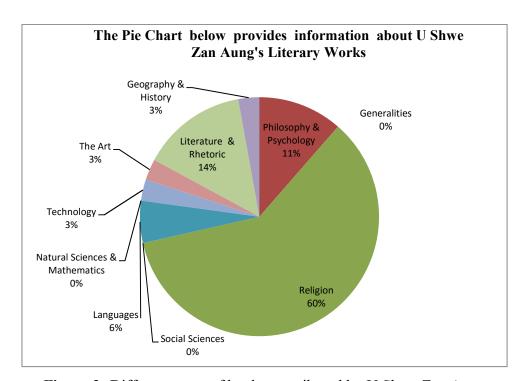


Figure 2: Different types of books contributed by U Shwe Zan Aung

According to the pie chart, it can generally be stated that the most preferable genre for U Shwe Zan Aung is Religion. Literature and Rhetoric on the other hand, accounted for only about 14%.

Reviewon Compendium of Philosophy.

(i) Compendium of Philosophy. London: Pali Text Society, 1910.

____. 2 ed. ___: ___, 1925.

____. 2 ed (reprint) ___: ___, 1956.

___. 3ed. ___: ___, 1963.

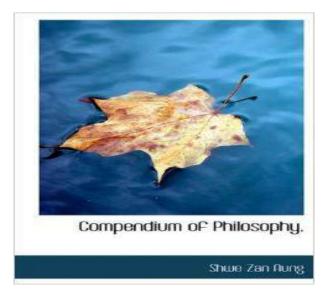


Figure 3: Book Cover of Compendium of Philosophy

This book is chosen for review as it may be pronounced useful for expressing most of the commonly accepted view of things with theoretical analysis. For students of Buddhism in Buddhist countries, it can be regarded as the best introduction to get on with the Abhidhamma sources.

The book was the first attempt to treat of Buddhist Philosophy by East and West hand-in-hand. In editor's preface, Mrs. Rhys Davids expressed words of gratitude to U Shwe Zan Aung for sharing the idea of their collaborated translation. They had set down the living translation of many philosophical concepts, thus, she trusted that it might prove a valuable contribution to Western enquiry in Buddhist Philosophy. Moreover, she had a

high opinion on "Abhidhamma" or "ultra-doctrine". She also gave a broad hint that Buddhist teachings were more abstract, analytical and advanced.

The contents of the manual were divided into nine parts.

Part I Compendium of Consciousness

Part II Compendium of the Mental Properties

Part III Compendium of Particular Concomitants in Consciousness

Part IV Compendium of the Process of Cognition

Part V Compendium of Consciousness not Subject to Process

Part VI Compendium of Matter. Nibbana

Part VII Compendium of Categories

Part VIII Compendium of Relations

Part IX Compendium of the Stations of Religious Exercise.

In Part I, of the manual, the writer enumerated different classes of Kāmmā-consciousness. Modes of consciousness can be analyzed into eightynine classes.

In Part II, the fifty-two mental attributes or properties were enumerated. A brief consideration of their most salient features was also given. Additionally, distribution of each property and synthesis of properties were fully informed.

In Part III, the writer had made the summary in thoughts and its concomitants. Treating of feeling, of the six conditions (hetu's), of function, of doors (or six organs), of objects of consciousness and of bases were considered to be the methods of mind's concomitants.

In Part IV, under consideration of the process of cognition, the writer had made discussion on the eight types of procedures. For further information, he first highlighted the processes of six-doored cognition and then the intersection of the life-continuum that happened to be constituted and continually as long as one lifetime lasted.

In Part V, the main topic was Compendium of consciousness not subject to process. The writer made summary of the four realms of life, fourfold rebirth, fourfold Kāmmā, fourfold advent of death and the stream of becoming.

In Part VI, the primary concern was Compendium of Matter. Nibbana. The writer described the ultimate kinds of things in serial form. Mind first, and next, concomitant of mind, body third and Nibbana last in kind.

Part VII, the writer categorized the distinctive kinds of states, each with its mark. The contents were serialized in four parts, namely evil categories, mixed categories, a compendium of what pertains to enlightenment and a compendium of the whole.

In Part VIII, the pannatti-object (name, idea, notion, concept), with its several sub-classes were enumerated. Though the subject covered a wide field, the writer explained it briefly. The evolution of evil from ignorance was discussed under the doctrine of paticca-samuppāda.

In Part IX, the writer highlighted the ten stations of religious exercise which were all suitable for everyone. The methods for practising preliminary exercises of meditation on the attributes of the Buddha were indicated. The stations of exercise must be cultivated by the meditators to enjoy the Doctrine's essence and gain its mastery.

Additionally, full details of the subject index and Pali words index were submitted in appendix for the lay readers to use it easily and effectively. In 1970, Pagan U Khin Maung Gyi made translation of U Shwe Zan Aung's book from English into Myanmar. The book entitled *Buddha Abhihamma* (Ak'"tbd"r®m) was published and distributed by Aye Aye Sarpay, Rangoon.

Conclusion

Myanmar is a land where many significant persons have emerged and risen to prominence. Some became famous for their martial prowess and the others were outstanding for their mental faculties. Among them, U Shwe Zan Aung was a talented writer in the field of Burmese literature and traditional cultures. In concern with religion, he had mastery of Buddhist doctrine.

Owing to his earnest effort, his books on Buddhism had attracted worldwide attention.

Due to his acquired virtue, he had got a great chance to study Abhidhamma treatise in Burmese, Pali and English. He had first-hand experience of Pali language from Vernerable Ashin Gandama (t&Sif*EÅrm) and Ledi Sayadaw (v,fwDq&mawmf). He could skillfully translate *Abhidammtta saṅ "gaha kyam"* (tbd"r®wÅo*F[usrf;) from Pali into English. Being an expert in literal translation, he made translation of G. Benn's treatise on Logic from English into Burmese. ¹⁸

At that period, the country educational system was narrowly specialized. However, the writer's unusual talent gained him worldwide recognition. Many learned people from the West were full of praise for sharing his religious knowledge. He always took a firm stand on his native country. He tried to upgrade Burmese literature, concepts and traditions by making good use of his outstanding abilities.

The proof of his attachment to his native language could be checked when he was on duty as a member of the Curriculum Committee for the Universities in Burma in 1924. Some committee members had suggested to include poems, verses and lyrical odes, in the course of study. The other members were against the formers' proposal for the sake of having essential time to teach foreign languages. U Shwe Zan Aung intervened personally in the crisis by advising them not to overestimate foreign languages. From his practical experiences, he thought that Lokaniti kyam (avmuedwdusrf;) was the best to learn and practise. Evidently, he had a strong feeling of pride in his native language. ¹⁹

By the early decades of the twentieth century, Rakhine had gained for itself a reputation for producing several men of national importance. Among them U Shwe Zan Aung was the honourable one with rare abilities. As he was a painstaking and dedicated writer, his classical book _ *The Compendium of*

¹⁸ Mg Zeyar, 2010, 190-193.

¹⁹ Ibid, 115-124.

Philosophy is still holding its own in the field of Buddhist Literature in English.

The national prestige of Myanmar and its cultural heritage are now recognized by worldwide nations. Thus, all the citizens of Myanmar are deeply indebted to U Shwe Zan Aung for all his literary work. Indeed, he can be regarded as an unforgettable person in the Union History.

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Appendix I

Different types of literature contributed by U Shwe Zan Aung are ascending order of publication:

English Section

I. Article Genre

1. "The Processes of Thought." The BuddhismMagazine vol.1, Pt.2 (1900).

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Appendix II

Pali- English Glossary

abhidhamma ultra-doctrine, the systematic Teaching of Theravada

Buddhism containing a treatise of Buddhist psychology

and philosophy

kāmmā volitional action (of body, speech, and mind)

nibbana (or) nirvana the ultimate goal of Buddhists.

Literally, Nibbana means non-attachment.

Paññatti 'conventional' or 'relative' truth; which means: 'concepts, ideas,

notions, names or terms'.

paticca-samuppāda commonly translated as dependent origination or dependent arising.

Source: A Dictionary of Buddhism, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.