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Hidden in Plain Sight: The Tai Zawti Buddhists of the Myanmar-China Border

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**Hidden in Plain Sight:
The Tai Zawti Buddhists of the Myanmar-China Border**

Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
King's College London

By
Olivia Porter

2023

Abstract

This dissertation examines the Tai Zawti (or Zawti), an elusive Theravada Buddhist tradition found across the Myanmar-China border. The Zawti are closely associated with the Tai (Shan) ethnolinguistic group who live throughout South China, mainland Southeast Asia and northeast India. The term ‘Zawti’ derives from the monk Shin Varajoti/Varazawti, who established the monastic lineage in the late 17th century in Sagaing, Burma. Among scholars and the wider Shan community, the Zawti have been labelled both as heretics and as extremely strict practitioners, and treated as peripheral to mainstream Shan Theravada. Until now, little has been known about them outside of the group itself, despite being enigmatically mentioned in scholarship since the 19th century and, incorrectly, traced back to the 18th century.

This thesis reveals that Zawti communities are in fact found throughout modern Myanmar, across the border in China, and even further afield. It aims to provide an accurate depiction of the Zawti history and the contemporary tradition by drawing on new translations I have made of key Zawti texts, and through multisite ethnographic fieldwork conducted within Zawti communities during August 2019-February 2020. The thesis identifies a long history of strategies to avoid centralised control and persecution in order to protect their strong commitment to a strict and literal interpretation of the Theravada canon, especially its monastic codes. This creates unique features – a single, very small monastic community that has almost no contact with the laity, an emphasis on lay leaders of rituals and learning, a widely dispersed lay community also identified by its association with the monastic lineage and by its adherence to strict precepts. Because of its long history, and its avoidance of centralised reforms and responses to colonialism, the Zawti also allow us to challenge some assumptions about the nature of modern Theravada.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents,

Alan Porter and Yip Lye Kuen

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Introduction

Aims of this Thesis

This thesis examines the Tai Zawti (hereafter Tai Zawti or Zawti), an elusive Theravada Buddhist tradition found across the Myanmar-China border. The Tai Zawti are closely associated with – but not confined to – the Tai ethnolinguistic group who are referred to as Shan in Myanmar. The Tai have no nation state of their own and are spread throughout multiple modern nation state borders, including Southwestern China, mainland Southeast Asia and Northeast India. The term ‘Zawti’ is derived from the monastic name to the founder of the tradition, the monk Shin Varajoti, who established the Zawti tradition in the late 17th century in the Sagaing region of Burma. The Tai Zawti consists of a small monastic community and a widespread group of dedicated lay followers, both of which have a reputation for their strict practices, and have been treated as peripheral to mainstream Shan Theravada in both scholarship and locally among the wider Shan community.

Until now, little has been known about the nature of their practices or their history outside of the group itself, despite being enigmatically mentioned in scholarship since the 19th century. In scholarship the Tai Zawti have been mentioned in writings on Burmese Buddhism as a heterodox, austere, and persecuted Shan tradition but these references are never more than one or two sentences long (E.M. Mendelson 1975; Jacques P. Leider 2004; Alexey Kirichenko 2012). This has resulted in an air of mystery around the Zawti tradition as well as some significant misconceptions.

Who are the Zawti and how did they manage to remain underground for so long? This thesis begins to piece together the Zawti network and history from the perspective of those within the community through the first translations of key Zawti texts and ethnographic fieldwork. I aim to demonstrate why the Zawti have been perceived as ‘extreme’, in both scholarship and among the wider non-Zawti Shan community, through an examination of Zawti monasticism and the complex social structure of the Zawti laity, including the Zawti lay attendants and ritual experts, who assume great importance given the relative scarcity and greater austerity of the Zawti monks. In examining the practises of the contemporary lay Zawti community, this thesis reveals that although the Zawti may seem ‘underground’, Zawti communities are in fact found throughout modern Myanmar, across the border in Dehong, China and even further afield.

This thesis therefore addresses several gaps or weaknesses in the field, not only in the unreported subject of the Zawti, but also because it reveals more about the nature of Buddhist practice among minority ethnic groups, especially the Shan, in national border regions. My research on the Tai Zawti, drawing on the work of Khur-Yearn, challenges the claims made in scholarship that Shan Theravada is ‘heretical’ on account of its emphasis on vernacular literature. As such, this research will contribute to the existing conversation within Buddhist Studies regarding the importance of vernacular literature and local traditions in the development of Theravada in Southeast Asia.

The Study of Shan Theravada

My research on the Tai Zawti is the first substantial work to provide a comprehensive overview of the Tai Zawti tradition from its historical origins to the contemporary monastic and lay community. The Tai Zawti tradition is a sub-group of Shan Theravada. The Shan (as they are known in Myanmar)¹ refer to themselves as Tai and are part of the broader group of Tai peoples, who are scattered throughout Southwest China, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, Thailand, and Northeast India. Among the Tai, there are subgroups such as the Tai Lue, Tai Nuea, Tai Khun, and Tai Long. Each subgroup, related generally to locality and script, has their own manuscript culture and ritual traditions, which exist within the broader framework of Tai culture and identity. The Zawti laity are predominantly Tai Nuea (northern Shan State and China) and Tai Long (central and southern Shan State) (see below for details on Tai Nuea and Tai Long writing systems).

In scholarship, research on Theravada Buddhism practised by ethnic minority communities, let alone sub-groups of ethnic minorities, has been far less studied in comparison with Burmese or Thai Theravada, the religious traditions associated with the dominant ethnic groups in the respective nation states where there are sizeable Shan communities. This is related to the fact that the Shan have not been included, or have been treated as peripheral to, what we might call the ‘big narratives’ that have dominated Buddhist Studies. Early Buddhist Studies scholarship privileged the textual study of the Pali Canon and commentarial material over how Buddhism is practised within its local contexts. In privileging canonical texts, vernacular texts written in local languages, like Shan *lik long*, were overlooked. Early Buddhist Studies also had an overtly monastic emphasis which meant that lay practitioners, who play an integral role in Shan Buddhism, were missing from academic scholarship.

While scholarship on Shan Theravada remains scarce, there are some notable exceptions. Nicola Tannenbaum and Nancy Eberhardt employ an anthropological framework to explore Shan culture and religious practice among the Shan in Thailand. David Wharton examines lay Buddhist practice among the Tai Nuea in Myanmar and Laos. Thomas Borchert’s research explores Tai Lue religion in Sipsongpanna within the backdrop of the Chinese nation state. Jotika Khur-Yearn’s scholarship centres around Tai Long traditional literature, meditation, and

¹ The term Shan is thought to have derived from the same root as ‘Siam’ and ‘Syam’, this reflects the Tai’s link with the broader Tai ethnic group. The Burmese recorded this as ‘syam’ or ‘rham’ and pronounced it as ‘Shan’ which is why the Tai are referred to as the Shan in Myanmar (Khur-Yearn 2012: 15).

manuscript culture. My work therefore contributes to this small but growing body of research on Tai Theravada as it is practised by multiple Tai sub-groups across multiple modern nation states.

In relation to the Tai Zawti specifically, while research on the Zawti remains minimal, there are several key exceptions. Tadayoshi Murakami and Takahiro Kojima have both conducted fieldwork and published about the contemporary Zawti tradition as part of their research on Buddhist religious practices along the Myanmar-China border (Murakami 2014a, 2014b and Kojima 2012, 2013). Both scholars publish predominantly in Japanese and as such, their scholarship has not been accessible to scholars who do not read Japanese. Jotika Khur-Yearn has also touched on the Zawti in his research into Shan manuscript culture and meditation (2012, 2018, Crosby and Khur-Yearn 2010). Murakami, Kojima, and Khur-Yearn all approach the Zawti through their examination of traditional Shan *lik long* literature and the lay ritual practitioners who compose and perform *lik long*. Prior to this work, the first dedicated work on such Shan literature was in the form of Barend J. Terwiel and Chaichuen Kamdaengyodtai's *The Shan Manuscripts, Part I* (2003)

In this thesis I demonstrate why it is that the Zawti, despite their relative obscurity, are known among scholarly circles for their dedication and mastery of *lik long*. I shall also show how, because of the uniquely strict practices of the Zawti, and their early migrations in order to be able to maintain their orthodox interpretation of the Buddhist canon, many Zawti lay communities rely on those who have mastered *lik long* for their regular religious rituals and practices. I set all this within a history of the Zawti and an account of their community and practices. Before I explain in more detail what is covered in this thesis, I shall explain here how it was shaped not only by the dearth of material available, and so the presentation of a mystery and a large gap in existing scholarship, but also by my own context and the history of the moment.

Research Approach and Background to this Research

When I set out to conduct this research in 2018, I had envisioned an anthropological investigation of the contemporary Tai Zawti tradition based on long term fieldwork in Myanmar and China. I made two initial trips to Myanmar to establish connections, familiarise myself with Shan State, and begin my Shan language acquisition. On these first two visits, in August- September 2019 and November-December 2019, I began to meet with different Zawti lay communities across Shan State and Yangon.

In late 2019, I heard from an informant that the Zawti were holding a *poi sang long* novice ordination at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery, the monastic headquarters in Kachin State in February 2020. I knew that the Zawti held this ceremony only once every three years, and that the opportunity would not arise again during my PhD timeframe. So, I returned to Myanmar for the third time and travelled to Kachin State to attend to the week-long *poi sang long* festivities. I then travelled to Yangon where I spent time with the Zawti community at Aung Bon Tha Monastery in Yangon. While I was at the *poi sang long*, I established connections with members of the Zawti community in China. I returned to London at the end of February as I had graduate assistant duties which required me to be in London, and I planned to return to Myanmar in 2020 to spend a prolonged period in the communities with whom I had established a rapport, including the Zawti lay communities in China.

My plans changed when the COVID-19 pandemic was announced in March 2020 and global travel become impossible. In the first year of the pandemic, I was uncertain about whether I would be able to return to Myanmar to conduct prolonged fieldwork during the PhD. I began to focus on learning Tai which would be useful if I was able to return to Myanmar and visit China, and would also allow me to read the Zawti texts that I had accumulated over my three trips to Myanmar. I also kept in contact over email and social media with the network of connections that I had made in Myanmar.

On 1 February 2021, a military coup was announced in Myanmar and the elected government collapsed. In the weeks following the coup, mass protests took place across Myanmar, and the military responded with violence, arrests, and internet black outs. At the time of writing this thesis, in February 2023, 1.2. million people have been internally displaced, 70,000 people have left the country, and at least 2890 people have been killed by the military since the coup.

Over 34,000 civilian structures including homes, clinics, schools, and places of worship, have been burned over the last two years and Myanmar's economy has collapsed with nearly half of the population currently living below the poverty line (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 27 January 2023).²

The military coup, compounded by the already limited access to the country because of the COVID-19 pandemic, made it impossible to return to Myanmar. The authoritarian and punitive nature of the military coup also meant that it became difficult to keep in touch with my informants who were directly impacted by the social and political conditions of the coup (especially internet black outs, government surveillance, etc).

Given these tragic and extremely unfortunate circumstances, the methodology of this research has had to adapt. While I had originally intended for this research to be anthropological in nature, I have had to lean more on the texts available to me, which means that my approach is more historical and textual than I had planned. My research approach has adapted to become a combination of textual translation and analysis coupled with traditional fieldwork practices, such as participant observation and interviews. I have used my translation and analysis of Zawti texts to approach the history of the Zawti and details of their practices as written by them. To support this textual approach, I have embedded ethnographic data that I managed to acquire during my limited fieldwork in order to provide contemporary accounts of these practices as well as aspects of the tradition that are not part of their formal literature.

My pivot towards a more textual approach to the study of the Tai Zawti has had its own limitations. Very little academic scholarship mentions the Zawti and when the Zawti are mentioned, details are vague. This is related to the historic lack of access to the Shan regions in Myanmar and China where the Zawti communities live because of authoritarian governments, conflict, and limited road access throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. These historic issues continue to present a problem to current researchers, including me, as previously explained. In the case of Myanmar in particular, there have been very few windows of opportunity to enter the country. Previous scholars of Shan Buddhism have

² <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/01/two-years-after-coup-myanmar-faces-unimaginable-regression-says-un-human>

circumvented this issue by working with Shan communities in Thailand, which is more accessible to foreign researchers.

In addition to there being very little academic scholarship on the Tai Zawti, there is also little known about the Zawti by the wider Shan and Burmese communities and as such there are few references to them in Burmese and Shan historical chronicles. It is possible that there are local Burmese and Shan historical chronicles that would help verify and contextualize the history of the Zawti. However, I would not know where to begin to approach seeking such resources which are usually stored in temple collections, and there is no way of knowing if such texts have lasted the test of time.

The lack of outsider resources on the Zawti in locally produced texts is likely related to the constant migration of the Zawti, especially the fact that they shifted inside and outside of the Burmese and Chinese political orbits throughout their history. The Zawti have settled in places for extended periods of time such as: eighty-four years in Loi Lek in China from 1777-1861, then twenty-four years in Namkham from 1912-1936 and most recently, nearing sixty-nine years in Mohnyin from 1953 until now. However, aside of these periods, the Zawti monks have always been on the move throughout the Shan States and beyond in Yangon and later in Kachin State.

The lack of scholarship on Shan Buddhism in Myanmar, and the Tai Zawti, coupled with very little being known about the Zawti beyond their own community locally in Myanmar, meant that I had very little to material to begin my research with, and little to use to corroborate the Zawti-authored texts that I acquired during fieldwork and on which I relied. I have, however, been able to corroborate aspects of Zawti history with reference to broader histories of the region, and to contextualise their beliefs and practices with reference to Pali canonical and commentarial texts, as well as by comparison of textual and fieldwork observations with what is known about the broader practice of Theravada among both the Shan more broadly and the Burmese. The resulting accounts offer a detailed and context-rich portrayal of Zawti values, community-making, and practice, supported by a history that sets their place within Southeast Asia and allows us to understand their contemporary spread, shape and identity.

Transliteration of Shan and Pali Loan Words in Shan

The original Shan script is a modified version of the Burmese alphabet, despite being in the Tai language family, rather than the Tibeto-Burman family, and is written without tone marks (Eberhardt 2006: 185). The Zawti textual sources listed as the basis for much of this thesis are written in the “New Shan” script, the writing system developed in 1958 by the Shan Literary Association in Taunggyi, Shan State. The “New Shan” script is a revised rendering of the original Shan script written with tone marks (ibid: 185).

There is no Western academic standard for the romanization of Shan. However, in 2012 the Library of Congress approved of a standardized system for the romanization of Shan.³ This system, unlike Cushing’s, which I shall explain below, was formulated with speakers of languages other than English, such as German, in mind. It therefore addresses the problem of transliterating letter combinations that are pronounced differently in Romance languages and Germanic languages. Following the Library of Congress system, the vowel combination in ၪေဝ်း ‘Zaw’ in the word ၪေဝ်းဝ် ‘Zawti’ is transliterated as ‘o’, and therefore as ‘Zoti’, to accommodate both English and German speakers.

Despite this recent standardization, scholars have continued to use their own systems for Tai languages to reflect regional pronunciation (for Shan in Myanmar see Khur-Yearn 2012: 233-234, for Shan in China see Borchert 2019: xiii-xv, for Shan in Thailand see Eberhardt 2006: xiii-xiv). The linguist Tadahiko Shintani has developed a system of Romanising Shan that differs from the Library of Congress system and is used in Japanese scholarly circles (personal communication with Nathan Badenoch 14/04/2022). The Japanese scholar Takahiro Kojima has used both Shintani’s system and also the system of romanization of Tai Nuea to Chinese developed by Meng Zunxian (2012, 2013).

I have not used the Library of Congress system. Instead, the transliteration system I have used in this thesis is based on J.N. Cushing’s *Elementary Handbook of the Shan Language* (1888) and the teaching of Jotika Khur-Yearn. Jotika Khur-Yearn, one of the few scholars to have published on Shan Buddhism and *lik long* as noted above, taught me to read the new Shan script and how to transliterate it in a way that reflects how it is pronounced in the Tai Long

³ <https://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpsd/romanization/shan.pdf>

spoken among the Shan in Myanmar. Khur-Yearn was actively involved in the development of the Library of Congress system through his work in the Revealing Hidden Collections Project at the Bodleian Library, and yet continued to use Cushing's system with me. In keeping with Cushing, I use 'Zawti' for ဘဝါးတိ, and 'zare' for ဘဝါး/ဘဝါး over the new Library of Congress system, which would be 'zoti' and 'zale'/'zare' respectively.

My reason for choosing to follow this system over the Library of Congress system is related to the subject matter of this thesis, the Zawti. In academic scholarship there are few references to the Zawti tradition, and in these brief accounts, the term is transliterated in various different ways: 'Zodi' (Vincenzo Sangermano 1833: 89), 'Co Ti' (Takahiro and Badenoch 2013: 103), 'Zoti' (Leider 2004: 91), 'Tsoti' (Takahiro 2012: 399). In this thesis, I have drawn most significantly on the scholarship of E.M. Mendelson (1975) and Khur-Yearn (2010, 2012, 2018), who both use 'Zawti'. In my research of the Zawti presented in this thesis, I have touched on how inaccuracies and inconsistencies in academic scholarship have contributed to the obscurity of the Zawti in academic literature. In choosing to use 'Zawti' over the other ways of transliterating the term I am situating my own research within Mendelson and Khur-Yearn's milieu. In doing so I aim to establish a sense of consistency and continuity, to highlight the visibility of the Zawti tradition as a single group.

The texts that I have worked with in this thesis are religious in nature and therefore contain many Pali/ Buddhist terms. The Shan alphabet does not contain enough consonants to represent Pali fully and so terms appear in Shan-ized Pali and Shan-ized Burmese Pali. Where possible, I have consulted Shan and Burmese scholars to come to the most accurate transliteration. I had a particularly difficult time transliterating the Shan-ized Pali names of the Zawti abbots, which were often also shortened in Shan, and the intended original Pali of some of these is still not completely certain.

As noted, all the Shan texts utilized in this thesis are written in the "New Shan" script, which is used to write Tai Long, the Tai language spoken by the Tai Long in the central and southern parts of Shan State. The majority of the contemporary Zawti laity speak Tai Long. However, I want to note here that the early Zawti community were predominantly Tai Nuea, a sub-group of the Tai peoples found mainly in northern Shan State and southwestern China. The Tai Nuea speak Tai Nuea (also called Tai Mao or Dehong Dai language), which has an additional tone

that is not present in Tai Long. Tai Nuea is mutually intelligible with Tai Long but there are difference of vocabulary and Tai Nuea has more Chinese loan words (on account of their proximity to China), while Tai Long has more Burmese loan words. The Tai Nuea language has its own script called ၵၵၵၵ, ၵၵၵၵ: ‘bean sprout’ script, which is distinct from the “New Shan” script and the original Shan script. Traditionally, *Zawti lik long* was composed in the bean sprout script. The older *Zawti zares* I met from the China side of the border continue to compose and recite in the Tai Nuea script.

Sources Used in this Thesis

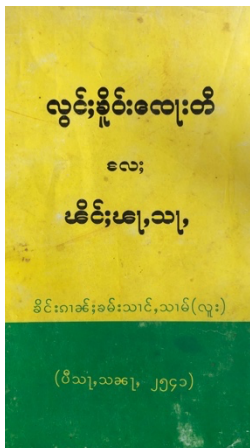
Four texts have been essential to my piecing together of the Zawti history and examination of the Zawti tradition as it is understood by the Zawti themselves. The earlier history of the Zawti detailed in these texts are informed by historical accounts that we can find in the Zawti's centuries-long literary tradition, i.e., its *lik long* poetic texts. Information in the introductions of these *lik long* texts contain rich historical accounts, some of which may have come from oral accounts of its own history, while others can be traced back to verifiable historical events or elements. We can therefore assume that the sources from which these recent Zawti histories draw their information are both literary and oral precedents. However, further research must be carried out to confirm if this is the case.

Each of these texts were composed and published by the Zawti relatively recently, in the past twenty-five years. They were published after the Zawti were absorbed into the Thudhamma *gaing*, an important period of Zawti history covered in Chapter Two of this thesis. The Zawti were absorbed into the Thudhamma *gaing*, the largest of the nine official *gaing*, to maintain their legitimacy as a monastic group in the eyes of the State Saṅghamahānāyaka Committee. In this thesis I examine how this has resulted in a sense of anxiety regarding the maintenance and survival of the Zawti tradition (see Chapters Two and Five). It is possible that the texts used in this thesis, published by the Zawti themselves, are a response to absorption. Through documenting their own history, traditions, rules, and rituals, the Zawti are able to establish and maintain their own distinct identity in the face of absorption. Through my experiences of meeting with many Zawti lay people who are so enthusiastic and willing to share their experiences and traditions, I also understand these texts as a celebration of the Zawti identity, written by the Zawti, for the Zawti.

These texts are self-authored from within the Zawti community and are used as a means of maintaining and creating a marginalized cultural and religious identity. As such, they must be treated critically. In Section One of this thesis (The History of the Zawti Tradition) I rely on these texts, which are rooted in traditional Shan oral and textual (*lik long*) history, to piece together a tentative vernacular history of the Zawti tradition. My reason for doing so is twofold. First, the Zawti are largely written out of mainstream historical narratives and as such, there were very few historical records that I could access to corroborate or enrich the resources I had available to me. Second, in my interviews and interactions with the contemporary Zawti laity,

it became apparent to me that these texts form the basis of the Zawti community’s understanding of themselves and their history, and as such, they should be taken seriously. While one must be aware that such records are not necessarily clear reflections of historical reality, the Zawti, as we shall learn in this thesis, are known for being textual experts and masters of traditional *lik long* literature. A key function of traditional Shan *lik long* literature is to record time and place, usually through the introductory material recorded at the beginning of *lik long* texts. The content of *lik long* itself can be historical in nature, and traditional Shan historical chronicles are composed in the style of *lik long*. Traditional Shan conceptions of history are associated with *lik long* literature. While this approach to historical fact might differ from a Western notion of history, it is reflective of the Shan conception of history, and is therefore an important historical resource and I treat it as such. This is to say, I am aware of the limitations of the relying so heavily on Zawti-authored texts, but I am also committed to centring the Zawti and their literature in piecing together a timeline of the historical development of the Zawti tradition, as an outsider, from a place of knowing relatively nothing to knowing something.

1. *Long Khoe Zawti le Phing Phāsā* by Khing Kān Kham Sāng Sām (1997)



The oldest of all the texts that I have had access to is *Long Khoe Zawti le Phing Phāsā* by Khing Kān Kham Sāng Sām, published by Mok Ku Soi Laeng publishers in Yangon in 1997. Mok Ku Soi Laeng is a small publishing house which specialises in Shan books and, at the time of completing this thesis in 2023, is still in existence. It is located in the ‘9 Mile’ area on the outskirts of Yangon. Though Mok Ku Soi Laeng publishing house is located far away from the centre of the current Zawti monastery in Kachin State, it is located in an area with a historical association with the Zawti and where there is an established Shan population.

Members of the Shan community in this area are congregants of Aung Bon Tha Monastery, locally referred to as ‘9 Mile Monastery’. As we shall learn in this thesis, Aung Bon Tha was established as a Zawti monastery in 1841 and served the local Yangon Zawti community until the 1980s, when the final Zawti abbot stepped down and was replaced by a non-Zawti abbot (a Shwegyin monk from Mandalay who is now the incumbent abbot).

The title *Long Khoe Zawti le Phing Phāsā* translates to ‘About the Zawti and their Traditions and Customs’. This book focuses specifically on the Zawti lay customs and traditions. The authorship of this book is attributed to Khing Kān Kham Sāng Sām (the title *khing* tells us that he is a Zawti elder) but much of the material is the same as that found in the two Zawti texts published by the monastery itself, which is described as having multiple authorship, having been compiled by several *khing* (lay elders) and *zares* (lay ritual practitioners). I have therefore chosen to refer to this text by its title rather than by author.

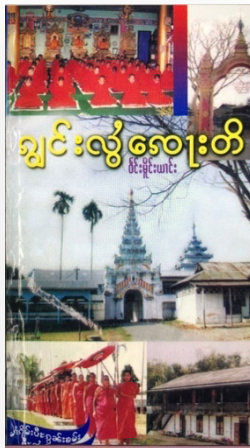
Long Khoe Zawti le Phing Phāsā is 189 pages long and is divided into twelve chapters. It is printed in the new Shan script. It is written in a clear and accessible style. The contents of the book cover the historical development of the Zawti tradition, the Zawti monastic tradition, Zawti lay customs, Zawti ritual customs, the words to recite during such customs, and a glossary of terms. The contents of the book, much like the two books published by the Zawti monastery in Mohnyin, are general and broad enough to be understood by an outsider but are more likely to be aimed at a Zawti lay audience. I assume that this is the case because of the use of ‘we’ and ‘you’ plural throughout the text, which creates the sense that it is written for the Zawti lay community.

I first came across the *Long Khoe Zawti le Phing Phāsā* at the Shan State Buddhist University Library in Shan State, Myanmar, where I was a visiting research fellow in 2019. The university was founded in 2014 by Venerable Khammai Dhammasami who has advocated for the study of traditional Shan *lik long* literature in an academic setting. In 2013 Venerable Khammai Dhammasami held the first *Lik Loung* Conference in Yangon, with the intention of promoting the study of traditional Shan *lik long* literature. At SSBU, there are several Shan monks who are experts in *lik long* and the university runs a Lik Long BA course which caters to trained Shan textual experts called *zare*. Multiple *zares* that have completed this course are from the Zawti tradition.

I then came across another physical copy of the book again in February 2020 when I attended the *poi sang long* festival at the Zawti monastic headquarters in Kachin State. I was kindly given the book by a book seller who heard that I was interested in learning about the Zawti tradition.

I would assume that outside of the Zawti lay community, the audience for the *Long Khoe Zawti le Phing Phāsā* text is likely limited to scholastic monks interested in Shan Buddhism and Shan *lik long* literature such as the monks at SSBU. The text is written and printed in Shan which limits the scope of the audience to those who read Shan. This means that the book is broadly inaccessible to most of the Burmese population who do not read Shan and researchers who do not read Shan.

2. *Kyong Loi Zawti: Weng Mong Yang* (2003)



Kyong Loi Zawti: Weng Mong Yang translates to ‘The Tai Zawti Monastery in the town Mong Yang’. It was published in 2003 by the Zawti monastic headquarters in Mohnyin, Kachin State, Myanmar. Each chapter is written by a different Zawti elder (*khing*). Throughout this thesis I refer to this text by its title, *Kyong Loi Zawti*.

Kyong Loi Zawti is 197 pages long and is split into twenty-two chapters. At the beginning of the book there is ‘Letter of Compassion’ written by the Zawti abbot Venerable Paññāsāra who was abbot from 1967 until 1997 when he passed away. The letter is addressed to the Zawti laity, which leads me to believe that the book itself is aimed at the Zawti lay community. The fact that the abbot makes a direct address to the laity is consistent with the formal lines of communication between the Zawti monks and the Zawti laity which is only through formal communication, namely through public *dhamma* talks and formal rituals.

The contents of the book are very similar to *Long Khoe Zawti le Phing Phāsā* but it provides more depth regarding the history and migration of the Zawti tradition. Section One ‘The History of the Zawti Tradition’ of this thesis draws significantly on the historical account of the early Zawti tradition provided in *Kyong Loi Zawti* (and its subsequent reprint *Pī Kon Kham Kyong Loi Tai Zawti: Weng Mong Yang*) as a starting point for piecing together a timeline of the Zawti tradition.

I first came across a physical copy of this book when I was introduced to Dr Sai San Aik in Yangon in September 2019. He knew that I was interested in the Zawti tradition

and gave me a copy of this book. I came across the book again in November 2019 on a fieldwork trip to Laihka. The Zawti *zares* and *go pa ka* members [lay committee members who oversee temple affairs] who I met there had a copy of the book, which they showed me and referred to often when I asked them questions about the Zawti tradition. One of the *go pa ka* members I met in Laihka is pictured on the front cover of this book. He is the novice holding the umbrella for the Zawti abbot Venerable Wannapañña in the image on the bottom left-hand corner of the cover. He remarked that he was at the front holding the umbrella because he was the tallest novice. The fact that the Zawti community themselves used the book as a reference work and an authority on the Zawti tradition suggests to me that the text plays an important role in how the Zawti community perceive themselves and understand their own history, origins, and identity.

3. *Pī Kon Kham Kyong Loi Tai Zawti: Weng Mong Yang* (2016)



To celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Zawti monastery at Mohnyin in 2016, the temple reproduced *Kyong Loi Zawti* (2003) and titled it *Pī Kon Kham Kyong Loi Tai Zawti: Weng Mong Yang* ‘The Golden Jubilee edition: The Tai Zawti Monastery in the Town Mong Yang’. This edition is almost identical to *Kyong Loi Zawti: Weng Mong Yang*. I refer to this text as ‘*Pī Kon Kham*’ in this thesis to differentiate it from *Kyong Loi Zawti*. The fact that the Zawti reprinted this book to celebrate the anniversary of the monastery in Mohnyin (Mong Yang) further supports my understanding of this text as a way in which the Zawti understand and celebrate their own

history, traditions, and rituals.

The purpose and reasons why the golden jubilee edition was published is explored in Chapter Two of *Pī Kon Kham*, titled ‘This Book’. Specific reference is made to *Long Khoe Zawti le Phing Phāsā* which suggests that the text is approved of by the official Zawti monastery, but that it is not a totally exhaustive or authoritative account of the Zawti tradition. It also suggests

to me that *Pī Kon Kham* draws on the material of *Kyong Loi Zawti* and this is why there is a lot of repetition between the three texts:

How did the Tai Sangha of the Zawti get this name? The history and their ways of life, their practices, activities, both higher and lower, all of this can be found in a book called *Long Khoe Zawti le Phing Phāsā* by Khing Kān Kham Sāng Sām of Lashio. He arranged this collection and printed it. But, in that book you have to think, reflect, compare, guess. The book is not complete so there is something necessary to be done. Because of these reasons, we arranged this book. The purpose of this edition of this book is to commemorate the golden jubilee of the Tai Zawti in Mong Yang. Because they extract from the old book, in this book there is some repetition but here are also some differences. Why are there differences? The experience, the views, the analysis, and the ideas are different, so it becomes different (2016:12).

One aspect of this statement that stands out to me is the question of ‘how did the Tai Sangha of the Zawti get this name?’ One key difference that I can observe between *Pī Kon Kham* and *Kyong Loi Zawti* is the inclusion of a paragraph about the definition of the name ‘Zawti’, which is present in the earlier edition but has been redacted from the fiftieth anniversary edition. The paragraph translates as:

The word ‘Zawti’ is the name of the original teacher, the abbot, who founded the Zawti group a long time ago. But what is the situation of the term Zawti and what is its meaning? The word Zawti is not Chinese, not Tai, not Burmese, it is a true Pali word. ‘Zaw’ is one word and ‘ti’ is one word. When combined it becomes ‘Zawti’, meaning the ‘three-fold mind’. The three types of mind are: the mind that knows the Buddha, the mind that knows the *dhamma*, and the mind that knows the *sangha*. In brief, this is the summary of the meaning according to the *lik long dhamma* scroll written about the biography of Loi Zawti [the Zawti monastery]. This version was written by Tsau Khantī [also known as] *zare* Tin from Moeng Phai.

In *Pī Kon Kham* the explanation of the term Zawti is given as “the name Zawti is the name of the head of the group who is the educator, the one who leads the practice. When he was a novice, his name was Varajoti, therefore the Zawti is named after him... this is the same as other sects in Burma [the convention of naming a tradition after the founder]. The redaction of

the explanation attributed to Tsau Khantī, drawn from *lik long*, suggests that the contemporary Zawti have moved away from his understanding of the term. Despite the redaction, when I was in Kachin State and asked one senior *go pa ka* member about the term Zawti, he repeated the definition about the true meaning of the term Zawti being related to the ‘three-fold mind’. Other *go pa ka* members and *zares* told me that the Zawti were named after Varajoti. It appears to me that the Zawti community do use these texts as a manual of sorts but that there are differences of interpretation and opinion. I suspect that one reason why this definition may have been redacted is related Tsau Khantī’s inaccurate translation of the Pali. Varajoti is straightforward Pali monastic name consisting of *vara* (excellent, noble) + *joti* (light, radiance). Tsau Khantī breaks up *jo + ti* (three), with the ‘three’ being a reference to the triple gem. However, *jo* as a stand-alone word does not exist in Pali.

Further details about the compilation and contributors of the volume are included in the same section of Chapter Two titled ‘This Book’. It states:

In order to combine these books, the Sangha and those in the community that look after the temple, the *go pa ka*, there were around five or six *go pa kas*, who have inputted their ideas. We came up with the idea to do this edition and Lung Tsaila arranged it all. With the devotees, they talked together and came to an agreement on 01.03.2003- they made the decision [to compile a book] for the commemoration. In order to compile the book, they had to write the articles first. The senior members of the sangha had to write the articles first and then the *khing* [lay elders] and the abbot Venerable Wannapañña approved their decision. The sangha and five or six *go pa ka* committees had a group discussion on who would write what. From the senior members of the sangha they appointed five monks, and from the *khing* in the lower level, they appointed about four or five. On the 3rd day of the 4th month in 2003, those with the responsibility, as they had written the articles, sat on the veranda with each other and read out their papers, and they discussed them and compiled this book (2016: 12).

This excerpt indicates that the text was compiled by multiple authors who were both monastic and lay. It also states that the text was approved of by the abbot Venerable Wannapañña. We can then assume that the text is accurate and representative of what the Zawti community, at the time of writing it, knew and believed of their own history and customs. What is not entirely clear to me is whether or not the decision to compile the fiftieth

jubilee edition was decided was made in 2003 when the first edition of *Kyong Loi Zawti* was composed and published or not. This is what the text states, but it seems unusual to me to decide to commit to a reprint an edition in thirteen years' time. I wonder if, in the reproduction of *Pī Kon Kham*, the same section from *Kyong Loi Zawti* was copied and reproduced without in depth editing, and in fact this process of compilation is reflective of the *Kyong Loi Zawti* edition.

Throughout this thesis I draw on both *Kyong Loi Zawti* and *Pī Kon Kham*. My use of one text over the other has been arbitrary since they include much of the same content. Once I had learnt the basics of the Shan language (using Cushing 1888), I essentially learnt Shan through translating these texts and consulting with Jotika Khur-Yearn. If the texts differed, or if information was included in one text and not the other, I observe the difference in the thesis in relation to the relevant passage, but there were very few differences, other than the differences explored above.

4. *Long Tsau Hau Khau An Keuk Pheun King Sī Lae Peun Kaep Phungkyi Tsau Tsau Wannapanya (Tsau Loi Khur) (2021)*



The text on this title page translates to “Pertaining to offering and honouring the glory of our Venerable monks and the passing of Venerable Tsau Vaṇṇapañña ...Pertaining to the Venerable Monks, Recorded in the *King Sī* and a brief biography of the Venerable Monk Tsau Vaṇṇapañña” by Tsau Loi Khaw. The term ဝိသုဒ္ဓိတီ, *king sī* refers to the Zawti historical chronicle. The original Zawti *king sī* is housed in the library at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery. This version is a reprint of the *khing sī* that was published to commemorate the death of the late abbot Venerable Vaṇṇapañña who passed away in 2019. The *king sī* chronicle covers the period 1778- 2020. I refer to this text as the *King Sī* in this thesis.

The contributors to this volume are included in the Contents Page of this text. The assistants who helped collect the information are listed as Tsai Saeng Leang Tham from Nam Sii Ong in Mong Kāyang. The co-ordinators and organizers are listed as the head khing and lay leaders

from Loi Khaw. The book cover and computing is attributed to Swepima. The text was compiled by Tsau Loi Khaw and was published at Mok Ku Soi Laeng publishers in Yangon. It was first published in February 2021 and 1000 copies were printed.

The text was printed by Mok Ku Soi Laeng publishers in Yangon, the same publishers who published *Long Khoe Zawti*. This suggests that the publishing house is still connected to the Zawti tradition.

I received a copy of this text digitally from Dr Sai San Aik, who scanned it and sent it to me by email in August 2021.

Structure of this Thesis

This thesis is split into three sections: (1) History, (2) Zawti Monasticism, (3) The Zawti Laity.

Section One (History) introduces the Zawti through an overview of their historical origins and development into the modern period. This section consists of two chapters. Chapter One is a historical overview of the early Zawti tradition from its inception up to the colonial period in Burmese history. I draw on the Zawti authored texts and accounts of the Zawti provided by outsider observers from the early 19th century to map out a historical timeline of the Zawti tradition. I also utilize secondary sources on the political and religious history of Burma, including on the details of how the Sangha (monastic community) is structured and governed, and the specifics of *Vinaya* (monastic discipline), to verify and corroborate the Zawti authored texts. Exploring this last body of literature allows us to assess the extent to which the Zawti conform to Theravada norms of practice and doctrine. We can thereby situate them within in the broader Burmese Buddhist context.

Chapter Two examines the history of the Zawti from the colonial period, from the mid-to-late nineteenth, up until the 1980s, when the Zawti monastic tradition was absorbed into the Thudhamma *gaing* during Ne Win's religious reforms. In this chapter I situate the Zawti within the context of the British colonial and post-colonial periods, specifically how changes brought about by the colonial condition impacted Burmese monasticism and Burmese society more broadly in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. We then shift into the 'modern' period, particularly the military era from 1962-1988 and how the political ideology and tactics of General Ne Win (President 1962-1981) impacted the Zawti tradition. The historical overview provided in Section 1 contextualizes the contemporary Zawti tradition, which is the focus of the rest of the thesis.

Section Two of this thesis focuses on Zawti monasticism and consists of four chapters. Chapter Three is an ethnographic exploration of the Zawti *poi sang long* (novice ordination) festival I attended at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery in February 2020. In this chapter we begin to learn about the contemporary Zawti community through one of their most important ritual events in the Zawti calendar, which brings together the Zawti monks and widespread network of Zawti lay people who travel great distances to attend the festivities. Chapter Four then turns to higher ordination (*upasampadā*) at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery. In this examination of the Zawti higher

ordination ritual I begin to demonstrate how Zawti monasticism is marked by a close reading of the canonical texts and commentaries and a commitment to textual orthopraxy, including in relation to the Zawti monks' use of the *udakukkhepa-sīmā* (water *sīmā*). Chapter Five examines the monastic life for the novices and monks at Paññālankāra Monastery through an exploration of their daily routine. In this chapter I highlight some of the more distinctive features of Zawti monasticism to demonstrate how they are rooted in a textual interpretation of the Vinaya, and in doing so I challenge the trope that the Zawti are 'unorthodox' and 'extremist'. This chapter also examines the centrality of monastic education in the Zawti tradition and their focus on *lik long* literature. Chapter Six provides an outline of the Zawti monastic hierarchy which is distinct in contrast to the organization of mainstream Burmese and Shan monasteries. In this chapter I also explore the lay structural hierarchies at Paññālankāra Monastery which enable the Zawti monks to maintain their strict practises.

Section Three shifts focus to the Zawti laity, most of whom live far away from Paññālankāra Monastery. Chapter Seven uses the *tai wat* (Zawti temples with no resident monks) as a starting point to examine the structure and spread of the Zawti lay community, and some of the more distinctive features of Zawti lay practice such as the Zawti attitude towards Buddha images and the role of lay ritual practitioners. Chapter Eight explores the Zawti lay morality and discipline through an examination of the Zawti *upadesa* (instruction) and *atsen ane* (what is permitted and not permitted). In examining these rules, we learn that Zawti lay morality and discipline is rooted in a strict observation of the five precepts which at times, appears to replicate monastic ideals and to be based on the structure for interpretation of rules laid out in the *Vinaya* monastic code of the Pali canon. I then situate Zawti lay morality within the context of modern reform movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which promoted lay reforms to maintain the Buddhist *sāsana*, which was feared to be in decline. I show how, although the Zawti tradition predates and sometimes missed such reforms, it reflects concern with such themes. Distinctive features include having *dhamma* rather than Buddha shrines in the house, strict lay adherence to precepts even among young community members, and a rejection of many Shan religious practices for practical purposes, such as the engagement with *phī*, spirits, and astrology.

In the Conclusion I return to the two questions that have shaped the development of this thesis: Who are the Zawti and how did they manage to remain underground for so long? I draw together how, through each chapter of this thesis, I have attempted to answer these key

fundamental questions and how, along the way, some important insights have emerged. I demonstrate how, in studying the Zawti, a tradition which has been treated as peripheral on account of their minority religious status, minority ethnic status, and practised by those who inhabit the borderlands of areas of the margins of nation states, we learn important insights into the historical development and nature of the Theravada Buddhism of Southeast Asia.

Section One: The History of the Zawti Tradition

Chapter One

Mapping the History of the Early Zawti Tradition

In this chapter I will use the ‘Zawti histories’, specifically material written about their migration, to piece together the history of the Zawti monastic lineage and community from its origins to the colonial period. The ‘Zawti histories’ that form the basis of this chapter are four texts compiled by the Zawti themselves: *Long Khoe Zawti* written by Sāng Sām and published in Yangon in 1997; *Kyong Loi Zawti Weng Mong Yang*, which I will refer to as *Kyong Loi Zawti*, published by the Paññālaṅkāra Monastery lay committee in 2003; an updated version of the same text republished in 2016 to celebrate fifty years at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery called *Pī Kon Kham Kyong Loi Zawti Weng Mong Yang*, which I refer to as *Pī Kon Kham* (2016); and a version of the *King Si Chronicle*, the Zawti historical chronicle, published in Yangon in 2021. The details of these texts can be found in the Introduction.

Each of these texts were composed and published by the Zawti relatively recently, in the past twenty-five years. The earlier history of the Zawti detailed in these texts are informed by historical accounts that we can find in the Zawti’s centuries-long literary tradition, i.e., its *lik long* poetic texts. Information in the introductions of these *lik long* texts contain rich historical accounts, some of which may have come from oral accounts of its own history, while others can be traced back to verifiable historical events or elements. We can therefore assume that the sources from which these recent Zawti histories draw their information are both literary and oral.

In addition to using these four histories created by the Zawti themselves, I draw on accounts of the Zawti provided by outsider observers from the early 19th century to verify and contextualise the information they provide. I also utilize secondary sources on the political and religious history of Burma, and on the history and practice of Theravada Buddhism, including on the details of how the Sangha (monastic community) is structured and governed and the specifics of *Vinaya* (monastic discipline). Exploring this last body of literature allows us to assess the extent to which the Zawti conform to Theravada norms of practice and doctrine, and thereby situate them within in the broader Burmese Buddhist context. Finally, an inscription at a former Zawti monastery, now temple, in Yangon, also provides some information on the development of the community.

When I started my research, following a chance encounter with Zawti practitioners, almost nothing was known about the Zawti outside of its own members, even among neighbouring ethnic and religious groups. Through my reading of the Zawti histories, with some corroborating material and broader contextualisation, I have been able to piece together a complete, albeit sparse, timeline and history of the Zawti tradition, its monastic leadership and its movements, which were extensive. In doing so, I corroborate accurate claims, and also overturn multiple inaccurate claims, made by Sangermano, J. G. Scott and Mendelson about the Zawti tradition. Such inaccuracies that I overturn include the identification of the Zawti as a Paramat group (see below)- a claim perpetuated by all three scholars- that the Zawti tradition was founded in the nineteenth century and that the Zawti do not worship Buddha images. I also address Mendelson's claim that the Zawti follow a one-monastery style of leadership, a claim that is now accurate but was not when he conducted fieldwork in the 1950s.

Had this been a history thesis, I would have investigated further manuscripts and chronicles to enrich this overview of the Zawti's three-hundred-year history. Instead, I am centring the Zawti's own historical sources to piece together a vernacular history that is reflective of how the Zawti themselves conceive their own history and existence. This brief overview of the Zawti history serves as the background for my investigation of the contemporary Zawti who are the focus of this thesis.

1.1. The Origins of the Zawti Tradition: Varajoti's Lifetime

The Tai Zawti tradition was founded in the late seventeenth century by the monk Shin Varajoti (approx. 1654-1744) after whom the tradition is named. 'Shin' is a Burmese honorific given to monks, and 'Varajoti' is a Pali ordination name, meaning *vara* 'excellent, noble' and *joti* 'light, radiance'. The Zawti lineage that traces its roots to Varajoti is, as we shall learn, both a monastic lineage and – unusually for Theravada Buddhism – a lay community. Moreover, even though the Zawti is a minority and marginal group, its geographic reach is surprisingly extensive from the borderlands of northern Shan State in Myanmar and Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture in the most southwestern region of Yunnan Province in China, all the way down to Yangon in southern Myanmar. Although its main centre is now in Mohnyin, in Kachin State, the northernmost state in Myanmar, it has, currently and historically, had bases at what we might consider both the peripheries of society and at regional and national centres.

Varajoti, the monk who founded the Zawti tradition, was born as Yāng Ke Tī, in Mong Mao, present day Ruili, a county-level city in Dehong Prefecture, in Yunnan Province, in southwestern China. He was born to a Chinese father and a Burmese mother (*Kyong Loi Zawti* 2003: 24). The year of Varajoti's birth differs among the Zawti texts from the early to middle of the seventeenth century. It is recorded as 1616 in both *Kyong Loi Zawti* (2003:24) and *Pī Kon Kham* (2016: 44), and as 1654 in *Long Khoe Zawti* (1997).⁴ Based on Varajoti's interactions with Burmese kings and other notable monks, whose dating can be verified, which are examined in this chapter, 1654 is more likely to be the year of Varajoti's birth.

According to *Kyong Loi Zawti*, when Yāng Ke Tī/Varajoti was seven years old, his parents sent him as a temple boy to U Na Maw Sayadaw, the head monk at Kalung Nan Khyān Monastery in Sagaing. At present, I am unable to find out any details about Na Maw Sayadaw or what type of monastery Kalung Nan Khyān was. When Yāng Ke Tī was fifteen years old, he was ordained as a novice, *sāmaṇera*, and was given the monastic name Varajoti. He was then ordained as a fully ordained monk, *bhikkhu*, under U Na Maw Sayadaw when he was twenty years old (2003: 24). The biography of Varajoti's life in *Kyong Loi Zawti* details how Varajoti studied his teacher's books and texts on the *Vinaya Piṭaka* and *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*,

⁴1616 is calculated from *sāsana* year 2160 as it is recorded in *Kyong Loi Zawti Weng Mong Yang* and 1654 is calculated from *sāsana* year 2198 as it is recorded in *Pī Kon Kham*.

which together with the *Sutta Piṭaka*, make up the *Tipiṭaka*, the canonical Theravada Buddhist texts. Varajoti wanted to know more, so he asked for U Na Maw's permission to leave the monastery in the pursuit of knowledge. On his travels he met a learned monk called Kyauk Kar (ကျွန်.ဂါ,) who taught him about the path to *nibbāna*, freedom from desire and escape from *samsāra*, the endless rounds of birth and rebirth. This narrative immediately conveys that, while Varajoti followed the usual path of most Theravada monks, whose careers begin with being sent to the local monastery by their parents at a young age, he attained the two crucial markers of spiritual authority: being learned in the textual authorities and pursuing the highest spiritual aspirations. This last quality is further emphasised in the next stage of the narrative, in which Varajoti then set out for a cave near Sagaing, west of a village called Mai Sāng Nām where he sat in meditation (*Long Khoe Zawti* 1997: 9). Sagaing is a hilly region only 12 miles southwest of the ancient Burmese capital of Mandalay on the opposite bank of the Irrawaddy River, famous for its many temples, and associated with the practice of meditation and famous meditators even into the modern period.

While Varajoti was meditating in the cave, a hunter named Ngā Pyu passed by and took aim at Varajoti, thinking that he was animal. Ngā Pyu then realised he had come upon a monk and not an animal. Once Varajoti emerged from his meditative state, he taught Ngā Pyu about the Buddhist teachings (*Long Khoe Zawti* 1997: 8). Because Varajoti was found by Ngā Pyu in a cave, he is also called ၵုးမာင်, U Māung, the Cave Venerable, following the Burmese tradition of referring to monks by honorifics based on a place name.⁵ The name of the cave is recorded as ထမ်းသၢမ်ဝိတ်, 'Three Door Cave' in *Pi Kon Kham* (2016: 44). The hunter Ngā Pyu then spread the word about Varajoti's teachings and Varajoti began to give sermons.

It is stated in *Long Khoe Zawti* that Varajoti began preaching the *catupārisuddhi-sīla*,⁶ the four noble truths, and the *dhamma* (the teachings of the Buddha (1997: 13)).⁷ The *catupārisuddhi-sīla* consists of four classifications of *sīla* (ethical precepts) followed by monks to achieve

⁵ In Burmese Buddhism place names are often used as monastic names and epithets for example, the Shwegyin monastic tradition is named after the birthplace of their founder U Jāgara.

⁶ The term *catupārisuddhi-sīla* appears in the commentarial literature, e.g., the *Dīgha Nikāya aṭṭhakathā* (commentary) and *īkā* (sub-commentary).

⁷ In *Long Khoe Zawti* this reads as (1997: 12): ငတုပုပုလိသုတ်ထိသီ,လ (catupārisuddhi-sīla); သိခေလုင်သီ,သိခေ; (the four noble truths); ငြး (dhamma). No further explanation of these terms is provided in the text.

moral purification. The four classifications are: (1) *pāṭimokkha-saṃvara-sīla*, which refers to practising restraint with reference to the monastic disciplinary codes; (2) *indriyasamvarasīla*, which refers to practising of restraint of our sense faculties such as the interaction between our internal sense organs and external world; (3) *ājīvasamvarasīla*, which refers to practising of restraint with regards to livelihood for monastic members; and (4) *paccayasannissitasīla*, which relates to the moral practice of monastic members with regards to the four requisites (Nyanatiloka Mahathera 1980).⁸ The four noble truths are thought of as the most famous and comprehensive summation of Buddhist teaching. According to the Pali Canon, the Buddha preached the four noble truths, *dukkha* (the truth of suffering), *samudaya* (the truth of arising), *nirodha* (the truth of cessation), and *magga* (the truth of the path), at the First Sermon after his proclamation of the Middle Way (Anderson 1999: 65, Strong 2015: 135). On realizing the four noble truths, the Buddha attained the destruction of the *kammic* influxes (*āsava*) that keep one in *samsāra* (the endless cycle of death and rebirth) (Anderson 1999: 58).

The nature of the content attributed to Varajoti's original sermons highlight that Varajoti's teachings were consistent with fundamental Theravada doctrine. The emphasis on the *catupārisuddhi-sīla* in particular, perhaps foreshadows the Zawti's emphasis on monastic discipline, but this too is in keeping with orthodox conceptions of Theravada monasticism (see Chapter Five). This conformity of Varajoti's early sermons with basic Theravada doctrine contrasts significantly with early descriptions of the early Zawti tradition in western scholarship, such as that of Father Vincenzo Sangermano who stated:

The Zodi [Zawti]... They are of Burmese origin, but their religion is totally different from that of Godama [Buddhism]. They reject metempsychosis [rebirth], and believe that each one will receive the reward or punishment of his actions immediately after death, and that this state of punishment and reward will last for eternity. Instead of attributing everything to fate, as the Burmese do, they acknowledge an omnipotent and omniscient Nat [Burmese god-like spirits], the creator of the world. (Sangermano 1833:111)

The idea that the Zawti were monastic outsiders on the grounds of doctrinal differences was perpetuated in subsequent scholarship, most starkly in the erroneous but pervasive conflation

⁸ For more on *sammā-ājīva* (right livelihood) for monks see Kyaw 2017.

of the Zawti with the Paramats, an elusive group of unorthodox believers, in the nineteenth century, which will be examined later in this chapter.

Returning to the Zawti accounts of their origins, the account in *Long Khoe Zawti* states that the first monastic disciples to join Varajoti were a group of eight monks who encountered Varajoti by chance. When they listened to his sermons, they were moved to accept him as their *upajjhāya* (preceptor) which marked the beginning of the Tai Zawti monastic lineage (*Long Khoe Zawti* 1997:12). The monks are said to ‘accept’ Varajoti as their *upajjhāya*, which suggests that a type of ordination ritual was performed, and yet the account states that these eight followers were already monks. Monks can move from one *nikāya* (monastic lineage/tradition) to another without losing their monastic *vassa* age through a ritual called a *dalhī-kamma* (strengthening act). *Vassa* age refers to how many *vassa* (the three-month rains’ retreat that takes place each year) a monk has been ordained for. A greater *vassa* age indicates greater experience and status as a monk, and when a monk disrobes his *vassa* age goes back to zero. The *dalhī-kamma* ritual therefore allows monks to retain their *vassa* age and the status that it imbues when moving to another monastic lineage. In contemporary Burmese Buddhism, the Shwegyin monks use a *dalhī-kamma* when monks from less prestigious or orthodox lineages wish to stay at a Shwegyin temple or hold a particular office in relation to one of the sacred sites of Burma managed by the Shwegyin (Crosby 2013: 212). The initial group of Zawti monks could have been ordained in a *dalhī-kamma* ceremony which would have allowed them to retain their *vassa* age and ritually join the Zawti monastic lineage. Such an ordination would then allow the Zawti to ordain new monks, a procedure that can only be performed by ordained *bhikkhus*.

Once Varajoti had assembled his original group of eight monks, they then began to ordain new monks by “reciting the *kammavācā* together, using a *sīmā-samutti* [the fixing of a new *sīmā*, a ritually prescribed boundary] donated by the King” (*Long Khoe Zawti* 1997: 12-13).⁹ *Sīmā* boundaries are used by Theravada monastics as the place for holding important ecclesiastical procedures (*saṅghakamma*). The *sīmā-samutti* detailed in this account is almost certainly a reference to a *visuṅgāmasīmā*, a special temporal village *sīmā*, the only type of ecclesiastical boundary that explicitly requires the authority of a king or his representative. This story

⁹ This quote is a direct translation of the Shan sentence: လှာဝ်းဂမ်.မဝ်,လၢ, ဂးသိမ်,သမ,မုဂ်း ကခိ်ခုခိ်ဂျၢမမ်းလူခခိ်.ယဝ်.

indicates that the Zawti at this time were recognised by the Burmese court in nearby Mandalay or by their local representative. Such *sīmā* are used by Sangha established in a single place and as we shall see in Chapter Four, the later migration of the Zawti and their subsequent peripheral status, meant that they switched from using this type of *sīmā* to the more flexible *udakukkhepa sīmā* (water *sīmā*). The explicit mention of the *sīmā* in this account of early Zawti monastic ordination signals that the early Zawti tradition had royal patronage and also an awareness of the types of disputes over *sīmā* that have been and still are raised in relation to the legitimacy of a monastic lineage (see Chapter Four).

The description in *Long Khoe Zawti* mentions eight monks, meaning that the original group of Zawti monks was large enough to conduct ordinations. According to the *Vinaya*, higher ordination is only valid if it takes place in the presence of a *parisā* (quorum) of at least five *bhikkhus*.¹⁰ Originally ten monks were required. However, in ‘outlying’ regions, which includes all Theravada countries, the requirement is lowered to five monks (Crosby 2013:198). The account of the early Zawti ordination procedure also references the *kammavācā*, presumably the *upasampadā kammavācā*, the standard textual litany used for higher ordination in both Burmese and Shan Buddhism. Through referencing these signposts of the higher ordination procedure: the *sīmā*, the *parisā* of over five monks, and the *kammavācā* litany, the Zawti are establishing evidence of their orthodoxy and conformity with Theravada *Vinaya* at their conception. Further, the reference to the *visumgāmasīmā*, the *sīmā* designated by a king, alludes to their earlier association with royal authority, and therefore their legitimacy as a monastic lineage.

The theme of royal legitimation during this period is continued in the Zawti-authored texts which state that Varajoti’s teachings gained the patronage of ခုနစ်လုဂ်; ဝနဲးတဆင်းဆူဂ်, ‘the one born on Sunday’, which refers to the ‘Sunday King’, an epithet of Taininganway Min, the ruler of the Burmese Toungoo Dynasty from 1714 to 1733 (*Long Khoe Zawti* 1997: 11). It is likely that it was Taininganway Min who donated the land used to establish the Zawti *sīmā* mentioned previously since he was the last Burmese monarch to have had a positive relationship with the Zawti.

¹⁰ A valid *parisā* of five or more suitable monks is needed to ensure *parisā-sampatti*. See Chapter Four for a full explanation of all five *sampatti*.

Varajoti is described as having another royal encounter with Mahadhammaraza Dipadi, who succeeded Taninganway Min in 1733 and reigned until 1752. Varajoti was invited to the royal palace to give a sermon on his understanding of the *dhamma* and the path to *nibbāna*, which was not received well by Mahadhammaraza Dipadi (*Long Khoe Zawti* 1997: 13). Since Varajoti was likely to be born in 1654 and passed away in 1744, this interaction with Mahadhammaraza Dipadi must have happened late on in Varajoti's lifetime, when he was at least 79 years old. This interaction marks the beginning of the Zawti monastic tradition falling out of favour with Burmese monarchs as earlier than previously thought. Outside of this account from *Long Khoe Zawti*, the earliest royal suppression of the Zawti on record was during the reign of Hsinpyushin (r. 1763-1776) which was recorded in the Royal Orders of Burma (ROB 4: 15 July 1783, Than Tun trans. 1986: 35).

The Tai Zawti monastic tradition therefore emerged sometime in the mid to late seventeenth century and then gained traction and enjoyed a period of royal patronage in the early eighteenth century. This makes the Zawti tradition older than previously thought. Mendelson attributed the Zawti to the late eighteenth century, while J. G. Scott placed the origins of the Zawti tradition later, to the beginning of the nineteenth century (Mendelson 1975: 233; Scott 1910: 147-149). Both Scott and Mendelson were likely to have relied on the Royal Orders of Burma, which situate the suppression of the Zawti in the context of the late-eighteenth century, under the reigns of King Hsinpyushin and later King Bodawhpaya (r. 1782-1819), which I shall examine in further detail in this chapter. The Royal Orders targeted followers of the Zawti tradition rather than Varajoti or the Zawti monks themselves, who by this time, had already moved into the Shan States.

1.1.1. Varajoti and the Robe Controversy

Confirmation of Varajoti's existence and monastic connections in the late seventeenth century to early eighteenth century comes from his association with the monk Ton Hpyongyi Shin Guṇābhilaṅkāra (1639-1720). Guṇābhilaṅkāra was one of the key monks involved in the great 'robe controversy', a major event in the history of Burmese monasticism which lasted the entire eighteenth century and continues to have ramifications to this day. The great monastic dispute centred around the question of whether Buddhist novices should drape their robe around both of their shoulders or just one shoulder when presenting themselves before the laity, for example whilst on alms round (Pranke 2004: 2). Varajoti is identified as a breakaway disciple of

Guṇābhilaṅkāra (Kirichenko 2012: 16). The dating of Guṇābhilaṅkāra places Varajoti as a junior contemporary, confirming the likelihood that Varajoti was born in 1654 than 1616, as observed above. If he were born in 1616 then he would have been Guṇābhilaṅkāra's senior and therefore unlikely to have been a breakaway disciple.

Burmese historical chronicles claim that Guṇābhilaṅkāra invented the one-shoulder manner of wearing the robe, which was then promoted by a third-generation disciple of his, Atula Hsayadaw Shin Yasa (1700-1786/87). Atula championed the one-shoulder faction when he served as King Alaungpaya's teacher-monk. He is recognized as the key actor in the formation of the 'one-shoulder faction' (*ekaṃsika gaṇa*), also known *Ton Gaing*, named after Ton, Guṇābhilaṅkāra's natal village, and as the *dukot-tin gaing* in Burmese. The 'one-shoulder faction' argued that novices only needed to cover one shoulder with the upper robe when they presented themselves before the laity (Charney 2006: 35). In contrast, the 'two-shoulder faction' or 'covered faction' (*pārūpana gaṇa*), known as the *Ayon Gaing* in Burmese, held that novices should observe the same rule as *bhikkhus*, and cover both shoulders with the upper robe when presenting themselves before the laity (Pranke 2004: 2).

Alexey Kirichenko, in his critical biography of Atula Hsayadaw Shin Yasa, argues that while history has depicted Guṇābhilaṅkāra and Atula as being responsible for the robe controversy, these histories reflect the views of the victors, and were written to discredit them both. Kirichenko states that portrayals of both monks were manipulated in royal chronicles to frame them as culprits and ignored their efforts at reforming monastic behaviour in the seventeenth century (2012: 3-4). Guṇābhilaṅkāra promoted a revival of forest-dwelling monasticism and *dhutaṅga* (austere practices), especially the use of *ticīvarika-aṅga dhutaṅga* (a single set of monastic robes). This resulted in him and his followers becoming known as the *ticīvarikas* or *tisiwareits* in Burmese (Kirichenko 2012: 4). Kirichenko highlights that in terms of reforms, the *tisiwareits* may have been one of the first monastic movements to argue that donations and support given to *alajjī* monks (immoral monks) would accelerate the decline of the *sāsana* (the dispensation of the teachings of the Buddha). This argument would later come to the forefront of monastic reform movements in the nineteenth century which focused on indiscriminating lay patrons as the problem rather than the monks themselves. (Kirichenko 2012: 4).

Varajoti's early association with Guṇābhilaṅkāra aligns with Varajoti's austere monastic approach and the refusal of the early Zawti lay people in giving donations to any monks other

than Zawti monks (Chapter Five and Chapter Eight). Guṇābhilaṅkāra's reform efforts, which were manipulated out of the Burmese historical chronicles to protect the image of later monastic authorities, were likely to have had a formative impact on Varajoti's approach to monasticism. If we were to assume that Varajoti was indeed a disciple of Guṇābhilaṅkāra, it is still unclear as to why he broke away or when this might have happened. We can postulate that if he were to have broken away this would have occurred after his departure from Kalung Nan Khyān Monastery but before he settled in the 'Three Door Cave' in Sagaing (*Kyong Loi Zawti* 2003: 24; *Long Khoe Zawti* 1997: 9). The Burmese sources explicitly describe him as switching to the two-shoulder dress code for novices, thus breaking his initial association with Guṇābhilaṅkāra (A Kirichenko 2020, personal communication 22 October 2020).

The narrative of the Burmese source identified by Kirichenko provides a tempting timeline of events, but once situated within the historical context of Varajoti's lifetime it becomes apparent that such claims are most likely to be retrospective to benefit the reputation of the Zawti. King Alaungpaya's order to prescribe the one-shoulder style of dress for novices came with the entrustment of the *sāsana* to Atula Hsayadaw in 1753, nine years after the death of Varajoti (Kirichenko 2012: 16). This raises the question, why would the Burmese source claim that Varajoti 'switched sides' in a debate that postdates his lifetime? By retrospectively aligning Varajoti as a breakaway disciple of Guṇābhilaṅkāra and identifying him as switching to the two-shoulder faction, Varajoti is placed on the final victorious side of the debate when it was eventually settled under King Bodawhpaya decades later in the 1780s.

Varajoti passed away before the robe controversy was ultimately settled once and for all in the late 18th century, during the reign of King Bodawhpaya who sided with the *Ayon Gaing*. By Bodawhpaya's reign, as we shall see later in this chapter, the Zawti were already exiled from Upper Burma and had been the subject of royal suppression. The Zawti, at this time, were already marginalized from mainstream monastic circles in Upper Burma and had established themselves in the Shan States. Whilst they were not likely to be actively engaged in the debate during the final period of the controversy, it would still have been in their interest for Varajoti to be described as a breakaway disciple of Guṇābhilaṅkāra in an effort to distance the Zawti from further marginalization. It is also possible that Varajoti's break from Guṇābhilaṅkāra did not centre around the robe controversy but another unknown factor. However, given the prominence of Guṇābhilaṅkāra in the robe discourse and the ramifications of being associated with him, it is likely that this disassociation would have been favourable to the Zawti.

While it is difficult to verify the Burmese sources that mention Varajoti, the fact that Burmese sources reference Varajoti at all indicate that he was a recognised figure in the Upper Burmese monastic networks of the early eighteenth century, otherwise they would not have mentioned him at all (A Kirichenko 2020: Personal Communication 22 October 2020). This helps us understand why the Zawti tradition was singled out in later years through various waves of eighteenth-century reforms despite their peripheral status. The Zawti histories, corroborated with more easily verifiable monastic figures and royalty, trace the origins of the Zawti monastic tradition to the late seventeenth-century. This means that the Zawti lineage is older than the Thudhamma *nikāya* lineage, which until now was thought to be the oldest Burmese *nikāya*. I shall examine this claim in further detail later in this chapter.

1.2. The Early Zawti Tradition 1744-1819: Falling out of Favour with Authority

When Varajoti passed away in 1744 he was succeeded by Venerable Nandamāla as abbot (*Pī Kon Kham*, 2016: 44). According to *Long Khoe Zawti*, the governor of the region called Nandamāla to his palace for questioning. Although the name of the governor and the name of the location are not provided in the text, the location was likely to be Sagaing where Varajoti had passed away. The governor asked the Zawti monks if they preached “when the laity build a pagoda, it is nothing more than a heap of bricks and gravel. Making a beautiful monastery from silver and gold is akin to a gathering of timber”. Nandamāla replied “yes”, and so the governor ordered them to leave his land (1997: 14). This interaction indicates that the governor considered the Zawti attitude towards merit-making and the treatment of pagodas as divergent from standard Theravada and expelled them as a result (it is the Zawti’s divergent attitude towards Buddha images, stupas and non-Zawti monks that resulted in the conflation between the Zawti and the Paramats in academic scholarship, examined later in this chapter).

The Zawti had already fallen out of favour with the Burmese royalty during the reign of King Mahadhammaraza Dipadi, when Varajoti was invited to the royal palace to give a sermon on his understanding of the *dhamma* and the path to *nibbāna*, which was not received well by the king (*Long Khoe Zawti* 1997: 13). However, it is this encounter with the unnamed governor that marks the beginning of the migration of the Zawti monks and accompanying laity from Upper Burma into the Shan states. Under the new leadership of Venerable Nandamāla, the Zawti monks fled to a village called Kung Nā Law in Mong Pawn, a Shan state.¹¹ The Zawti remained in Kung Nā Law under the abbotship of Venerable Sutsāka, who succeeded Venerable Nandamāla. When Venerable Sutsāka passed away, he was succeeded by Venerable Nanda Talāpha. When Venerable Paññakitti succeeded Venerable Nanda Talāpha, he moved the Zawti community out of Kun Nā Law, further north, to Pang Long, then to Man Sing in Mong Kung where they remained for a while (*Long Khoe Zawti* 1997: 15).

In the mid-eighteenth century these Shan States were made up of many small princely states ruled by Shan chieftains called *saopha* (Shan: ၶၢၦၰၢၦ) Each small state had its own aristocratic lineage in which rulership was inherited through the male line. The *saopha* had dominion over

¹¹ The Shan principalities ruled by the *saopha* chieftans later became known as the ‘Shan States’ and ‘Chinese Shan States’ by the British who ruled over the area from 1885- 1948. When Burma gained independence in 1948 the areas that were under British jurisdiction became Shan State and Kayah State.

their state but they were careful to maintain relations with the Burmese and Chinese powers on each side. The royal kings in Burma would implement central policies then send ministers to check on the *saopha* to ensure that the *saopha* were remained loyal, sent annual tributes, and paid taxes (Sai Aung Tun 2009: 111).¹² The *saopha* had to pay allegiance to the Burmese royal centre but, when they posed no immediate threat to the central state, they were allowed to conduct their affairs undisturbed (Taylor 2009: 22). This included, for the most part, their religious customs, and practices.¹³

During the early period of Zawti migration in the Shan States in the mid-to-late-eighteenth century there were multiple military clashes led by the Burmese monarch King Hsinbyushin. These clashes between Burma and China first broke out in 1765 over the status of the northern and north-eastern Shan states and they lasted until a treaty was signed in 1769 (Koenig 1978: 55). Burma eventually emerged victorious. The Shan region retained their *saopha* leadership structure and were no longer considered a serious threat to Burmese control or vulnerable to absorption into the Chinese kingdom (Koenig 1978: 55). King Hsinbyushin's victory resulted in the reassertion of Burmese authority in the Shan States. Although Burmese authority was reasserted in the area, Hsinbyushin was unlikely to have become involved in the cultural and religious affairs happening in the Shan States, which were still largely left to the local *saopha*. The Royal Orders of Burma retrospectively detail that the Zawti were suppressed by King Hsinbyushin (ROB 4: 15 July 1783, Than Tun trans. 1986: 35). No further details are provided but we can assume that this order was aimed at the Zawti lay community who remained in Upper Burma rather than the Zawti who had migrated to the Shan States, where the authority of Burmese royal power had little reach.¹⁴

¹² In the 18th century to around the mid-19th century, this form of kingdoms or petty states ruled by a hereditary local lord was also found in what is now Thailand. Kamala Tiyavanich writes "these kingdoms or *meuang* considered themselves autonomous, they sent tribute to the more powerful kingdom. Bangkok allowed the outlying *meuang*s to remain more or less independent, so long as there was no war between any of the lords of the region. Its control did not extend beyond collecting taxes from the lords" (1997:5) This changed in the last decades of the nineteenth century when the Siamese King Chulalongkorn began to form a centralized state of Siam with a fixed boundary. The Siamese court sought to strip the local ruling families of the principalities in the northern, northeastern, and the southern regions of their powers and transfer their authority to officials appointed by the Siamese court (1997: 7).

¹³ This was certainly the case for the Tai principalities that later became Thailand in the 19th century.

¹⁴ Kirigaya postulates that Shan areas were probably excluded from royal inquests made by Hsinbyushin and Bodawhpaya as the Burmese historical *sittans* (a record of an inquiry) do not reference any Shan rulers as recipients of the royal order that included officers and leaders of many crown service groups and organizations, as well as headmen of various towns and villages. This is to say that the Shan rulers and states were not included in the *sittans* produced by the royal centre at this time, meaning that they were not part of the Burmese royal administration (Kirigaya 2016: 271-272).

The Zawti had escaped central Burmese authority by retreating into the Shan States. In escaping one sphere of authority, they entered new ones. The Zawti had to maintain relations with each individual Shan *saopha* who had dominion over the villages where they settled. According to oral history, when the Zawti moved to an area called Manli in Hsipaw (a Shan principality), they made a mistake which offended the *saopha* who expelled them from Hsipaw (1997:15). From Hsipaw they moved even further north, closer to the China border, to a village called Ho-Puk in Lashio where they established a monastery. Venerable Paññakitti passed away in the Ho-Puk monastery, and according to *Long Khoe Zawti* his tomb and the Zawti pagoda still remain there (1997:16). The marginalization of the Zawti by royal and regional authorities during this period is corroborated in *Long Khoe Zawti*, which states that after the death of Varajoti the Zawti could not rely on the governors who had previously supported them and so the monastery could not remain in one place for a long time (1997: 15).

The account of this period of Zawti migration during the mid-to-late eighteenth century detailed in *Long Khoe Zawti* misses out two of the abbots listed in the Table of Abbots presented in *Pi Kon Kham*. Therefore, I cannot place the whereabouts of the Zawti under Venerable Nanda Myitza (1709-1777) and Venerable Tatmok Dhammapañña (1745-1795) (see Appendix A for Table of Zawti Abbots). What we do know, however, is that it was during this period, the Zawti laity who remained in Upper Burma were singled out by King Bodawhpaya through royal orders.

1.2.1 Bodawhpaya's Reforms

The next time the Zawti were targeted directly by the Burmese royal powers occurred some twenty years later, during the reign of Bodawhpaya. In the turbulent interim period between the reign of Hsinbyushin and Bodawhpaya, King Singu had ruled from 1776-1782, then King Phaungka for a year before he was deposed by his uncle Bodawhpaya. William Koenig writes that the Konbaung period can be split into two phases. The first is from the rise of Alaunghpaya in the early 1750s up until the death of Hsinbyushin in 1776. During this period “the central authority paid careful attention to the organization and augmentation of its resources, a policy which left the realm in a generally healthy condition both administratively and demographically” (Koenig 1978: 82). The second phases began with the reign of Singu (r.1776-1782), who's rule introduced “a period in which the lack of either domestic or foreign

policy set the stage for an accelerating trend of decline in the succeeding reign of Bodawhpaya” (Koenig 1978: 82).

Bodawhpaya ascended to the throne with the aim emulating his father Alaunghpaya’s successful military leadership and administrative control. Such ambitions were not actualised and Bodawhpaya’s rule was eventually characterised by military failure. But what Bodawhpaya lacked in military success he made up for in his mastery of court politics, which he manipulated to ensure the ascendancy of himself and his successors (Koenig 1978: 448). In particular, Bodawhpaya made significant “radical attempts at religious reform” (Leider 2004: 83). Bodawhpaya’s vision for a unified and reformed Burmese Sangha had significant implications for the Zawti tradition.

Bodawhpaya’s religious reform movements encouraged a greater emphasis on textual knowledge, which meant that monks were required to follow a strict interpretation of Vinaya rules to have an in-depth understanding of Pali texts (Leider 2004: 83). Bodawhpaya aimed to eliminate any belief or practice that diverged from the religious texts he deemed authoritative or questioned the authority of the established monastic institution (Leider 2004: 90). A key component of this religious reform was eliminating ‘heretical’ monastic groups that he considered as divergent from his authorised Sangha. Through purging heretical sects Bodawhpaya aimed to establish a single unified Burmese Sangha. In 1782 Bodawhpaya decided not to appoint a single chief of religious affairs (*thathanabaing*) and instead established a Council of Elders known as the Thudhamma Council. At first, four monks were appointed as chiefs of religious affairs with one monk having overall authority. Bodawhpaya then elected a further eight monks to join the council to help the original four monks (Charney 2006: 96).

The Thudhamma Council were given the task of settling the robe controversy, which Varajoti had purportedly been embroiled in earlier in the eighteenth century as previously discussed. The robe controversy emerged again in monastic circles in 1780, when members of the *Ton Gaing* (one-shoulder) initiated a series of hearings concerning the correct way for novices to wear their robes in public. This resulted in a debate, in which the scriptural support of two-shoulder practice was contested. At the core of the debate was the nature of the authority upon which each side rested its interpretation of the rule, specifically the role of canonical and commentarial texts in prescribing monastic practices (Pranke 2004: 2). The *Ayoun Gaing* argued that the Theravada *Vinaya* and its recognized body of commentaries and sub-

commentaries were the sole legitimate authority (*mahāpadesa*) in matters of monastic discipline (Pranke 2004: 2). In contrast, the *Atin Gaing* maintained that in addition to the *Vinaya* and commentaries, local customs and traditions also constituted as legitimate authority. The *Atin Gaing* claimed that the *Cūḷagaṇṭhi* text, which described the one-shoulder robe wearing practice for novices, was an authentic text, while the *Ayoun Gaing* claimed that the *Cūḷagaṇṭhi* was not authoritative. To the surprise of the initiators of the debate, the two-shoulder faction triumphed, and the two-shoulder manner of robe-wearing was prescribed to both novices and monks (Kirichenko 2012: 21). In 1782, in an effort to unify the monks and put an end to the debate, Bodawhpaya announced two royal orders in May and June in favour of the *Ayoun Gaing* and the two-shoulder style of dress for monks and novices (*ibid*).

The royal court therefore switched sides from the one-shoulder side of the debate to the two-shoulder side of the debate, since King Alaungpaya under the guidance of his teacher-monk Atula, had previously promoted the one-shoulder debate. The switch made the royal stance on the debate seem indecisive and unreliable. Kirichenko argues that both Guṇābhilānkāra and Atula Hsayadaw were manipulated into the role of the culprits of this royal mess to deflect blame away from the monarchy. Atula had not been the royal teacher-monk since the decline of King Alaungpaya, whose royal successors had appointed other monks to serve as their principal teacher-monks. Yet he was held personally responsible for the promulgation of the one-shoulder of the debate to mitigate any blame that might have been placed on the royal institution. Atula was eventually disrobed, exiled, and labelled as an “enemy of the *sāsana* (*sāsanapaccatthika*) (*ibid*: 26).

In 1788, Bodawhpaya appointed the monk Ñāṇābhivamsa as both the chief of the Thudhamma Council and the *thathanabaing* (chief of religious affairs) (Charney 2006: 43). Throughout the eighteenth century, the *Ayoun Gaing* had argued that the poor monastic training, weak command of canonical texts, and reliance on non-canonical texts like the *Cūḷagaṇṭhi*, of Atula and the *Atins* had resulted in the robe controversy (Charney 2006: 43). The *Ayouns* exploited these weaknesses to jockey for power and royal patronage by claiming greater orthopraxy with reference to this one aspect of *Vinaya* practice, how the monastic robe should be worn.

The triumph of the *Ayouns* over the robe controversy, on the grounds of a stronger understanding of the texts, emboldened Ñāṇābhivamsa and his Thudhamma Council to launch further sweeping monastic reform measures. This ultimately resulted in the absorption of all

existing monastic lineages and factions into a single *gaing* (Pali: *gaṇa* ‘group’) ‘faction’ under centralized Thudhamma control (Pranke 2008: 4). The *Ayouns*, and all other agreeable monks were absorbed into one central *gaing*, the Thudhamma *gaing*. Ñāṇābhivamsa actualized this plan by dispatching ‘reform monks’ throughout the kingdom to re-ordain monks who accepted the new Thudhamma orthodoxy into the Thudhamma *gaing* and any monks who did not comply were defrocked (Charney 2006: 100). Monks had to submit to the Thudhamma Council when ordaining new disciples and if their ordination was not in line with the Thudhamma ordination procedure then it was illegitimate. Through centralizing ordination procedures, Ñāṇābhivamsa ensured that all lineages apart from the Thudhamma would go extinct after one generation (Charney 2006: 100). Through these efforts, the Thudhamma *gaing* was transformed from a regionally based community of monks with a strong Lower Chindwin influence, to a kingdom-wide fraternity (Charney 2006: 100).¹⁵

Varajoti, who was described in Burmese sources as switching to the two-shoulder faction therefore ended up on the right side of the debate in the end. As previously stated, I understand such an account to be retrospective. If the Zawti had outspokenly aligned themselves with the two-shoulder faction during this re-emergence of the controversy, then they would have been aligned with the majority view of Bodawhpaya’s Thudhamma Council. But the Zawti were targeted specifically in Bodawhpaya’s purge of monastic groups who either failed to conform to the new Thudhamma regulations or were considered a threat to Thudhamma authority. Bodawhpaya’s singling out of the Zawti during this period therefore must not have been on the grounds of a divergent position within the robe controversy, but for some other reason.

King Bodawhpaya announced several Royal Orders that targeted the Zawti specifically. The first was announced in July 1783, which stated that if any Zawti followers were found and they declared that they had abandoned the faith, then punishment was unnecessary (ROB 15 July 1783 Than Tun trans. 1986: 25). A subsequent order was declared just two days later, which ordered that if a follower of the Zawti tradition was found then they should be sent to the royal capital. If checks were not done properly and Zawti followers were found later on, then those responsible for doing the checking were to be punished (ROB 17 July 1783 Than Tun trans. 1986: 26).

¹⁵ Michael Charney (2006) highlights that Ñāṇābhivamsa and the *Ayoun* partisans appointed by Ñāṇābhivamsa to join Bodawhpaya’s court all came from, or were educated, in the Lower Chindwin River Valley.

On 8 September 1783, another order was announced stating that members of the Zawti Sect were found in the Sinbyugyun area. The *hluttaw*¹⁶ had been sent to bring them to the city but the men accepted bribes and allowed them to escape. As a punishment, the bribes the men had accepted were to be melted and poured down their throats (ROB 15 July 1783 Than Tun trans. 1986: 31). The punishment sanctioned by Bodawhpaya was cruel and violent, but it was not out of the ordinary since this type of violence was characteristic of the Konbuang Dynasty. As the Burmese state centralised, provincial administration became difficult to manage, and more extreme measures were enforced in regions that lay outside the orbit of central control. Charney writes that “Konbaung officials depended on regular, spectacular, and local displays of violence, both to obtain resources and to reconfirm their authority” (Charney 2021: 45). These displays of violence were intended to reinforce central control but instead they intensified divisions. Whilst the state-enforced violence was technically legal it was not accepted as just and entire villages moved further away, out of the reach of the state in response (Charney 2021: 47).

Bodawhpaya’s order indicates that the Zawti had gained traction in Sinbyugyun in Upper Burma, which indicates that the Zawti tradition had a presence in Upper Burma as well as the Shan States. The geographic spread of the Zawti tradition during this period could have threatened Bodawhpaya. Jacques Leider postulates that Bodawhpaya’s targeting of the Zawti was less likely to be because the Zawti monks diverged from Thudhamma in terms of texts or orthodoxy and was more likely because the Zawti questioned the monastic institution (2004: 90). Although they do not name Bodawhpaya specifically, in *Long Khoe Zawti*, the Zawti themselves identify changes to the Burmese Sangha and royal powers as the reason why they migrated so frequently after the death of Varajoti. It is detailed in *Long Khoe Zawti* that:

Regarding the circumstances of why they had to move from place to place, look at the history of the *sāsana* [the monks] during the time of the kings in ancient times because the *sāsana* depends on the rulers and the rulers depend on the *sāsana*. If the rules changes, the *sāsana* also changes. Such as the one shoulder and two shoulder [debate]... all these things happen because the ruler and the *sāsana* are interdependent (1997: 15)

¹⁶ *Hluttaw* refers to the council of ministers in the King’s court in pre-colonial Burma.

In removing themselves both physically and socially from Bodawhpaya's monastic milieu by retreating into the Shan Hills and moving around frequently, the Zawti were able to bypass reforms. This avoidance could be interpreted as a type of passive resistance which inadvertently threatened Thudhamma hegemony. The Zawti retreat from the Burmese monastic milieu was not without consequence. Ñāṇābhivamsa's order to centralize ordination procedures was put in place to ensure that any monastic group that did not conform to Thudhamma ordination conventions would go extinct after one generation. In principle this meant that groups like the Zawti who did not conform to Ñāṇābhivamsa's Thudhamma ordination procedures were considered illegitimate. But the Zawti lineage did not go extinct and what was considered illegitimate under one *thathanabaing* was considered legitimate by another. The Zawti monks remained in the Shan States and in areas in the Chinese domain during this period of the eighteenth century which removed them from these debates. This meant that by the time they remerged into Burma in the nineteenth century, after another wave of monastic reform, the Zawti were able to reintegrate themselves into the Burmese monastic fold as legitimate members of the Burmese Sangha. I shall examine this point in further detail later on in this chapter.

1.2.2. Paramat Paranoia

The singling out of the Zawti by Bodawhpaya during a period when he set out to purge heretical sects is likely to be where the conflation of the Zawti and the Paramats in Western academic scholarship began. The association between the Zawti and heretical sects was first recorded in the accounts of the early colonialists and missionaries who arrived in Burma in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The most extensive and accurate early account, which continues to be useful today, is recorded by Father Sangermano, an Italian Barnabite monk who was sent to Burma in 1783 (Sangermano 1833, 1893). Sangermano was posted to Rangoon (now Yangon) where he remained throughout his service in Burma before returning to Italy in 1808 (Symes 1955: 144).

Father Sangermano mentions the Zawti in *A Description of the Burmese Empire* in his discussion of religious freedoms during the period. As a Catholic missionary, Sangermano was interested in proselytizing in Burma and how this would be received by Burmese authority. He described how:

The Burmese government allows to the Mohammedan Moors the free exercise of their religion, as likewise to about 2000 Christians who are scattered up and down the empire. But this toleration arises more from political and religious motives [more for political purposes than for religious purposes]¹⁷, for the Talapoins teach that there is no salvation out of the religion of Godama. Since the time of the Catholic missionaries have penetrated into these parts there have indeed been some conversions, but the number has not been so great as to excite the jealousy of the Talapoins or of the Government. Hence Christianity had hitherto experienced no persecutions in these parts, partly on account of the small number of the converts, and partly through the prudence of the missionaries, who have been solicitous to preserve themselves and their disciples from observation. Otherwise it is probable they would have had to suffer much, as we may gather from the fate of the Zodi [Zawti], who began by making a great stir throughout the whole kingdom, and thereby excited the zeal of the Emperor against them. It is believed that great numbers of them still exist in some divers parts of the empire, but they are obliged to keep themselves concealed. They are of Burmese origin, but their religion is totally different from that of Godama. They reject metempsychosis, and believe that each one will receive the reward or punishment of his actions immediately after death, and that this state of punishment and reward will last for eternity. Instead of attributing everything to fate, as the Burmese do, they acknowledge an omnipotent and omniscient Nat, the creator of the world; they despise the Pagodas, the Baos, or convents of Talapoins, and statues of Godama. The present Emperor, a most zealous defender of his religion, resolved with one blow to annihilate this sect, and accordingly gave orders for their being searched for in every place, and compelled to adore Godama. Fourteen of them were put to a cruel death; but many submitted, or feigned to submit, to the orders of the Emperor, till at length he was persuaded that they had all obeyed. From that time they have remained concealed, for which reason I have never been able to meet with one of them. All that I could learn was that the sect was still in existence, and that its members still held communications with each other. They are for the most part merchants by profession. This little which I have gleaned concerning them has rather induced me to believe that

¹⁷ Father Sangermano's *Relazione del Regno Barmano* was published in Rome in 1833. It was translated from Italian to English by William Tandy D. D. and published in the same year in Rome for the Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland. The phrase "more from political and religious motives" as it is printed in the English translation reads strangely. From consulting the original Italian version, "more for political purposes than for religious purposes", is a more accurate translation. This phrase appears again in Crawford's account of schismatic groups. He describes the persecution of such groups as "rather political than religious" (1829: 292). It is possible that Crawford read Sangermano's original account in Italian rather than the English translation.

they may be Jews, for the doctrine attributed to them agree perfectly with these people, who, we well know, have penetrated into almost every corner of the known world, even to the remotest parts of Asia (1833: 111-112).

Sangermano situates the Zawti within his discussion of King Bodawhpaya targeting politically relevant religious groups. He would have been particularly sensitive to the political and religious motivations of Bodawhpaya given his status as a missionary and would have needed to know Bodawhpaya's attitude towards 'outsider' religious groups, both non-Buddhist and Buddhist, for his own preservation. As I have mentioned previously in this chapter, the details of the Zawti's religious beliefs such as rejecting metempsychosis (rebirth), attributing everything to fate, and acknowledging and omnipotent Nat, are inaccurate. I have not been able to corroborate whether fourteen Zawti lay people were sentenced to death, or if this was in fact members of another 'Paramat' group. However, despite some inaccuracies, Sangermano makes several astute observations. He accurately notes that the Zawti roused the interest of Bodawhpaya who sought to stamp them out, that the Zawti have remained concealed, and that they were still in existence despite Bodawhpaya's purge.

Two English editions of Sangermano's *A Description of the Burmese Empire* have been published in English. The first was translated by William Tandy D. D. and was published in 1833, the same year as the original Italian version titled *Relazione del Regno Barmano*. Tandy's translation includes a short preface written by Nicholas Wiseman, a Cardinal of the Catholic Church who would later become the first Archbishop of Westminster. A second edition was published in 1893 which included the same preface to the first edition, but with an additional introduction and notes by John Jardine. Jardine was colonial civil servant in India and was appointed the Judicial Commissioner of British Burma in 1877. In Jardine's footnotes on Sangermano's discussion of the Zawti he refers to the accounts of John Crawfurd and Henry Yule, and makes note of Yule's reading of Adoniram Judson. It is important to note that these footnotes are not included in the original Italian version written by Father Sangermano or in the first English translation published in 1833.

Jardine, in the footnotes of the 1896 version of *A Description of the British Empire*, notes that Yule, an orientalist and geographer who was called to accompany the Commissioner of British Burma Colonel Arthur Phayre's mission to Ava in 1855, was of the opinion that the Zawti

“really consisted of the latitudinarian¹⁸ Buddhists whom Judson, the celebrated missionary, in his journals and letters, calls semi-atheists and semi-deists” (as cited in Sangermano 1833: 89). The American Baptist missionary Adoniram Judson, who arrived in Burma in 1813, was one of the first Protestant missionaries to settle in Burma. His writings were therefore a valuable resource to the Western missionaries and envoys that arrived after him.

In *A Narrative of the Mission Sent by the Governor-General of India: The Court of Ava in 1855*, Yule draws on the writing of Judson in his attempt to make sense of the Burmese worship of pagodas. He notes that:

During the reign of Mentaragyi [Bodawhpaya], in the end of the last and the beginning of the present century, a latitudinarian or heretical doctrine had considerable diffusion in Burma, among the intelligent of both sexes. It is repeatedly mentioned by Judson in his journals and letters. He calls its followers sometimes semi-deists, sometimes semi-atheists, but it is difficult, from the slightest notices alluded to, to get any accurate idea of their doctrine; indeed it appears to have varied with individuals. One held the fundamental doctrine that Divine wisdom, not concentrated in any existing spirit or embodied in any form, but diffused throughout the universe, and partaken in different degrees by various intelligences, and in a very high degree by the Buddhas, is the true and only God... In other cases the sectarian tenets took the shape of a mere universal scepticism; and in other of a nearer approach to deism, with entire rejection of Gautama (1858:241).

Yule goes on to say that “this sect of Judson’s is probably the same with that of the Zodi, of whom Padre Sangermano says...” and repeats Sangermano’s description of the Zawti provided in *A Description of the Burmese Empire*. He concludes with the remark “I have been told that this deistical sect is still numerous, but I have not been able to obtain any information regarding them” (1858:242). Yule does not have any evidence that the group being described are the Zawti but instead speculates that the groups described by Judson and Sangermano could be the same group, which could be the Zawti.

¹⁸ ‘Latitudinarian’ is defined as in the Merriam-Webster dictionary as “not insisting on strict conformity to a particular doctrine or standard”, specifically “a group that was tolerant of variations in religious opinion or doctrine” (Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. “latitudinarian,” accessed July 21, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/latitudinarian>).

Jardine also references John Crawfurd in his footnotes. John Crawfurd was a colonial administrator who was sent on an envoy mission to Burma in 1826 in the aftermath of the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-1826). Adoniram Judson was part of the same envoy. Crawfurd, in the *Journal of an Embassy from the governor general of India to the court of Ava in the year 1827*, discusses how:

Of late years several individuals of this country have broached heretical doctrines,-- attempted to reform the popular worship, and gained a considerable number of followers. The absolutism of the Government, however, has generally silenced these schismatics or at least prevented any overt expression of their opinions...I do not understand that the propagation of a new religion was the object of any of these parties, but simply a reform of the old one. The reformers were generally, or I believe, always, laymen. They principally decried the luxury of the priesthood, and ridiculed the idea of attaching religious merit to the building of temples, or, as they described it with some justice, "heaping together unmeaning masses of brick and mortar. The most noted of the Burmese sectaries are known by the name of Kolans. I do not know what their particular tenets are, but their doctrines have been repeatedly proscribed, and some of themselves put to death. The spirit of persecution in Ava, however, is rather political than religious. Innovation of any kind is considered dangerous to the State (1829:292).

Crawfurd does not mention the Zawti—and instead attaches the description to a group called the Kolans who I have not come across other than in this context—but his description of a politically threatening reform groups with divergent attitudes towards priesthood and the idea of attaching religious merit to the building of temples, is an apt description of some of the key defining features of the Zawti tradition. As we learned earlier in this chapter, Venerable Nandamāla and the Zawti monks were expelled from Sagaing for preaching that “when the laity build a pagoda, it is nothing more than a heap of bricks and gravel. Making a beautiful monastery from silver and gold is akin to a gathering of timber” (*Kyong Loi Zawti* 1997: 14). This excerpt from the Zawti’s own historical record echoes Crawfurd’s description of reformers who ridiculed the idea of attaching religious merit to the building of temples, or, as they described it with some justice, ‘heaping together unmeaning masses of brick and mortar’” (1829:292). I shall examine the Zawti attitude towards Buddha images in further detail in Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight of this thesis.

Crawfurd’s description of a group who “decried the luxury of the priesthood” is applicable to the early Zawti tradition. Traditionally the Zawti laity did not revere any monks other than their own. However, there is a long history of lay patrons refusing to give alms to certain monks in Burmese Buddhist society. As we learned earlier in this chapter, in the seventeenth century, Guṇābhilaṅkāra’s *tisiwareits* were the first monastic group to argue that donations and support given to *alajji* (immoral) monks would accelerate *sāsana* decline, and as such, the laity should be selective in their choice of monks to whom they give alms (Kirichenko 2012: 4). This argument emerged again in the monastic reform movements of the nineteenth century, in which the laity took it on themselves to alter their own behaviour in a bid to prolong *sāsana* decline (see Chapter Eight). The contemporary Zawti laity do revere non-Zawti monks and have done so since the 1980s, when the Zawti were absorbed into the Thudhamma in the 1980s and began to open to outsiders (see Chapter Three). However, the Zawti laity are still told “it is not good to eat at *alajji* temples” (see Chapter Eight), suggesting that the fear of *sāsana* decline through the support of corrupt monks is still a factor that concerns the Zawti. The Zawti laity’s historic lack of reverence of non-Zawti monks also helps us understand how the Zawti remained hidden in plain sight for so long. The Zawti laity, having no interest in non-Zawti monks, would not have engaged in pilgrimages to other villages or towns or communicated with other non-Zawti Buddhist lay associations. It meant that the Zawti laity were unlikely to engage in the types of activities, such as attending religious festivities in neighbouring temples or travelling to non-Zawti monks on *uposatha* days, that broker connections between different communities.

Crawfurd’s observation that the persecution of schismatic groups, despite having divergent attitudes towards merit making, was “rather political than religious” (see footnote 17) since “innovation of any kind [was] considered dangerous to the State; and the ‘Lord of life and property’ cannot endure that any subject should have the presumption to differ with him in opinion”, supports the argument put forward by Leider and Kirichenko that the Zawti were singled out by the royal court not because of their religious beliefs, but because they were socially relevant and therefore a political threat (Crawfurd 1829: 392; Leider 2004: 90; Kirichenko: 2020).

The early Zawti tradition shared some of the defining characteristics attached to the reform groups described in the accounts of early missionaries and colonialists, namely a divergent attitude towards merit making which resulted in them being targeted by royal authority. It is

therefore understandable how and why the Zawti came to be associated with the Paramats in a second wave of scholarship.

Scholarship from the twentieth century, which was undoubtedly influenced by the first wave of colonialist and missionary scholarship from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, conflates the Zawti with a specific group called the ‘Paramats’. J.G. Scott, a Scottish colonial administrator who helped establish British colonial rule in Burma and wrote extensively about Burmese society, was first to conflate the Zawti and the Paramats. He described the Paramats as:

The only sect which has at any time started any doctrinal heresy is that of the Paramats. They reject the worship before pagodas and images... they never go near the shrines... the sect was founded at the beginning of this century by a *pongyi* [monk], called by his followers Shin Tabaung. He lived in Sinbyugyun, “White Elephant Island”, a place half way between Mandalay and the British frontier. (Scott 1910: 147-49)

The location of Sinbyugyn is likely to be the root of Scott’s association between the Zawti and the Paramats. In this description of the Paramats (with whom he later identifies the Zawti, below), Scott describes the tradition as being found by Shin Tabaung who lived in Sinbyugyun. Sinbyugyun is the location where, according to Bodawhpaya’s royal order of 8 September 1783, Zawti followers were found. Scott is likely to have understood Sinbyugyun as the link between the Paramats and the Zawti, and thus conflated the two groups. But as we have learned in this chapter, the founder of the Zawti tradition was named Varajoti or U Māung, not Shin Tabaung. Further, Varajoti established the Zawti tradition in the late seventeenth century not the ‘beginning of this century’ as described by J. G. Scott, which refers to the nineteenth century. We also know that Varajoti remained in Sagaing throughout his monastic life and did not live in Sinbyugyun. J. G. Scott then goes on to describe that:

These Paramats are, perhaps, represented most nearly in the present day by the Sawti [Zawti] sect, which is fairly strong in some parts of the Shan States, and has its headquarters at Nam-kham, near the Chinese border. The Sawti’s neither support nor reverence the mendicants nor their monasteries, and their leaders seem to correspond most nearly to what we should call lay brethren. (1911: 378)

While J. G. Scott's description of the origins of the Paramats is not applicable to the Zawti, the further details regarding the group being prevalent in some parts of the Shan States and having its headquarters in Namkham is applicable. The Zawti monastic headquarters, as we shall learn later in this chapter, was situated in Namkham for twenty-four years from 1912-1936. The Zawti traditionally did not revere non-Zawti monks and lay ritual practitioners called *zare* play an important role in the Zawti tradition (see Chapter Seven). It is therefore understandable why J. G. Scott made this association between the Zawti and the Paramats.

J.G. Scott's descriptions of the Zawti then informed later scholarship on the Zawti, namely by E.M. Mendelson who, following J.G. Scott, continued to associate the Zawti with the Paramats. Mendelson conflates the Zawti with the Paramats in his exploration of reformist sectarian movements during the reign of King Bodawhpaya, and again in his examination of the origins of the 'Mindon Sects' which emerged in nineteenth century (1975: 75, 86). The confusion is understandable since Zawti practice does parallel some practices associated with the Paramats e.g., their attitude towards pagodas and Buddha images (See Chapter Six and Chapter Eight). Both J. G. Scott and Mendelson assume that the Zawti fled from Upper Burma because of Bodawhpaya's policies. But as we now know, the Zawti fled into the Shan States at least thirty years prior when they fell out of favour with King Mahadhammaraza Dipadi. While the Zawti were persecuted by Bodawhpaya at the same time as the elusive Paramats, the two groups are not the same. In illustrating how Scott and Mendelson's Paramats are not the Zawti, I demonstrate how the Zawti have been inaccurately characterised as 'heretical' in academic scholarship. In doing so, I also begin to challenge the pervasive notion, in both academic literature and the among the broader non-Zawti Shan community, that the Zawti monastic tradition is unorthodox.

1.3. The Journey to Loi Lek

In the late-eighteenth century the Zawti community continued to move further into the Shan States, outside the sphere of central Burmese authority. Venerable Indapabhāvatī succeeded Venerable Tatmok Dhammapañña as abbot in 1795. During his abbotship he led the Zawti monks and laity to Man Na village in southern Namkham, an area close to the Shweli River which separates Myanmar and China.

According to *Long Khoe Zawti*, the *saopha* of Hsenwi invited monks from many temples, including Venerable Indapabhāvatī, to participate in a လိၵ်ႈပရိယတ္တိ (a *pariyatti* exam) (1997: 16). The date of when this incident is not included in *Long Khoe Zawti* but, given that Indapabhāvatī became abbot in 1795 and passed away in 1814, it must have happened during this nineteen-year period.¹⁹ Sāng Sām, the compiler of *Long Khoe Zawti*, uses the term *pariyatti*, which in this case is likely used as a general term for formal monastic examination rather than the *pariyatti* exams as we now know them today, as I explain below.

In Burma, formal monastic examinations were first introduced during the reign of King Bodawhpaya. In the period of 1795-1814, when this incident with Venerable Indapabhāvatī occurred, formal monastic examinations were in their infancy. Bodawhpaya appointed twelve examiners in 1784 to oversee the new formal monastic examinations were called *pathama sar taw pyan* (B. excellent candidate for royal examination) or *pathamapyan* (Khammai Dhammasami 2004: 85). The *pathamapyan* examination developed into what are now referred to as *pariyatti* examinations in contemporary Myanmar. Bodawhpaya's formal monastic examinations were not popular, and the Sangha showed little interest in them, choosing to continue teaching their own monastic syllabuses rather than adopt the new centrally prescribed texts (ibid: 88). Khammai Dhammasami details that this resistance was related to the Sangha's desire to retain full freedom of education management, and a fear that qualifications and worldly awards would corrupt the minds of young student-monks (ibid: 89) (see Chapter Five for more on monastic education).

¹⁹ Indapabhāvatī passed away aged 57 years old.

Hsenwi, then a Shan principality in the northern Shan States, where this incident took place, followed the Kengtung Lanna Theravada tradition before the advance of Burmese Theravada in the region in the late Konbaung period.²⁰ Kengtung, once a Shan principality and now a town in Shan State, Myanmar, close to the Thai border, had a more developed monastic curriculum and its own form of monastic assessments that predate Burmese formal monastic examinations by almost six-hundred years (Personal Communication with Khammai Dhammasami 12 January 2023). Therefore, the exam that Venerable Indapabhāvātī is said to have done in Hsenwi was more likely to be a formal monastic examination that followed the Kengtung Lanna curriculum, rather than a *pathamapyan* examination, which later became known as a *pariyatti* exam, set by the central Burmese Sangha.

Venerable Indapabhāvātī, accompanied by some other Zawti monks, travelled from Namkham to Hsenwi, some sixty-five miles away, to take the examination. After the examination, the *saopha* of Hsenwi was so impressed by Venerable Indapabhāvātī that he asked him to be the head of the Sangha in Hsenwi, but Venerable Indapabhāvātī did not accept his offer (1997: 16). When Venerable Indapabhāvātī returned to Man Na village in Namkham, the Zawti monks and lay people moved again to Mān Hin Long, an area described as being on the frontier, the border area between Burma and China. They stayed there for only one year before moving up to the Mao Valley, to an area called Mān Khao On, in the area now known as Ruili, a county-level city of Dehong Prefecture in Yunnan Province in China, just beyond the sphere of Burmese royal influence and authority (1997: 16).

The Zawti monks and lay community would remain in China for almost a hundred years. The Zawti remained in the lowland areas of the Mao valley until Venerable Indapabhāvātī encountered a Palaung chieftain named Saen Tsung. The Paluang are a Mon-Khmer ethnic minority who live on the borders of Shan State, China, and Thailand. According to *Long Khoe Zawti*, Sen Tsung had a portentous dream the night before he met Venerable Indapabhāvātī, which led him to invite the Zawti to build a monastery on the foothills of Loi Lek, a mountain in the town now known as Zhefang in Mangshi, in Dehong Prefecture, Yunnan Province, China. During this period, there were only five Zawti *bhikkhus*, two novices, two male *khing*, lay attendants, and two *nai hen som*, female attendant who cook (See Chapter Six for details of these roles). Saen Tsung brought a fish to offer to the Zawti monks as a meal, but they sent

²⁰ Hsenwi or Theinni in Burmese, is now a town in northern Shan State, Myanmar.

it away, telling him that Zawti monks would not accept a live fish because it would be a break of the precept to abstain from killing. Saen Tsung accepted this and asked to become a Zawti devotee. The Zawti monks are said to have told him to:

Leave behind the bad and accept the good. Observe the Five Precepts (basic code of ethics for lay Buddhists), and ask his villagers to abandon their pigs and chickens (see Chapter Seven) (*Long Khoe Zawti* 1997: 17).

The Shan and Palaung communities near Loi Lek were all said to accept the Zawti way of life, except for one village called Mān Kāt, a village of butchers, a profession not deemed compatible with Zawti lay life (see Chapter Eight). Tadayoshi Murakami, who traced Zawti migration in his paper titled *Buddhist History from the “periphery”*: *Towards a History of Shan Buddhism*, draws on the work of Christian Daniels to consider the political dimensions of the Tai principalities in China during this period (2014: 172). Daniels writes that during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Shan rulers recruited the Palaung to their security forces to counter the pillaging by the Jingpho, known as the Kachin in Burma, which refers to a confederation of ethnic groups who inhabit the Kachin Hills in Myanmar, China, and India. This resulted in an increase in Palaung influence in the region, which eventually grew to threaten the status of Shan rulers themselves (Daniels 2014: 71-79). Tadayoshi highlights that the growth of the Zawti tradition during this period, under the patronage of Saen Tsung, the chief of Loi Lek, occurred in the context of the expansion of Palaung power (2014: 172).

Once the Zawti monks had settled in Loi Lek, they used Loi Lek as their base and began to travel around the region. The abbot at the time Venerable Indapabhāvātī and some novices travelled to Mong Lon where they remained for a year, before travelling to Kokang, where they remained for three years. According to *Long Khoe Zawti*, the *saopha* of Hsenwi went to Kokang and told his men to destroy and loot the Zawti temple (1997: 19). The Zawti monks fled for their lives and travelled back to Meung Lon, where they waited for Saen Tsung to lead them back to Loi Lek (1997: 19). This incident suggests that despite establishing themselves outside of Burmese royal jurisdiction, the Zawti still faced opposition and were forced to move frequently. Through migration, the Zawti were able to protect themselves, preserve their tradition, and evade authority. The fact that the Zawti had satellite monasteries during this period, in Mong Long and Kokang, challenges the “one-monastery and headquarters concept of leadership” described by Mendelson in *Sangha and State* (1975: 233). The contemporary

Zawti community follow this model but as we have identified in this chapter, this has not always been the case.

1.3.1. The Yangon Split

When Venerable Indapabhāvatī passed away in 1814, he was succeeded by Venerable Vāradhamma. It was during Vāradhamma's abbotship that a key event in the Zawti monastic history occurred. In February 2020 I interviewed the senior members of the current Yangon Zawti congregation members who told me about the origins of the Zawti community in Yangon. I shall now examine the entire history of the Yangon Zawti community before returning to the history of the Zawti tradition in the nineteenth century

The current Yangon congregation told me that in 1835, when Venerable Vāradhamma was abbot in Loi Lek, his right-hand monk was Venerable Paññāvaṇṇa and his left-hand monk was Venerable Yasodhamma (Interview in Yangon, 21 February 2020). The significance of the left-hand and right-hand positioning is related to the canonical descriptions of how the Buddha organised his principal disciples around him. Sāriputta, his most important pupil, sat on the right side of the Buddha and Mahāmoggallāna, his other great pupil, sat to the left (J. L. Taylor 1993: 28). This practice of the right-hand monk and the left-hand monk of the Buddha is depicted in a model of a Burmese shrine room from Mandalay palace in the 19th century.²¹ This model of monastic hierarchy is still observed by the contemporary Zawti and reflects the Zawti's orthodoxy and strict observance of the monastic rules and structure as they understand it to have been laid out during the time of the Buddha (see Chapter Six).

With the permission of the abbot Venerable Vāradhamma, Venerable Paññāvaṇṇa set out on foot to Yangon. The distance from Loi Lek to Yangon is over 1000 kilometres and Venerable Paññāvaṇṇa and his accompanying monks would have had to cross the Burma-China border and then travel south, across almost the entire length of the country on foot. Zawti monks are prohibited from using any form other transportation other than boat. They also must walk barefooted in public, in contrast to the general Burmese practice of removing shoes indoors and at pagodas, which means that if Zawti monks want to travel anywhere then they must walk

²¹ <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O57777/shrine-unknown/>

barefoot. The Zawti monastic regulations regarding travel will be examined in further detail in Chapter Five. As far as I am aware, from reading the Zawti texts available to me, the Zawti monks always walked when they migrated rather than travelling by boat.

Once Venerable Paññāvaṇṇa arrived in the capital city he settled in a place called Aung Bon Tha on the outskirts of Yangon. After some time, Venerable Paññāvaṇṇa returned to the main Zawti temple in Loi Lek to report on the progress that had been made in Yangon. In 1836, a year after Venerable Paññāvaṇṇa had set off for Yangon, the abbot Venerable Vāradhamma had passed away and since the community were unsure if or when Venerable Paññāvaṇṇa would return, Sao Yasodhamma had been appointed as abbot (Personal Interview, 21 February 2020).

The appointment of Venerable Yasodhamma did not sit well with Venerable Vaṇṇavatī, who felt that as the right-hand monk he should have been the first in line to become abbot after Venerable Vāradhamma. Venerable Paññāvaṇṇa decided that he could not remain in Loi Lek under such circumstances and returned to Yangon with thirty-one monks and twenty households (Interview in Yangon, 21 February 2020).²² According to a stone inscription that remains at Aung Bon Tha temple today, Venerable Paññāvaṇṇa arrived back in Yangon in 1841 and established Aung Bon Tha as a Zawti monastery with himself as abbot. The Zawti laypeople who had accompanied him settled in a village next to the monastery. For around twenty years, the main branch in Loi Lek sent down rice supplies to Yangon to support the Zawti community. The Yangon branch established its own committee of *gopakas* (guardian or watchman), i.e., a committee of trustees, to oversee the temple affairs and support the Venerable Paññāvaṇṇa (Personal Interview, 21 February 2020). This event marks the expansion of the Zawti monastic and lay community into Yangon.

This story, recounted to me by the Yangon Zawti community, and detailed in the stone carving that remains at Aung Bon Tha Monastery in Yangon, differs to the account provided in *Pī Kon Kham*. According to *Pī Kon Kham*, during a period of unrest in the areas surrounding Loi Lek, the right-hand monk named Tsau Paññāvaṇṇa was invited to Yangon by Zawti laity in Yangon.

²² The Yangon Zawti said that Venerable Paññāvaṇṇa returned to Yangon with 31 monks. Their understanding is based on the stone inscription housed at Aung Bon Tha. However, in *Long Khoe Zawti*, it states that he returned with 6 sang long. It is not clear which is the correct figure and if it was *bhikkhus* or *sang long* that returned with Venerable Paññāvaṇṇa (1997: 21).

Tsau Paññāvāṇṇa led six novices from Loi Lek to Yangon and once they arrived in Yangon, they never returned to Loi Lek (1997: 21). From then on, there were two Zawti monasteries, the monastery in Loi Lek and the monastery in Yangon, and each monastery held their own separate *poi sang long* (novice ordination festival) and ordinations (1997: 21).

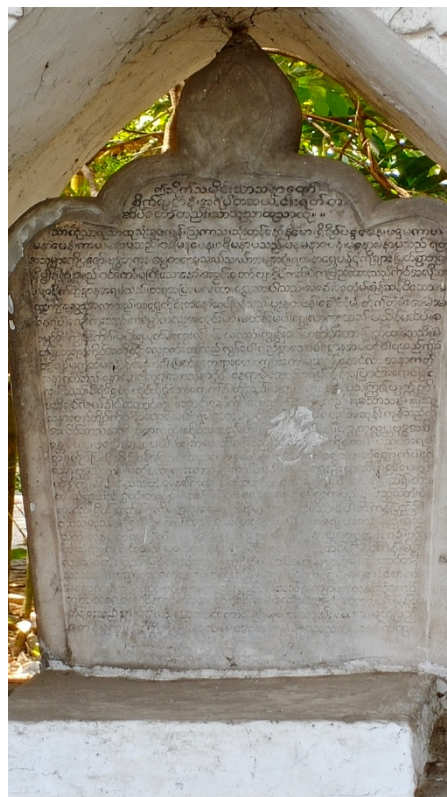
After Venerable Vaṇṇavatī, there were seven different Zawti abbots at Aung Bon Tha. When Venerable Sobhana, the final Zawti abbot at Aung Bon Tha, stepped down from monkhood, the *gopaka* from Aung Bon Tha went to Paññālaṅkāra Monastery. They asked for a Zawti monk to follow them back down to Yangon to lead the monastery there. The Mohnyin *gopaka* decided that it would be easier, for the sake of organization, to have only one monastic headquarters, which would be maintained at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery in Mohnyin (Communication with a trustee at Aung Bon Tha Monastery 2020). I do not know the date of when the last Zawti abbot stepped down at Aung Bon Tha, but given that the Zawti community had arrived in 1841, that were seven abbots afterwards, and that the average duration of an abbot for the Zawti, according to the table of Zawti abbots provided in the Appendix A, lasts 20 years, my best guess is that it would have been at some point in the late-mid 20th century. This tallied with the Yangon community's attempt at restoration through inviting a Shwegyin monk in 1986.

In 1986, the Aung Bon Tha *gopaka* travelled to Māhagandhāyon Kyaung Taik in Mandalay and invited Tsau Songsara to be the abbot at Aung Bon Tha, who accepted and remains as abbot to this day. Māhagandhāyon Kyaung is a Shwegyin monastery, built in 1908, and considered the most famous monastic college in contemporary Myanmar (Buswell et al 2013: 93). The Shwegyin *nikāya* is the second largest of the nine official *gāing* in Myanmar. They are considered more orthodox than the Thudhamma *nikāya* because of their strict observance of the *Vinaya*. The decision of the Aung Bon Tha *gopaka* to recruit an abbot from Māhagandhāyon suggests that the Yangon community considered Shwegyin monastic standard as comparable to Zawti monasticism, an idea which I shall explore in Chapter Five.

A small Zawti community of Zawti elders remain at Aung Bon Tha. When I interviewed the elders, some of which were in their eighties, they remarked that in their lifetime the Zawti community in Yangon were in contact with lay communities in Mong Khon (Mangshi, China), Namhkam, and Mohnyin. They recalled that during their childhood some Zawti groups sent their boys to Yangon to get ordained at Aung Bon Tha rather than Paññālaṅkāra Monastery in

Mohnyin. The Yangon Zawti elders commented that since Venerable Paññāvanna had been the right-hand man back in the Loi Lek days, his lineage was considered by some as more authoritative than the lineage headed by Venerable Yasodhamma. They said that communication with Zawti groups outside of Yangon ceased when World War II broke out in 1939 and did not recover after.

The Yangon Zawti community still have their own *wat* and continue to maintain their traditions (see Chapter Seven). However, the monastery is now a mainstream Shan monastery, and most of the congregants are non-Zawti. This means that there were two active Zawti monasteries in Myanmar up until 1986 when Tsau Songsara took over as abbot at Aung Bon Tha. After that, Paññālaṅkāra Monastery in Mohnyin became the only Zawti monastic headquarters. The existence of the Yangon Zawti community with their own monastic lineage until the late-mid 20th century (I have explained how I have come to this dating above), reaffirms that fact that the Zawti did not always have a “one-monastery and headquarters concept of leadership” as described by Mendelson (1975: 233).



(Image of the Burmese stone inscription at Aung Bon Tha Temple that details the Paññāvāṇṇa's journey to Yangon. I am not sure when the stone inscription was installed. Photo taken and sent to me by a congregant of the Aung Bon Tha temple in February 2020).

1.4. The Remaining Loi Lek Years

Returning to the history of the Zawti in the nineteenth century, according to the *Long Khoe Zawti*, the Loi Lek years were a period of expansion on both sides of the Shweli river. The Shweli river separates Burma and China, and in the nineteenth century it was a porous border where travel was not restricted. The fact that the Zawti expanded their lay communities in the Shan States on the Burma side of the border while the Zawti monks were settled in China, indicates that the Zawti maintained and strengthened transnational lay patronage during this period. The Zawti established eighteen *tai wat* in the northern Shan States which were under Burmese governance (*Long Khoe Zawti* 1997: 18). They also established multiple villages at the foot of the mountain Loi Lek and three *tai wat* (temples) in Mong Mao (modern day Ruili in China), close to the banks of the Shweli river (*Long Khoe Zawti* 1997: 18). The term *tai wat* literally means ‘Shan temple’ but has a specific meaning in the Zawti context. For the Zawti, the *tai wat* is a temple with no resident monks that is used to carry out community rituals and to house Buddha images and *lik long* texts (see Chapter Seven).

The Zawti arrived in Loi Lek with only five *bhikkhus*, but by the peak of the eighty-year period they are described as having no less than three hundred monks at any given time and having a thriving Shan and Palaung lay congregation (*Long Khoe Zawti* 1997: 18). According to *Long Khoe Zawti*, Loi Lek was conducive to the expansion of the Zawti monastic and lay tradition because of the agricultural landscape of the region. There was ample farmland and rice paddy, as well as forests for collecting firewood, which meant that the Zawti were able to sustain themselves there for a long time (*Long Khoe Zawti* 1997:18).

Although the Zawti had been in the Loi Lek since the late eighteenth century, the construction of the monastery in Loi Lek was not completed until 1849 under the abbotship of Venerable Yasodhamma (1774-1859) who, as we know, had succeeded Venerable Vāradhamma, as abbot in Loi Lek in 1836 (*Long Khoe Zawti* 1997: 35, 2021: 13). According to the *King Si* Chronicle the Zawti had hired Chinese workers to dig the ground of monastery site in preparation in 1827 (*King Si* 2021: 11). This type of contracted digging is common practice in Tai communities since the geographical area is mountainous and needs levelling before buildings can be constructed and it is still done today (Personal Communication with Jotika Khur-Yearn 2021).

According to the *King Si* Chronicle in 1858 the Zawti experienced a “year of crisis”, when many monks died. The cause of death is not detailed in the *King Si* Chronicle but, the date coincides with the outbreak of the third plague pandemic which broke out in 1855 in Yunnan and led to an excess of 12 million deaths in India and China. Venerable Yasodhamma passed away in 1859 and was succeeded by Venerable Kitisāra (*King Si* 2021: 14). In 1861 the great monastery at Loi Lek was completely destroyed (*King Si* 2021: 13). According to the *King Si* Chronicle, the Kachin (it is not clear if this is an army or a group of villagers) set fire to the monastery and the monks had to live in a *tsalop* (Shan: ‘resting place’) for a month and fourteen days before they moved on to Mong Mao (modern day Ruili, Yunnan) (*King Si* 2021: 14). In *Long Khoe Zawti* it is noted that Kachin and Panthay Chinese also lived in Loi Lek (*Long Khoe Zawti* 1997: 18). The Panthay Chinese, who refer to themselves as Hui, are ethnically Han Chinese Sunni Muslims who originate from Yunnan. I am not able to find any records of the specific conflict between the Zawti and the Kachin but, this incident place at the time of the Panthay Rebellion (1856-1873), a rebellion of the Panthay, along with other ethnic groups including the Kachin, against the Manchu rulers of the Qing dynasty in Yunnan. The Panthay rebellion persisted for nearly two decades and resulted it considerable fatalities and yhe displacement of communities who were forced to flee (J. C. Scott 2009: 154). The Kachin attack on the Zawti monastery in Loi Lek could have been part of this rebellion.

The destruction of the Loi Lek monastery resulted in a period of frequent migration across the border and beyond into Yangon. The Zawti stayed in Mong Mao for two years, until 1864 (*Long Khoe Zawti* 1997: 36). During this time the abbot Venerable Kittisāra passed away and was succeeded by Venerable Indivāra (1829-1889). In 1867, all the monks moved to Aung Bon Tha, the monastery in Yangon which had been established by Venerable Vaṇṇavatī, briefly reuniting the two lineages (*King Si* 2021: 15). Then, in 1870, the group of monks who had arrived at the Yangon monastery in 1867 went back to Loi Lek and the Zawti were separated into two groups again (*King Si* 2021: 16). In 1871 the Loi Lek group moved to Mong Haw Pet near Mong Mao (modern day Ruili in China). In 1872 they moved again, up the Salween river to Mong Khon (Mangshi in present day China) (*Long Khoe Zawti* 1997: 36, 2021: 17,18). The Zawti monks moved again in 1874, down to a village called Sai Leung where a terrible tragedy occurred. It is reported in the Zawti *King Si* Chronicle that in 1876, the *poi sang long* novice ordination ceremony was invaded by outsiders and many *sang long* novices were killed (*King Si* 2021: 18). No further information is provided in the *King Si* Chronicle.

It is written in *Long Khoe Zawti* that the following year, 1877, the Zawti monks relocated to Sai Leung in Mong Mit (Burmese: Momiek) and that the year after the group moved to Kong Mao in Namkham in Northern Shan State, close to the China border (*Long Khoe Zawti* 1997: 36; *King Si* 2021:19-10). The Zawti remained in Kong Mao, Namkham, throughout the duration of Venerable Indivāra’s abbotship. According to the *Pī Kon Kham*, Venerable Indivāra passed away in 1889 and was succeeded by Venerable Nandapañña (*Pī Kon Kham* 2016: 44).

1.4.1. The Shan States as a ‘zone of refuge’?

In this chapter we have learned that the Zawti moved frequently throughout the Shan States and remained in Loi Lek, a Shan area within the Chinese sphere of orbit for almost a century. I now want to interrogate a theory put forward by E. M. Mendelson in *Sangha and State* and reaffirmed by J. C. Scott in *The Art of Not Being Governed*, that the Shan States serve as a zone of refuge “to sects chased out of Burma proper for ‘heretical’ beliefs” and how the Zawti might be seen an example of such sects (Mendelson 1975, J. C. Scott 2009).

So far, in tracing the migration of the early Zawti community we have learned that the Zawti tradition was founded in Upper Burma in the seventeenth century, and they began their retreat into the Shan States in the mid-eighteenth century. This retreat was the result of political dissent catalysed by the Zawti’s divergent attitude towards the treatment of pagodas and merit-making during the reign of King Mahadhammaraza Dipadi (r. 1733-1752). The Zawti established themselves on the China side of the border where they could bypass Thudhamma reform measures, specifically Bodawhpaya and Ñāṇābhivaṃsa’s Thudhamma reforms measures of late eighteenth century. In this way, the Shan States did serve as a zone of refuge for the Zawti who were considered heretical by the Burmese Kings from as early as the rule of King Mahadhammaraza Dipadi.

J. C. Scott, the contemporary political scientist, draws on Mendelson’s ‘zone of refuge’ perspective by describing the Shan Hills as a religious “frontier” beyond which central lowland orthodoxy, in this case the orthodox State Sangha, could not easily be imposed (2009: 155). J.C. Scott argues that the Shan Hills served as a zone of refuge for schismatic sects who were persecuted and forced out of central valley regions where religious orthodoxy was proscribed (2009: 156). J. C. Scott uses the Zawti as an example of a “heretical” sect who escaped lowland

central authority by fleeing into the mountainous peripheries of ‘Zomia’ (2009:156-157).²³ Relying on Mendelson’s account of the Zawti, J.C. Scott describes the Zawti as following some of the heretical practices of the Paramats and adopting some distinctive Shan Buddhist customs along the way (2009: 155).

J. C. Scott uses the example of the Zawti to introduce a discussion of Shan Buddhism representing “something of a living historical archaeology of dissident Buddhist sects” (2009: 127). He suggests that this could be the case since the Shan only adopted Buddhism in the sixteenth century and Shan State was the refuge of banned sects from the Burmese core (2009: 127). Drawing on J.G. Scott’s *Gazeteer* from 1900 and Leach’s *Political System of Highland Burma* from 1954, J. G. Scott summarizes that Shan Buddhists are “not very devout” and draws on descriptions of Shan monks as “armed traders with fortified positions, who smoke and wear skullcaps” (2009: 157).

The Zawti, as I will demonstrate in this thesis, are not a suitable example to support Mendelson’s theory of Shan Buddhism in the Shan States being of a more heretical variety in comparison to their lowland neighbours. The Zawti’s ‘heresy’ is related to their orthodoxy and interpretation of the Vinaya and their unwillingness to conform to the reforms of individual incumbent *thathanabaing*, who championed their own specific interpretations of texts as authoritative. J. C. Scott’s descriptions of heretical Shan monks are based on observations of monastic behaviour rather than an understanding of the types of issues that actually resulted in religious schisms in Burmese Buddhism, namely disagreements over literature considered authoritative (as evidenced in the robe controversy), and how this translates into monastic discipline. Jotika Khur-Yearn has highlighted that the characterization of the Shan as ‘heretical’ is based on Western scholarship from the last 150 years that has not benefited from the access or understanding of traditional Shan *lik long* literature, in which traditional Shan Buddhist doctrine and interpretation is recorded (2012: 229). The ‘heresy’ of the Zawti is not the same type of ‘heresy’ described by J.C. Scott to support his argument that the Shan Hills serve as a “shadow society” in contrast to the orthodox lowland (2009: 157).

²³ Zomia, an alternative term for the Southeast Asian Massif, is a geographical term used to refer to all the lands at altitudes above approximately three hundred metres all the way from the Central Highlands of Vietnam, to northeastern India, the Shan Hills in northern Myanmar, the mountains of Southwest China, and the highlands of Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand (J. C. Scott 2009: ix).

While I agree with Mendelson and J.G. Scott in the broad sense that the Shan States served as a ‘zone of refuge’, in that the Zawti did retreat into the Shan Hills in the eighteenth century to evade Burmese royal authority, I do not agree with the characterization that the Shan States were a type of lawless hideaway for schismatic sects. As I have detailed in this chapter, by the mid-eighteenth century the Zawti were expelled multiple times by both the governor of Mong Pawn and the *saopha* of Hsipaw on the grounds of religious dissidence. They were expelled from Shan States by Shan leaders, who were continuously negotiating their status inside and outside of Burmese royal jurisdiction, Chinese imperial power, and later British colonial authority over the centuries. Further, when the Zawti remained in Loi Lek in the frontier region within the Chinese domain from the late eighteenth century into the nineteenth century, while they might have had more religious freedoms, they were still susceptible to rebellions, inter-ethnic conflicts, and plagues. For the Zawti, it was the act of migration itself, moving frequently and often, that allowed them to evade authority and preserve their distinct religious tradition rather than the socio-political conditions of the Shan Hills.

The Zawti therefore challenge the idea that the frontier region was a ‘zone of refuge’ where sects could go unchallenged, the perception that the hills breed heterodoxy, and the idea that the lowland Burmese royal court were the only group to target divergent sects as inferred by Scott (Scott 2009: 156).

1.5. Conclusion

In this Chapter I have provided the first detailed overview of the early Zawti history in English. Professor Tadayoshi Murakami includes a summary of the Zawti history using the same sources as I do in his chapter titled “Buddhist History from the “periphery”: Towards a History of Shan Buddhism” published in Japanese in *The History of Cultural of Upland Peoples in Mainland Southeast Asia* (2014). I became aware of Murakami’s chapter in April 2022 when I reached out to Professor Takahiro Kojima, who has written about the Zawti in his research on Shan *tsale* (*zare*) practitioners along the Myanmar-China border, to discuss our shared interest in the Zawti (2012, 2013).²⁴ Professor Kojima, who is a colleague of Professor Murakami, kindly sent me a copy of *The History of Cultural of Upland Peoples in Mainland Southeast Asia* on his behalf.

In this chapter I have utilised Zawti texts, particularly the accounts of Zawti monastic migration in *Long Khoe Zawti* (1996), *Kyong Loi Zawti* (2003), *Pī Kon Kham* (2016), and the *King Si Chronicle* (2021), to piece together the early Zawti history. The Zawti’s own publications, produced at a time when they sought to maintain a separate identity, after absorption into the Thudhamma Nikāya under Ne Win’s reforms, have been crucial because, until now, this history was unknown outside of the Zawti themselves. The Zawti sources refer only to events in their own tradition with little comment on external events or contextualisation. To provide the context and in an attempt to identify the historical incidents and other events mentioned in the Zawti sources, I have also drawn from Burmese historical sources, royal chronicles, interviews conducted during fieldwork, a Burmese inscription at one of the Zawti temples, and academic literature. These additional academic sources only provide rather fragmentary and limited information pertains to the Zawti since their focus tends to lie elsewhere.

In addition to providing a historical overview of the early Zawti tradition, in this chapter I have also attempted to address some key misconceptions about the Zawti tradition that have been perpetuated in academic scholarship such as J. G. Scott’s claim that the Zawti tradition was founded in the eighteenth century by a monk called Shin Tabaung in Sinbugyun. I have also

²⁴ I came to know of Kojima’s work when I began translating the Zawti *Pī Kon Kham* text, in which the sentence ‘a Japanese named Kojima arrived and learnt the history of the tradition’ is embedded within a description of a new text donation ceremony held at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery.

provided context and nuance to other claims such as E. M. Mendelson's remark that the Zawti monks follow a one-monastery style of organization. In addressing such claims, I have also demonstrated how such details have been reproduced in subsequent scholarship, which has perpetuated a characterization of the Zawti that is not entirely accurate and is misleading on several points.

In examining the early history of the Zawti through their own historical records, I attempt to contextualise the historical and social conditions of the development of the Zawti tradition. The Zawti have had to navigate a tumultuous political and social landscape since their inception and have experienced periods of direct confrontations with the state as well as periods of relative isolation with very little outside contact. In some ways, the unstable political landscape provided the right conditions for the Zawti to enjoy obscurity. In the midst of political and social upheaval, despite having established an extensive network of lay communities as a result of the frequent migration of the monks, the Zawti have remained hidden in plain sight. Now that I have provided some historical context to the early Zawti tradition, I shall turn my attention to development of the Zawti tradition from the colonial period up to present-day Myanmar and China.

Chapter Two

The History of the Zawti from the Colonial Period Onwards

Following on from Chapter One, in this chapter I trace the history and development of the Zawti tradition from the mid-to-late nineteenth up until the 1980s, when the Zawti monastic tradition was absorbed into the Thudhamma *gaing* during Ne Wins religious reforms.

I provide an overview of modern Burmese history, starting with the fall of the Burmese Empire and the ascension of British colonial powers in the nineteenth century, to post WWII independent Burma, then socialist Burma. At each point, I situate the Zawti within these periods of great social and political change, examining how they have been impacted by the numerous Sangha reforms that have shaped the contemporary Burmese Sangha. In Chapter One we learned how the Zawti retreated into the Shan States in the eighteenth century, and in this chapter, we shall learn how they reintegrated themselves back into the Burmese Sangha in the twentieth century.

2.1. The End of the Burmese Empire: The Colonial Period

The period of Zawti history and migration in the mid-to-late nineteenth century is situated within the broader historical context of the colonization of Burma and its absorption into the British Empire. The British had been expanding their presence in Burma since the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-1826) when King Bagyidaw, who had succeeded Bodawhpaya in 1819, lost Assam, Manipur, and Arakan to the British. Bagyidaw was overthrown by his younger brother Tharrawaddy, who reigned until 1846. Tharrawaddy was succeeded by his son Pagan Min in 1846, who was king when the Second Anglo-Burmese War broke out in 1852. By 1853, the British had captured Pegu and had control of Lower Burma. Pagan Min abdicated in 1853 and was succeeded by King Mindon (r. 1853-1878) who had opposed the war. The Zawti remained in Loi Lek during this turbulent period, where they were within the Chinese orbit and remained outside the Burmese royal domain. Although the Zawti were isolated from Burmese royal influence during this period, changes to the Burmese Sangha during this time had a lasting effect, which impacted the Zawti when they returned to Burma later in the nineteenth century.

When King Mindon ascended to the throne in 1853, he inherited a diminished kingdom and problems regarding the role of the Sangha in what was now Upper Burma and British Lower Burma (Mendelson 1975: 80-81). While the *thathanabaing* had previously enjoyed jurisdiction over wherever the Burmese king reigned, his power was now limited to what remained of Upper Burma. It was during Mindon's reign that sectarian divides occurred and the sects like the Shwegyin, Dwaya and Hngettwin emerged, over differences in the interpretation of Vinaya. These splits marked the end of the united Thudhamma *gaing* which had been formed under King Bodawhpaya and his *thathanabaing* Ñāṇābhivaṃsa in the previous century.

The rest of Upper Burma and the Shan States fell to the British after the Third Anglo-Burmese War in 1885 during the reign of King Thibaw the son of King Mindon, who had ascended to the throne after the death of his father in 1878. The Konbaung dynasty fell and King Thibaw was exiled to India. The entirety of Burma was now under the rule of the British Raj as a province of India. The new colonial rule ushered in a period of rapid change in Burma, with new economic structures and systems of authority. Colonial rule marked a new period of uncertainty for the Burmese Sangha in the decades that followed. Burmese Buddhists read the political and social changes as signs that the Buddha's *sāsana* (teachings) was deteriorating. In response to the loss of the Burmese monarchy and the declining authority of the Sangha,

Burmese lay Buddhists had to band together to slow its deterioration (Turner 2017: 2). Alicia Turner writes that the Burmese laity reimagined themselves as protectors of Buddhism, and in their role as preservers of the *sāsana*, they initiated new waves of publishing, preaching, and organizing to counteract decline. The Burmese laity became the drivers of the re-established “moral community” in the new colonial climate, and this gave rise to new conceptions of lay morality which took on a distinctively stricter flair. I shall examine the impacts of colonialism on Burmese lay morality in further detail in Chapter Eight.

A key issue for the Burmese Sangha during this period was the question of what would happen to the position of the *thathanabaing* now that the British were totally in charge. King Thibaw had appointed Taungdaw Sayadaw and the Shwegyin Sayadaws as *thathanabaings* but the Shwegyin left, leaving Taungdaw Sayadaw as the head of the Thudhamma Council (Mendelson 1975: 180). In 1887, Taungdaw Sayadaw embarked on a momentous trip down the Irrawaddy River on a river-boat steamer from Mandalay to Prome and then to Rangoon by rail. It was the largest event that had been held since the British led King Thibaw into exile. When Taungdaw Sayadaw arrived in Rangoon he released an important statement that: “[the] British government recognizes the *Thathanabaing* as the head of the Buddhist religion in Lower and Upper Burma and desires to see his authority respected and supported in all matters concerning the Buddhist religion” (Turner 2014: 11). The colonial government sought the cooperation of the *thathanabaing* as a government-recognised religious authority in the hopes that it would suppress monastic-led insurgency. This recognition was phrased as an acknowledgement of an existing status but in fact it resulted in the creation of a new kind of authority (Turner 2014; Kirichenko 2010).

There had been no *thathanabaing* in Lower Burma which was annexed by the British after the Second Anglo-Burmese War in 1852. When the British took Upper Burma and endorsed Taungdaw Sayadaw as the *thathanabaing*, the position took on a new meaning. Previously, the *thathanabaing* had been the head of only the Thudhamma lineage. Other monastic groups like the Shwegyin who were also royally recognised, and many of the new monastic sects in Lower Burma, had not recognised that Thudhamma *thathanabaing*’s authority at all (Turner 2014: 11). But now, with the merging of Upper and Lower Burma under the British and the new overarching authority of the colonial-backed *thathanabaing*, the boundaries of authority were blurred. Taungdaw Sayadaw passed away in 1895. He was succeeded as *thathanabaing* by Pakhan Sayadaw who was thought of as the centre of the old guard of the Thudhamma

hierarchy (Turner 2014, Janaka Ashin 2016). Pakhan Sayadaw opposed the British government's education efforts and in turn, the British ignored the monastic elections that Pakhan Sayadaw had won and refused to acknowledge his authority as *thathanabaing* (Turner 2014: 61). The British refused to appoint a new *thathanabaing* until after Pakhan Sayadaw passed away in 1900 (ibid: 61).

The Zawti left Namkham in northern Shan State in 1896, eleven years after the Shan States fell to the British in 1885, when the fate of the *thathanabaing* was in flux. They walked 906 kilometres south to Shwegyin, a township in what is now Bago Region in Myanmar, just north of Yangon.²⁵ This was the first time the Zawti had left the Shan Hills since their exile from Upper Burma, and they returned to a very different social and political climate than the one they had left in the eighteenth century. In what remains of this section, I shall examine the socio-political context in which the Zawti found themselves on their return to Burma.

The Zawti remained in Shwegyin for seven years. Shwegyin is home to the Shwegyin Nikaya, a monastic group founded in the mid-nineteenth century by the monk U Jāgara. The Shwegyin monks had broken away from the Thudhamma majority during the rule of King Mindon Min (r. 1853-1878), a period characterized by monastic sectarian splits which resulted in the creation of the Dwaya, Weluwun, Hngettwin and other monastic groups. All of these groups, including the Shwegyin, broke away from the court-backed Thudhamma on the grounds that it was too lax.

The Shwegyin Nikāya is now the second largest of the nine approved *gaing* (sects) in contemporary Myanmar. Shwegyin monks are characterised by their strict adherence to the Vinaya and are considered more 'orthodox' than the majority Thudhamma *gaing*. U Jāgara passed away in 1894, just before the Zawti arrived in Shwegyin. Whilst the Zawti migration to the place where the Shwegyin monastic tradition was founded and based might have been coincidence, the shared features between the two groups and the crisis point of the Shwegyin founder's death suggests that this journey concerned some kind of collaboration between the two groups. Many of the strict monastic practices that set the Zawti apart from mainstream

²⁵ There is no obvious river route from Namkham to Shwegyin. It is possible that they travelled by boat but from the Zawti material I have access to, they are usually described as walking. Hopefully I can find more material to explore this further.

Theravada are shared with the Shwegyin monks. This will be explored in more detail at a later point in this thesis, in Chapter Five.

Whatever the intended purpose of the move to Shwegyin, the Zawti monks left Shwegyin in 1903, after seven years, and moved back to Mong Khon (*King Si* 2021: 24). Venerable Nandapañña had passed away in 1901 and was succeeded by Venerable Paṇḍita (*Pī Khon Kham* 2016: 44). Venerable Paṇḍita passed away in 1910 and Venerable Tseyanda took over as abbot (*Pī Kon Kham* 2016: 44). According to the Zawti *King Si* Chronicle in 1910 some of the Zawti monks went on a reconnaissance trip to Mong Yang (Mohnyin) in Kachin State, Myanmar (*King Si* 2021: 26). In 1911 the monks migrated to Pāng Nim and then to Mong Khon (*King Si* 2021:26). The following year, they returned to Kong Kala, Namkham where they remained until 1934 (*ibid* 2021: 27).

Venerable Tseyanda passed away in 1919 and was succeeded by Venerable Kittinanda who passed away in 1922 (*Pī Kon Kham* 2016: 44). The abbotship was taken over by Venerable Govinda. The Zawti monastic community remained in Kong Kala during Venerable Govinda's abbotship until he passed away in 1932. He was succeeded by Venerable Sundanda (1876-1941) who moved the headquarters from Namkham to Pang Nim in 1934 CE (*Long Khoe Zawti* 1997: 36).

In 1938, just a year before the outbreak of World War II in 1939, the Zawti relocated to Loikaw (*ibid* 1997: 36). Venerable Sundanda passed away in 1941 and was succeeded by Venerable Yasodhamma (Nā Khing)²⁶ (1881-1951) who moved the Zawti monks to a village called Nat Simitsom in Mong Mit, in northern Shan State in 1942 (*ibid* 1997: 36). Venerable Yasodhamma (Nā Khing) moved the Zawti monks from Nat Simitsom to another village in Mong Mit called Pheuk Nām in 1946 (*King Si* 2021: 32). The Zawti's migration from Loikaw to Nat Simitsom in Mong Mit took place in 1942 just before the Japanese seized Burma from the British during World War II.

When World War II broke out in 1939, Burmese anti-colonial activist parties, namely the Dobama Asiayone (commonly known as the Thakins) and the Poor Man's Party merged to

²⁶ This is the second Zawti abbot called Yasodhamma. In *Pī Kon Kham* he is referred to as Yasodhamma (Nā Khing) to differentiate him from the first Venerable Yasodhamma who was an abbot at the Loi Lek monastery and passed away in 1859.

form the Freedom Bloc. The Freedom Bloc launched an anti-war campaign on the grounds that the war was an imperialist war and was not related to the issue of Burmese independence (Charney 2009: 48). The British responded by arresting and imprisoning members of the Freedom Bloc (ibid: 48). In 1941 a group of Burmese nationalists led by Thakin Aung San, who would later become known as the ‘father of the nation’ of Burma, formed a group called the ‘Thirty Comrades’ with the aim of achieving Burmese independence (Sai Aung Tun 2009: 192). The group of Thirty Comrades received Japanese military training and joined forces with the Japanese imperial army to capture Burma from the British in 1942. In exchange for their help, they were promised independence. In 1943 General Toji, the prime minister of the Japanese imperial government, declared that Japan would support “the construction of a Myanmar state” (ibid 2009: 192). The Japanese appointed Dr Ba Maw (the former leader of the Poor Man’s Party) as head of state and he appointed Thakin Aung San as Defence Minister (ibid:192-193).

A key part of establishing the new State of Myanmar involved marking out the territory of the new Myanmar. In September 1943 the new territory which was drawn up was confined to areas around the valley of Sittang and the Irrawaddy rivers and Tenasserim (Sai Aung Tun 2009: 193). Although the Japanese had taken control of the Shan States, they were not included in the new Myanmar state territory, and the Japanese ensured that the local *saopha* remained as leaders of each state. The Japanese used the Shan States as bargaining chips with Thailand and the newly formed Myanmar (Sai Aung Tun 2009: 194). They offered up the Shan states as gifts that could be given in return for Thai and Burmese cooperation with the Japanese conquest of Southeast Asia (ibid 2009: 194).

The Shan States became a war zone when the British joined forces with the Chinese nationalist government to defend the Shan States. The British attempted an evacuation to India, but the Japanese blocked the Myanmar-China road which linked Lashio in the northern Shan States to Kunming, in retaliation (ibid 2009: 200). Sai Aung Tun writes that the Myanmar-China road in northern Shan State came to be known as the “Road of Death” as many British, Chinese, Burmese and Japanese lives were lost in the area (ibid 2009: 200). In 1945 the Japanese surrendered to the Allied forces and the British regained control over Burma. By now, the Shan States had been under continuous periods of foreign intervention for more than half a century (ibid 2009: 207). I do not have any details regarding how the Zawti communities were affected

by the war but there were communities throughout this region and Zawti lay people were undoubtedly impacted by the conflict.²⁷

²⁷ In Burma, during war and turbulent times, some learned monks disrobed, but some then started teaching Pali etc. as laymen. I do not know if any Zawti monks disrobed during WWII.

2.2. Post-World War II: Independent Burma

Post WWII, the British were losing grip of their empire and were preparing to leave Burma. The frontier region which included Shan States was a topic of considerable concern. Technically the Shan States were governed by the British, but they had remained outside of “ministerial” Burma (Charney 2009: 65). When it became clear that the British would soon be leaving, the local *saopha* leaders worried that the Frontier Areas would remain part of the British Empire while the rest of Burma would enjoy independence. In 1947 Shan leaders of the thirty-four federated Shan States along with Karen, Kachin, and Chin representatives met with Burmese leaders, including Thakin Aung San who had been appointed the 5th Prime Minister of the British-Burma crown colony. They met to discuss how the region would be governed once the British had left and Burma was granted independence.

In 1947, the Panglong Agreement was signed which declared that the Hill Peoples would join Burma and request independence from Britain. In agreeing to do so they would be granted representation in the Executive Council (a provisional cabinet proposed before the Burmese national election). The Hill Peoples would be granted full autonomy in internal administration of the Frontier Areas and would enjoy the rights and privileges regarded as fundamental in democratic countries. The Federated Shan States would enjoy their own financial autonomy as they had before (Panglong Agreement 1947). The Shan *saophas* also requested the right to leave the Union of Burma after ten years of Burmese Independence if they were dissatisfied with the new federation. Bertil Lintner writes that the British were no doubt putting pressure on these conversations to facilitate a hasty withdrawal from the region. The British were concurrently in the process of partitioning the Indian subcontinent which had broken out in civil war and violence in Bengal and the Punjab and would have wanted to avoid a similar situation arising in Burma (Lintner 1984: 408).

The British officially left Burma in December 1947 and in January 1948 the Union of Burma was established with U Nu (also known as Thakin Nu) as the first Prime Minister of Burma and Thakin Aung San as deputy Prime Minister. The conditions of the Panglong Agreement were never fully actualized as Aung San who had led the negotiations was assassinated in July 1947. The Shan States had previously enjoyed self-governance under British rule, but they now found themselves in a power struggle with the new Burmese government and the new Union of Burma of which they were now members. U Nu nullified the Panglong Agreement and the

Shan States never received the independent autonomy that they had been promised. In 1949 Shan State was invaded by the Kuomintang (KMT) forces who were pushed out of southern Yunnan and into the Shan States by the Chinese Communist Party. The Shan States then became a military base for the KMT who were backed by Taiwan and the U.S. security forces who sought to reconquer China. In an effort to thwart the KMT stronghold in Shan State, the Union of Burma government sent Burmese troops to the region and declared a major part of southern Shan States as under military administration (ibid 1984: 409). While this move was made to suppress the KMT it simultaneously undermined the powers of the local Shan *saopha*. The Shan found themselves with significantly decreased autonomy and in the middle of multiple ongoing conflicts.

The current political situation in Shan State is a direct result of these political events. Shan State is now the largest administrative state in Myanmar which is divided into fourteen administrative divisions made up of seven states and seven regions. States are typically home to particular ethnic minorities and regions are predominantly Bamar, the majority ethnic group in Myanmar. Contemporary Shan State is home to several insurgent groups who continue to fight for Shan political autonomy and the region has experienced endless armed conflict for over half a century. It is under these circumstances that the Tai Zawti community has lived and continue to live.

The political situation in the Shan States has been turbulent since the inception of the Zawti tradition in the seventeenth century. However, it is through the lens of this period of instability during the post-colonial period specifically that we must consider the significance of Shan identity to the Tai Zawti. While the Tai Zawti are primarily a religious tradition, and they began outside of the Shan region, their identity is now associated with Shan ethnic and cultural identity. Throughout this chapter so far, we have learned how the Tai Zawti monks and lay people have moved throughout the Shan States and areas of Tai dominion since the eighteenth century. They established communities throughout these areas, which, at various points in history and up to today, are sites of conflict between various competing powers. The Tai Zawti are religious outsiders on account of their distinctive religious traditions and as a predominantly Shan ethnic community they are an ethnic minority in the broader Burmese nation state. Despite having some different religious beliefs, the Tai Zawti share ethnic solidarity with the

wider Shan community and being Shan is key aspect of Tai Zawti identity.²⁸ I examine the role of Shan ethnic identity and culture in the Tai Zawti tradition in more detail in Chapters Three and Eight.

2.2.1. Religious Reforms under U Nu

During this period U Nu introduced a number of measures to revive Buddhism in Burma. Michael Charney argues that U Nu's approach towards Buddhism and the state was motivated by three main factors. First that U Nu was inspired by genuine personal religiosity, second that monks had formed a powerful lobby since the end of WWII, and third that U Nu believed that promoting Buddhism was a means of deterring the population from the attraction of communism (Charney 2009: 88-89). U Nu began by passing the Vinicchaya Act or Ecclesiastical Courts Act in 1949 which established a Sangha council that would judge cases of monastic misbehaviour (ibid 2009: 89). In 1950 the Pali University and Dhammacariya Act was enacted to train monks and to produce missionary monks (ibid 2009: 89). The Buddha Sasana Council Act was also passed in 1950 which provided an official body to enforce the government's policies relating to Buddhism (ibid 2009: 89). This was followed by the Pali Education Board Act of 1952 which created a governing body to oversee government sponsored Pali examinations held for the monks (ibid 2009: 89).

At this time, the Zawti monastic community remained in Mong Mit where the abbot Venerable Yasodhamma (Nā Khing) passed away in 1951. He was succeeded by Venerable Kitidhamma (1892-1966) (*Pī Kon Kham* 2016: 44). In 1953 Venerable Kitidhamma led the Zawti monastic migration from Phak Nām in Mong Mit approximately 300km north, to Mohnyin (*Long Khoe Zawti* 2016: 37). The monks walked all the way which took a total of twenty days as they stopped for a night or two in villages along the way (ibid 2016: 37).

At the time of relocation, the Zawti Sangha consisted of fifty-three monks made up of eight *bhikkhus* and forty-five novices. The monks were accompanied by twelve *khing* (Shan: *khing* ၵံး: 'elder layman') from Mohnyin, nine *khing* and *nai* (Shan: *nai* ၵံး: 'elder woman') from

²⁸ Shan ethnicity is not essential to Tai Zawti identity however the vast majority of Tai Zawti monks and lay people are born into the tradition and most communities reside in Shan areas. I examine this topic in further detail in the Introduction, Chapter Six, Chapter Seven, and Chapter Eight.

Mong Mit and three *nai hoen som* (Shan: *nai* ခေံး: ‘elder woman’; *hoen* ဝိခေံး: ‘prepare’; *som* သွမ်း: ‘food’) (*Long Khoe Zawti* 2016: 38). This group of lay people attended to the monks throughout the journey and the *nai hoen som* cooked food for the monks. A full examination of the different lay roles within the Zawti lay community is examined in Chapters Six and Seven. The Zawti monastic community have remained in Mohnyin from 1953 until now.

The Zawti remained in Mohnyin in Kachin State the northernmost State in Burma during the period of post-colonial political turbulence. Down south in Yangon, tensions were rising within the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League (AFPFL) led by U Nu after the assassination of Aung San. U Nu stepped down as Prime Minister in 1956 and the AFPFL split into two factions, the ‘Stable AFPFL’ led by Kyaw Nyein and Ba Swe and the ‘Clean AFPFL’ led by U Nu. In 1958 U Nu made a special appeal to the monks at the All-Burma Clean AFPFL Conference at the World Peace Pagoda in Rangoon. He promised that if the Clean AFPFL won the next election they would officially declare Buddhism as the state religion (Charney 2009: 102). Elections were held in 1960 and the Clean AFPFL won the majority of seats and U Nu remained as Prime Minister.

The monks urged U Nu to keep his promise to make Buddhism the official religion of Burma. In 1961 the State Religion Act was passed, and Buddhism was adopted as the state religion. This meant that the government was now responsible for “maintaining, preserving, and printing the Pali Canon, holding a yearly consultation with leading monks, aiding in the restoration of damaged pagodas, constructing special hospitals throughout the country for monks, the protection of the religion, the promotion of study and practice of Buddhism, and a minimum state provision of half a percent of the state’s annual budget for religious activities” (ibid 2009: 103).

Ashin and Crosby argue that in overseeing these developments U Nu was emulating the traditional role of a Buddhist king, but his attempts to make Buddhism a state religion caused anxiety among Burma’s non-Buddhist minorities. This resulted in a non-Buddhist student demonstration at the tomb of Aung San who had advocated for a united and secular Burma (ibid 2009: 103). Acts of religious violence broke out including anti-Muslim violence committed by monks (ibid 2009: 102-104). This unrest made the military uneasy and there was a fear that in order to placate the ethnic minorities, U Nu would have to allow them greater

autonomy from central government (Ashin and Crosby 2017: 202). The establishment of Buddhism as the state religion intensified tension between the Sangha and State rather than alleviating it as was intended and contributed to the military coup d'état of 1962 led by General Ne Win, the Army Chief of Staff.

2.3. Socialist Burma: Ne Win's Sangha Reforms

On the 2nd of March 1962, General Ne Win staged a military coup, announcing the creation of a military government headed by the Revolutionary Council (Charney 2009: 108). In what follows, I shall examine the reforms introduced by Ne Win to contextualise the historical and political situation the Zawti found themselves in during this period. Ne Win introduced several Sangha reform measures which directly impacted the Zawti.

Ne Win's Revolutionary Council claimed that the main cause for the coup was the worrying negotiations going on between the U Nu government and Shan State leaders who were arguing that Burma should adopt a federal rather than a unitary government and that if they didn't then they would secede from the union, referencing the Panglong conference (ibid 2009: 108). Post-colonial Burma was deeply divided, and the threats being voiced by the Shan leaders contributed to Ne Win's decision to stage a coup. In addition to these concerns, Bechert argues that the success of the 1962 military coup can also be partly attributed to the experimental and unsuccessful religious policies implemented by U Nu (Bechert 1989: 305).

Many of the measures that U Nu had taken to establish Buddhism as the national religion were abrogated in the first year of the Revolutionary Council's leadership. The law requiring government offices to close on Buddhist sabbath days as part of the State Religion Proclamation Act of 1961 was repealed as was the ban on slaughtering cattle (Charney 2009: 117). The new Revolutionary Council repealed the Vinicchaya Tribunal Act, the Pali University and Dhammacariya Act and the Pali Education Board Act of 1951 (ibid 2009: 118). The state took over monastic court cases which had previously been sent to the *vinicchaya* courts.

Ne Win set up a pan-Buddhist organization called the Buddha Sāsana Sangha Organisation, *Buddha Thāthana Thanga Apwe* (BSSO) to conduct *vinicchaya* cases (Ashin and Crosby 2017: 203). In 1965 a meeting was held in Hmawbi to draft the new organization's constitution. One of the reform measures discussed was the introduction of registration cards for monks, novices, and nuns (ibid 2017: 204). As a result of the meeting all Buddhist *gaing* were asked to register with the new state-run Buddha Sāsana Sangha Organisation (BSSO). The proposition of such measures resulted in an uprising, and monks in Mandalay were involved in torching army trucks and government buildings (Charney 2009: 119). The BSSO reforms were

overwhelmingly rejected by monks across Burma and were not passed into law (Ashin and Crosby 2017: 204). This incident highlighted to Ne Win the influence the Sangha had over his policies. Ne Win aimed to manipulate control over the Sangha by winning over high ranking Buddhist monks who would in turn influence younger monks to ensure monastic cooperation and to encourage a politically disengaged Sangha that would not oppose his policies (ibid 2017: 204).

In 1979 Ne Win revisited the Sangha reform measures with the aim of actualising his ambition of setting up a single monastic organisation to oversee the entire Sangha (ibid 2017: 206). A State Council Meeting was held on 4 August 1979 where a draft was proposed that: 1) All the members of the Sangha (Order) shall observe and practice in compliance with the Vinaya Rules and 2) The Sangha shall unanimously elect and form the Boards of Juries to arbitrate, settle and decide all the religious disputes and monastic cases among the members of the Order (Bechert 1989: 307). A group of monks who would ultimately be elected by the monks themselves would be selected to lead to the organization of an ‘All-*gaing*-Sangha Meeting’ (Ashin and Crosby 2017: 207). This group was set up by the Ministry of Home and Religious Affairs who organised four sub-committees: management and finances, planning, record-keeping, and request writing (ibid 2017: 207). The planning sub-committee oversaw touring the country and listing all the monasteries, monks, novices and *gaings* across the 14 administrative regions of Burma (ibid 2017: 207). The Sangha Executive Committee (SEC) was established to represent the monks from across these regions and the number of representatives was determined by the total number of the monks in the area, taking the size and the *gaing* present in the area into consideration (ibid 2017: 207).

A group of 66 monks were selected to represent the nine main *nikāyas* or *gaing*. The terms *nikāya* and *gaing* are used by both monastic and lay people to describe Burmese monastic groups. *Nikāya* is a Pali term meaning ‘group’, and *gaing* is a Burmese term derived from the Pali *gaṇa* meaning “chapter” or “collection” which is sometimes translated as ‘sect’ (Carbine 2011: 76). Both terms are used interchangeably by Burmese monks, and it is difficult to pinpoint an exact distinction between the two. F.K. Lehman suggests that “a *nikāya* might contain a number of different *gaing* within it, excludes commensality between communities of monks, while a *gaing* does not” (Carbine personal communication with F.K. Lehman 2011: 78). John P. Ferguson suggests that characteristics of a *gaing* include:

A sense of distinct monastic lineage; a written history of the sect's formation and the lives of its leaders; separate rules based on their particular interpretation of the Vinaya; a hierarchical chain of command under a leader; some attempt at national coverage in terms of member monasteries; insistence on separation ordination rituals [;] distinctive interpretations of scripture [;] sometimes the refusal to eat, study, or associate closely with [members of other *gaing*]; and, most importantly, official recognition in some fashion of their distinctiveness by royalty or some branch of the modern government. (Ferguson 1978: 73-74, brackets inserted by Carbine in Carbine 2011: 78)

The Sangha Executive Committee (SEC) included representation from the Thudhamma Gaing, Anaukkhyaung-dvara Gaing, Ganawimote Gaing, Mahadvara Gaing, Muladvara Gaing, Hngettwin Gaing, Shwegyin Gaing and Weluwan Gaing. Included in this group of 66 were 58 Thudhamma Sayadaws, 5 Shwegyin Sayadaws, 2 Mahadvara Nikaya Sayadaws, 1 Muladvara Sayadaw (Bechert 1989: 208). The official recognised Sangha was therefore represented by these nine *gaing* who had all registered by the government-imposed deadline of 1 February 1980 (Ashin and Crosby 2017: 208). The representation of the different ethnic groups and monastic *gaing* in the SEC contributed to the success of the All Gaing Sangha Convention held in 1980 and attended by 1219 monks (Bechert 1989: 309).

At the Convention it was agreed that the national Sangha would be organized through a centralized structure, and they would create an effective ecclesiastical jurisdiction. The SEC would disband at the end of the Convention but would be replaced by three permanent committees that represented all the nine *gaing*. This included the State Central Sangha Executive Committee (SCSEC), the State Ovādācariya Committee (SOC) and the State Saṅghamahānāyaka Committee (SSC). The SSC played the most significant role of the three committees as the members of the SSC acted as representatives of Burma's entire Sangha (Ashin and Crosby 2017: 210).

One of the new rules imposed by the SSC during this reorganization was that that all monks and novices residing in Burma would now have to hold identification papers which included *gaing* affiliation. For a monk to be considered legitimate under the eyes of the State Saṅghamahānāyaka, they needed an identification card and in order to get an identification card they needed *gaing* affiliation. These new "sāsana membership records" were given to all monks and novices (except those temporarily ordained for a fixed period) through the local

Saṅghamahānāyaka Committees with the help of local Immigration and Manpower Department offices (Tin Maung Maung 1988: 43). In addition to the monastic ID cards, a new annual census was introduced which recorded the number of monks and novices present at monasteries during the *vassa* (Buddhist lent) period. These new measures allowed for heightened systematic control at the state level. These changes were applauded by the Burmese Buddhist population who supported the formation of a united Sangha.

The implementation of the Sangha register and specific rules for Sangha membership were welcomed and the imposition of strict discipline directed at wayward monks and novices enhanced the standing of the Sangha among the public (ibid 1988: 47). Another important new rule imposed by the SSC was the commitment to revising the *pariyatti* monastic examinations so that monks and novices would learn Pali as well as Burmese in their course studies which would enhance and develop their “wisdom and knowledge and regulate their conduct according to the highest ideals of the *sāsana*” (ibid 1993: 22). Monastic education was now even more centralised and monitored (see Chapter Five).

2.3.1. The Impact of Ne Win’s Reforms on the Zawti

The introduction of the nine official monastic *gaing* and the implications of this new system had a direct impact on the Zawti. The formation of new *nikāyas* was banned but, smaller groups could join any of the nine official *gaing*. If smaller groups did not join one of the nine official *gaing* they would not be recognised as legitimate *bhikkhus*. In 1986 the Zawti were absorbed into the Thudhamma *Nikāya*, the biggest and most widespread *gaing* in Burma and they still remain part of the Thudhamma *Nikāya* (*Pī Kon Kham* 2016: 11). The absorption of the Zawti in the Thudhamma *Nikāya* is addressed in the Zawti text *Pī Kon Kham* (2016: 11). The text states:

“The Shan Sangha of the Loi Zawti Temple are also included in the Thudhamma sect on the 13th July 1986 (Burmese Year 1346). Why were they [the Zawti] included in the sect? Because the government office and Sangha decided that there should be only nine sects, so it had to be included in one. The Phai Moeng, the Yun, and the Zawti should not stand alone, so they were asked to be included in any of the nine sects. Therefore, it is included in the Thudhamma sect” (*Pī Kon Kham* 2016: 11).

The mention of the Phai Moeng, an eastern Shan tradition, and the Yun, a tradition from northern Thailand, suggests that the Zawti were not the only monastic tradition that found themselves in the same predicament after the creation of the SSC. In fact, the entire mainstream Shan Theravada Sangha was absorbed into the Thudhamma *gaing*.

The next question addressed in *Pī Kon Kham* is: “Why the Thudhamma sect?” and the reasoning given by the Zawti themselves is that:

“In Mohnyin, there is only the Thudhamma sect, so to make things easier for the devotees to pay respect at the end of the rains retreat, it was included in the Thudhamma sect. The Sangha of the Tai Zawti cannot exist alone because it did not attend the meeting in 1342 (1980). The Zawti monks did not attend the meeting and request the status as a sect to stand alone so they are included in the Thudhamma” (*Pī Kon Kham* 2016: 11).

The Zawti state that their absorption into the Thudhamma was a consequence of not attending the meeting, which is ambiguous enough to imply that the Zawti *could* have established their own sect if they had attended the meeting. A more specific reason why the Zawti monks did not attend the All Gaing Sangha Convention in 1980 is not provided. A possible reason is related to the restricted travel of the Zawti monks. As previously mentioned in this chapter, the Zawti monks are restricted from using any form of transportation other than boat and they must walk everywhere barefoot. While the Zawti monks have travelled great distances on foot in the past, it is possible that in this instance the Zawti monks were not able to walk barefooted from Mohnyin in Kachin State to Yangon, a distance over 1000 kilometres. The explanation that it would be easier for the laity to pay their respects at the end of the rains retreat because there is only the Thudhamma sect in Mohnyin suggests that it would make it easier to hold a shared *kathina* ceremony at the end of the rains retreat. I am not aware that the Zawti monks have ever celebrated *kathina* with non-Zawti monks, so I am not sure why a shared *kathina* would be a decisive factor in agreeing to absorption into the Thudhamma.

The decision to accept absorption was not as pragmatic as implied in this initial account laid out in *Pī Kon Kham* (2016: 11). In a later chapter, the decision-making process of Venerable Paññāsāra, the abbot of the Zawti monastery at the time, is described in further detail (*Pī Kon Kham* 2016: 41). The absorption of the Zawti into the Thudhamma is described as his “chief work” and in this description a rhetorical question is asked: “During his time, what was the

most difficult and heavy task?” The response given is: “the main task, the *sāsana* reform was very difficult, uncomfortable and frustrating. He [Paññāsāra] used the qualities of mindfulness, effort and wisdom to help with his decision making. He thought thoroughly, looking to the future, working tirelessly” (*Pī Kon Kham* 2016: 41).

Venerable Paññāsāra had to make a difficult decision. Looking back to Ferguson’s definition of *gaing*, the Zawti fit every criterion except, and most crucially, the last which is “official recognition in some fashion of their distinctiveness by royalty or some branch of the modern government” (Ferguson 1978: 73-73). We examined in Chapter One how the Zawti monks enjoyed royal patronage in the eighteenth century but their relationship with central Burmese authority deteriorated soon after. For the contemporary Zawti to be considered legitimate under the eyes of the Saṅghamahānāyaka they would have to conform to their measures and agree to absorption into the Thudhamma Nikāya. Ultimately, by agreeing to join the Thudhamma *gaing* the Zawti were able to retain their legitimacy as a monastic lineage. Thudhamma affiliation meant that the Zawti monks would be allowed to have monastic identification cards and would therefore be deemed legitimate under the eyes of the State Saṅghamahānāyaka.

The absorption of the Zawti monks into the Thudhamma Nikāya in the 1980s was the first official recognition and acceptance of the Zawti monks into the mainstream Burmese Sangha. The Zawti had bypassed the monastic reforms of eighteenth century by leaving the Burmese domain and moving across the border into China where they remained during the next wave of monastic reforms in the nineteenth century. The integration of the Zawti into the official Burmese Sangha has effectively legitimized the Zawti monastic lineage despite the Zawti enjoying periods of both forced and self-imposed isolation.

In the eighteenth century when Ñāṇābhivamsa was *thathanabaing* and formed the initial Thudhamma *gaing*, he imposed centralizing procedures that ensured the extinction of all lineages apart from the Thudhamma after one generation. But, by isolating themselves in Loi Lek in China during this period and only really re-entering the wider Burmese monastic milieu some two hundred years later, the Zawti enjoy membership of the very group that was formed to eradicate lineages such as their own.

The contemporary Thudhamma *nikāya* resembles something close to F.K. Lehman’s suggested definition of the term previously mentioned, which is that a *nikāya* might contain a number of

different *gaing* within it and excludes commensality between communities of monks while a *gaing* does not (Carbine personal communication with F. K. Lehman 2011: 78). Following this definition, there can therefore be multiple legitimate monastic lineages within a single *nikāya*. By accepting Thudhamma absorption the Zawti have legitimised their lineage and their status in contemporary monastic society. The simple fact that they were accepted to join the Thudhamma *gaing*, the largest *gaing* with the highest number of executive monks in the SEC, suggests that the Zawti fit the criteria for legitimacy. This challenges the perception that the Zawti, at least the contemporary Zawti tradition from the 1980s onwards, are heretical or in any way illegitimate.

However, the difficulty described by Paññāsāra in making the decision to join the Thudhamma suggests that absorption came at a cost. Thirty-five years on, the effects of this change still ripple among the contemporary Zawti laity who have concerns and fears about Thudhamma absorption. Lay members of the *nāyaka* (leader) committee in Laihka expressed concern about the knock-on effect the integration of the Zawti into the Thudhamma *gaing* would have on monastic education at the Zawti monastic headquarters (Interview 6 December 2019). A key aspect of the 1980s Sangha reforms was an overhaul of monastic education and *pariyatti* examinations. The 1982 ‘Pariyatti Education Plan’ was based on two objectives: “to master the Pali language; and to excel in written Myanmar language and literature” (Tin Maung Maung 1993: 35). A specific focus on Burmese language and literature was included in this reform, which is something that the contemporary Zawti still comment on and worry about.

The *nāyaka* are concerned that the Zawti monastic headquarters Paññālaṅkāra Monastery might have to adopt the Burmese monastic education curriculum in the future. The Burmese monastic curriculum does not include traditional Shan literary *lik long* training, a hallmark of Zawti monastic education. Until now *lik long* has remained a part of monastic education at the Zawti headquarters, but there is a sense of anxiety that this could change at any time given the Zawti’s status as members of the Thudhamma Nikaya. Zawti informants have commented that the reason why the Zawti monastery has been allowed to continue teaching Shan *lik long* and language is because of their expertise and commitment to teaching Pali and Burmese as well. Since their focus on Shan literature does not compromise the rigour of their Pali and Burmese training, the authorities have not raised it as an issue (Personal Communications 2020). Chapter Five of this thesis explores contemporary Zawti monastic education in further detail.

Another key post-1980s Reform change that occurred at the Zawti monastic headquarters was that the monastery became more accessible. The location of *Kyong Loi Zawti* monastery had been in the forest and was relatively inaccessible. After the Zawti were absorbed into the Thudhamma the local Burmese officials in Mohnyin built a road that led to *Kyong Loi Zawti* monastery, and the gates of the Paññālaṅkāra Monastery were opened to outsiders including non-Zawti monks. The *nāyaka* commented that this resulted in more non-Zawti devotees, such as Bamar Burmese Buddhists, visiting the temple.

Another significant change imposed after 1986 was the renaming of the Zawti monastic headquarters. The Zawti themselves still refer to the monastic headquarters in Mohnyin as *Kyong Loi Zawti*, but the name was officially changed to Paññālaṅkāra Tai Zawti Monastery after the Zawti were absorbed into the Thudhamma Nikāya. I have chosen to use the official name of the monastery throughout this thesis. The term *paññālaṅkāra* translates to ‘the celebration of wisdom’ in Burmese Pali. At first glance the name seems standard. But another reading of the name reveals a homage to the abbot Venerable Paññāsāra who was abbot when the Zawti were absorbed into the Thudhamma Nikaya. *Alaṅkāra* ‘ornament’ could also be a nod to the Zawti’s skill and dedication to *lik long* literature which is also referred to as *lik langka long* ‘text (*lik*) of great (*long*) poetry or ornamentation (*langka*)’ which is a distinct feature of the tradition (Khur- Yearn 2012: 26).

Thomas Borchert, in his exploration of Dai-lue monks in Sipsongpanna in China, identifies the use of languages unknown to authority as a device used by minorities to subvert authority (2005: 267). Borchert refers to a set of regulations posted on the walls of village temples in both Chinese and Dai-lue that differ slightly in meaning. The Chinese version states that the monks should ‘love the country’, *guojia*, and ‘the religion’, *zongjiao*, whilst the Dai-lue version states that the monks should ‘love the land’ *prades-bān-meuang* and the ‘religion’ *pha puttha sāsana* and also ‘love their lineage or people’ *cheua* and ‘ethnic group or nation’ *cheau- chat*. Borchert argues that in the Tai-lue version *prades bān meuang* refers to Sipsongpanna specifically whilst the Chinese version refers to China more broadly and how this potentially subnationalist sentiment is hidden in a script that is not accessible to the Han Chinese majority who cannot read the Dai-lue script and therefore have no idea of its meaning (2005: 267). In this way, through language, the Dai-lue monks are able to subtly subvert authority.

This subversion of authority through language is linked to J. C. Scott's notion of hidden transcripts, in particular 'the arts of political disguise'. These are methods of subtle resistance by which "ideological resistance is disguised, muted, and veiled for safety's sake" (1990: 137). J. C. Scott argues that "rumour, gossip, disguises, linguistic tricks, metaphors", etc, are used by subordinate groups to subvert authority (ibid: 137).

The Zawti were asked to rename their monastery when they were absorbed into the Thudhamma *gaing* in the 1980s. The Zawti agreed to do so but, in calling it Paññālaṅkāra Tai Zawti Monastery, the Zawti chose a name which appealed to the authorities in that it makes sense in Pali-Burmese, but remained true to their distinct heritage in paying homage to their abbot and craft (*lik long*). In this way, the Zawti have employed the type of subtle resistance described by J. C. Scott, a small act of defiance that does not threaten their safety but reaffirms their identity as Zawti.

Another example of the Zawti's use of language, specifically the Shan language, to subvert meaning is found in the way they describe themselves. While the contemporary Zawti acknowledge that they are part of the Thudhamma *gaing*, they refer to themselves as the Zawti မုခ်.တုမ်: *muk tsum* 'group', 'association'. The Zawti define the Shan term *muk tsum* as having the same meaning as မုခ်.တုမ်: *koeng*, the Shan term for *gaing*, since both terms derive from the Pali *gaṇa* (Long Khoe Zawti 1997: 6). To refer to themselves explicitly as a *gaing* would be problematic and would not be considered acceptable by the SSC, but by using the Shan term they are able to circumvent controversy.

The Zawti therefore use the Shan language to maintain their own distinct Zawti identity, specifically as their own *muk tsum/ gaing*. This act of resistance demonstrates that the Zawti understand themselves as separate to the Thudhamma *gaing* in some ways. The reason why the Zawti accepted absorption into the Thudhamma *gaing* over another *gaing* such as the Shwegyin, to which they are far more similar in terms of monastic austerity, is probably related to the fact that Thudhamma is an umbrella *gaing* that includes multiple lineages, whereas the Shwegyin is not. The Zawti have their own distinct monastic lineage, so to accept absorption into another lineage would be problematic for them. Instead, they chose to join the Thudhamma, the largest and most lax *gaing*, which allows them legitimacy in the Burmese Sangha, but the ability to maintain their own Zawti history an identity.

As we have learned in this chapter, despite being labelled as ‘heterodox’ in scholarship, having a reputation as ‘extremists’ in the wider non-Zawti Shan community, and subverting authority in their own subtle ways, the fact that the Zawti adhered to the reform measures implemented in the 1980s indicates that the Zawti are active and legitimate members of the Burmese monastic community. While the Zawti may have been ‘underground’ for a considerable part of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, integration into the broader Burmese monastic community in the 1980s indicates a formal emergence from the peripheries and the beginning of interaction with non-Zawti monks and lay people.

2.4. Conclusion

Following on from Chapter One, in this chapter I have provided a detailed historical overview of the Zawti tradition from the colonial period to the 1980s, when the Zawti were absorbed into the Thudhamma *gaing* in the 1980s during New Win's religious reforms. In this chapter I have situated the Zawti among the various social, political, and religious upheavals that have happened during this period to highlight that despite their social isolation, the Zawti monks and lay people are active members of Burmese and Shan society.

I have examined how absorption into the Thudhamma *gaing* signalled an openness to integration with the wider Burmese Sangha, which has legitimized the Zawti monastic tradition. This legitimation challenges the misconception perpetuated in scholarship, and among the wider non-Zawti Shan community, that the Zawti are 'extreme' or 'unorthodox'. In doing so, I have also contextualized the anxieties felt by the contemporary Zawti tradition regarding the preservation of Zawti religious practices post absorption, which we shall examine in the remaining chapters of this thesis.

Section Two: Zawti Monasticism

Chapter Three

Zawti Lower Ordination

In this chapter I aim to introduce the contemporary Zawti tradition through an ethnographic and textual examination of the 2020 Zawti *poi sang long* novice ordination festival. I have chosen to introduce the Zawti tradition through this ritual because this event, above all others, brings together the entire monastic and lay Zawti community from across the full range of its geographical spread throughout Myanmar, from as far north as Kachin State, throughout the length and breadth of Shan State, as far south as Yangon, and across the border into Dehong in southwestern China. Far more than a ritual about novice ordination, then, this event, which occurs only once every three years, is an opportunity for the entire Zawti laity to come together as a collective to re-enact and affirm their Zawti identity and traditions.

The chapter is split into three broad categories: i) introducing the *poi sang long*; ii) the preparation that takes place before the *poi sang long*; iii) an account of the *poi sang long* event itself which is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted at the Zawti Paññālaṅkāra Monastery in Kachin State in February 2020.²⁹ Through these sections I aim to situate the Zawti within the context of the wider Shan community by highlighting the similarities and differences between the Zawti and mainstream Shan *poi sang long* festivities. More broadly, I also investigate how the Zawti interact with other outsiders, specifically non-Zawti monks and Burmese government officials, and analyse how these relationships are negotiated and maintained. By introducing the Zawti tradition in this way, I aim to address some of the misunderstandings about the Zawti that have been perpetuated in scholarship and among the wider non-Zawti Shan community.

²⁹ Since the writing of this thesis, the Zawti held another *poi sang long* in February 2023.

3.1. What is the *Zawti Poi Sang Long*?

In Theravada Buddhism there are two types of monastic ordination – lower ordination and higher ordination. Lower ordination or novice ordination (P. *sāmaṇera pabbajjā*) is essential before a candidate can receive higher ordination (P. *upasampadā*) to become a *bhikkhu*, a fully ordained monk. In this chapter I focus specifically on *Zawti* lower ordination, or novice ordination (P. *pabbajjā*), when a *sang long* (S. သာဝဏ်, ငွေ့: ‘novice-to-be’) becomes a *sāmaṇera* (P. novice). In the *Zawti* community and the wider Shan community, the first time a boy is ordained is usually marked with elaborate ceremonial fanfare in a ceremony called the *poi sang long* (Eberhardt 2009: 55).

The *Zawti poi sang long* is actually one of two *Zawti* novice ordination events. *Zawti* novice ordination is split into two categories or ‘batches’ (S. ဝါဝံ; *kāp*), the ‘small batch’ (S. ဝါဝံ; ကွေ့, *kāp on*), and the ‘big batch’ (S. ဝါဝံ; ငွေ့, *kāp long*). The big batch event is the *poi sang long* which happens once every three years in the third month of the Shan calendar, around three months before *vassa* (*Pī Kon Kham* 2016: 47, 71). Both ordination batches take place at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery.

The fact that *Zawti* novice ordination can only take place in one location, at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery, is distinctive. In the wider Shan community, *poi sang long* festivities are organized by village leaders who decide when and where to hold the festival, and usually ordination takes place in their village monastery (Eberhardt 2006: 127). In contrast, the *Zawti* do not get ordained in their villages, but instead travel from across Myanmar and China, to *Paññālaṅkāra Zawti Monastery* in Kachin State, for ordination. *Zawti* ordination can only take place at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery because all the *Zawti bhikkhus*, who are needed to authorize novice ordination, live at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery (See Chapter Five for more on *Zawti* monastic travel prohibitions). Many of the *Zawti* laity live far away from the monastery and need time to plan their travels and save money for the event, and the *Zawti* themselves state that this is why the event happens only once every three years (*Pī Kon Kham* 2016: 48).

The ‘small batch’ ordination is even less frequent than the *poi sang long*. According to *Pī Kon Kham*, there have been only nine small batch ordinations since 1955 (2016: 47). The small

batch ordinations are held in the sixth month of the Shan calendar during the school holidays, for boys who want to ordain but cannot take the time off from school (*Pī Kon Kham* 2003:47). These days the need for two batches seems to be understood in terms of the timing of secular school holidays. However, according to the *Pī Kon Kham* text, the two-batch approach has existed since ‘ancient times’, before they established the monastery in Mohnyin and so also before the formal secular education system was introduced to Burma during the colonial period (*Pī Kon Kham* 2016: 48, see Chapter Five).

The Zawti tradition of having two ordination batches is not unusual. In the broader Theravada context, it is common for a monastery to hold two or more ordination ceremonies per year, or to have ceremonies held during the school holidays to cater to those in full time education. For example, in the modern Thai context, Wat Phra Dhammakaya holds two novice ordination ceremonies per year for this very reason. The first is aimed at schoolboys and is held in March to utilize the entire school vacation period, with the expectation that the boys will disrobe after seven weeks to return to school. This could be likened to the Zawti small batch ceremony aimed at schoolboys in full time education. The second Dhammakaya ordination takes place in July at the beginning of *vassa* (rainy season) and is understood as a temporary ordination preceding *upasampadā* which is taken at the end of *vassa*. In the Dhammakaya movement, the July *pabbajjā* is considered a more serious and long-term commitment (Holt 2017: 167, 177). For the Zawti, there is no strict correlation between ordination batch and how long a novice will stay ordained. There is an expectation that the Zawti *sang long* who are ordained at the big *poi sang long* will stay in the monastery until after the rains retreat. However, as my informants told me at the *poi sang long*, it is ultimately a personal decision which varies widely according to personal preference and circumstance. Some boys stay ordained for a few weeks, others a few months, and some a few years.

3.2. Preparation

3.2.1 The Setting of the Study

One of the first things I learned about the Zawti tradition from reading E. M. Mendelson's brief account was that they held a "triannual all-Burma *shinbyu* at Mohnyin" (1975: 232). When I went to Myanmar for the first time and asked Shan scholar monks about the Zawti they also mentioned the triannual ordination. The Zawti *poi sang long* stands out as distinctive to mainstream Burmese and Shan novice ordination ceremonies because it happens only once every three years and only at Paññālaṅkāra Zawti Monastery in Kachin State. These two features alone mark the Zawti *poi sang long* as distinctive to both scholars and the wider non-Zawti monastic population. Such distinctions have contributed to the sense of mystery that surrounds discussions of the Zawti in both scholarship and locally among the wider Shan population.

In December 2019 I received an email from a key informant I had established in Yangon, whom I will refer to as Dr Sai, telling me that the Zawti would be holding their *poi sang long* in February 2020.³⁰ Since I had read about the event in Mendelson's account, heard about the celebration spoken about in a rumour-like tone by those in the wider Shan community, and read the account of the festival from the perspective of the Zawti in *Pī Kon Kham*, I jumped at the chance to attend the *poi sang long* myself. My informant from Yangon got in contact with the Mohnyin *go pa ka* who oversee Paññālaṅkāra Zawti Monastery. The Shan term *go pa ka* is derived from the Pali *gopaka* (guardian) and refers to the senior lay committee of a temple. He asked them if I would be able to attend the *poi sang long*. The *go pa ka* agreed that I could attend the event, but warned that I could not enter the *dhamma* scroll room (library) inside the monastery and that I would not be permitted to meet the monks since I was woman and an outsider.

I made my way from Yangon to Mohnyin by coach, arriving there on 1 February and leaving on 6 February. I stayed in a guest house in Mohnyin township, a close drive away from Paññālaṅkāra Zawti Monastery. My informant from Yangon arranged for an interpreter to assist me while I was in Mohnyin. My interpreter was a tour guide who lived in Yangon but

was originally from Mohnyin and was born and raised in the Zawti tradition. The following account, then, is based on my fieldwork on that occasion, supported, as explained above, by Zawti texts on the subject, by interviews about the broader context, understanding and preparations, and by comparison with broader Theravada, Shan and Burmese parallel practices.

3.2.2 Preparing the Novices-to-Be

Preparing the *sang long* (novice ordinands) for the *poi* begins ten months before the date of the *poi sang long* itself, in the year labelled Year A in Figure 1 below. In these months, the *go pa ka* lay committee in each region meets with the *khing ho wat* (the *zare* in charge of each local temple) and other temple elders to discuss which boys should be ordained that year (*Pi Kon Kham* 2003: 48). The first criterion that must be met is that the *sang long* must be aged twelve or above, because, according to my Zawti informants, if they were any younger, they would not be able to keep up with the standard of education at the monastery. Although the reason given for this as the minimum age contrasts with the mainstream interpretation of the canonical phrase that boys can be ordained “once they are old enough to scare crows away”, usually interpreted as at around seven or eight, it does reflect ordination patterns found elsewhere (Crosby 2013: 203). More widely in Southeast Asia, lower ordination acts as a coming-of-age ceremony, taking place at the age of twelve or thirteen. Moreover, in traditional Cambodian monasticism, lower ordination at twelve is thought to ensure the salvation of the novice’s mother, and higher ordination at twenty-one ensure the salvation of the father (Bizot 1976 as cited in Crosby 2000: 147). It is not clear, then, whether this Zawti practice is based entirely on the stage of education or reflects the broader traditional role of lower ordination in Theravada culture.

The Zawti *go pa ka* and *khings* (lay male elders) then decide which boys should arrive at the temple before *vassa*, and which boys should come at the end of *vassa*. The *sang long* who will be ordained at the ‘big batch’ *poi sang long* are split into groups based on education level. The boys who have studied up to Standard Six in the Burmese state education system (usually attained when around 12 years old) arrive in November at the end of *vassa*, three months before the *poi sang long* festival in February of the following year (Year A November in Figure 1). The boys who have not reached Standard Six, or have had poor schooling, arrive earlier in June, just before *vassa*, around 7 to 8 months before the *poi sang long festival* in February (Year A June in Figure 1). *Poi* attendees explained that the standard of education in the remote

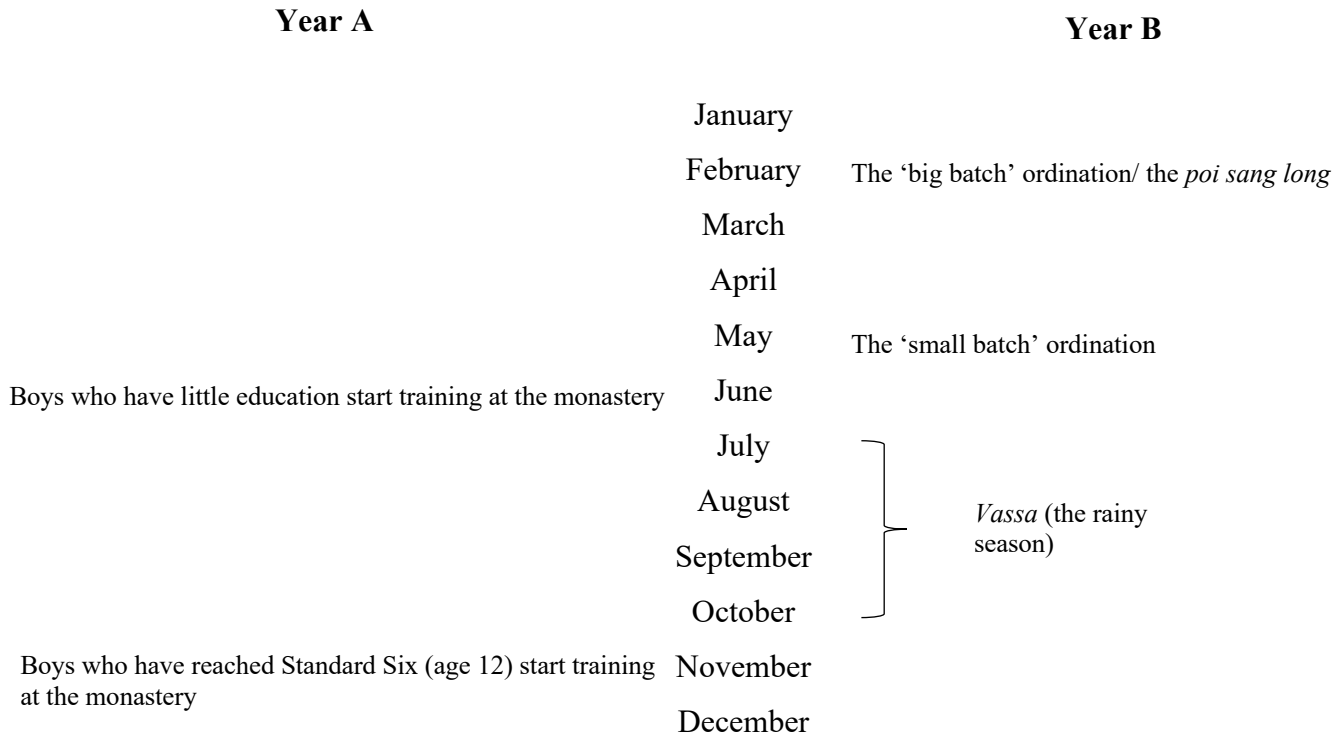
mountainous regions, where many of the Zawti communities are located, is very low, and as a result many boys struggle with reading and writing. The extra months at the monastery serve as remedial educational training to ensure that all the boys are at the same standard of education by the time of the *poi*. Such preparation in the months ahead of novice ordination is also common in mainstream Theravada. In the wider Shan context, there is a tradition of boys living in monasteries as temple boys to receive a primary level of monastic education before ordaining as novices (Khur Yearn 2012: 93).

Nonetheless, the more formalised pattern and extensive preparation of the Zawti, beginning ten months before the *poi* itself, to ensure that the boys are up to scratch in terms of education and understanding of the relevant texts and chants, is reflective of the broader Zawti attitude towards education. Education is central to Zawti monastic life and plays a key role in the parents' decision to ordain their sons. One father of a *sang long* from Kyaukme in northern Shan State said that he had talked with his son's head teacher to ask for permission to withdraw his son from secular school so that he could go to Paññālaṅkāra Monastery for ordination. He remarked that he did not know how much school his son would miss but that it could be three months or three years, it did not matter, and that it was his son's decision. Parents are reassured by the fact that their sons will receive a high-quality education during their time at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery which is renowned in the wider Shan monastic community for their training in *lik long* traditional Shan poetic literature. The boys are also taught Shan language and literature, Pali, and Burmese (see Chapter Five for more on Zawti monastic education).

While many of the boys already speak Shan at home, many will first learn to read and write Shan while ordained as novices in Paññālaṅkāra Monastery. Shan literacy is not part of the standard secular curriculum either in Myanmar or China, where most of the Zawti lay people live. In Myanmar, if students want to learn to read and write Shan then they must do so outside of school hours, usually during the holidays at centres for Shan literature. For example, in Mohnyin, close to Paññālaṅkāra Zawti monastery, Shan youths can study Shan literature and language at the Shan Culture, Literature and Free Funeral Service Association. Not all Zawti lay people have ready access to such institutions. The opportunity to become proficient in the Shan language is therefore a significant consideration for the parents of the *sang long* when

deciding to send their sons for ordination.³¹ Novice education at Paññālankāra Monastery and in particular Shan fluency as a means of maintaining Shan identity and culture is examined in more detail in Chapter Five.

Timeline of the Preparatory Training Period for the Incoming *Sang Long*



(Figure 1: This timeline of the training period for the incoming *sang long* illustrates how early preparations begin in the year prior the *poi sang long* festival itself. Disrobing begins as soon as a week after initiation.)

3.2.3. Preparing Financially for the *Poi*

Alongside the preparation of the novices, other preparations are also underway in the lead up to the *poi*. All *poi* attendees prepare financially for the *poi*. The sponsors (usually the parents) of the *sang long* must prepare to pay for the costs of the ordination itself. The Zawti have a flat rate for novice ordination which is 300,000 kyats (around £170), which covers their ordination outfit, robes, requisites and maintenance whilst they are at the monastery. This is a considerable cost given that one third of the Myanmar population live below the poverty line with an average

³¹ My informants in Laihka commented that some non-Shan boys were ordained at Paññālankāra Zawti monastery and they had to learn to speak Shan which was difficult. Monastic education at Paññālankāra Zawti monastery is taught in Shan, which in a way acts as a barrier to entry for those who are not already conversant in Shan, or able to pick it up quickly.

annual average income of \$1400 (or, \$3.8/ per day) (Meehan et al 2022: 17). In Shan State, home to the majority of the Zawti laity, 42% of Shan adults have depleted household funds for food and other critical living needs before their next income (UNCDF Report 2019: 3). The cost of the ordination ties in with the infrequency of the *Zawti poi sang long*, held only once every three years, which was described by some Zawti laity as beneficial since it gives families time to save money over a number of years. In the wider Shan community, families also hold off ordaining their sons until they are financially ready to do so or might decide to allow a wealthier sponsor to cover the costs of the ordination (Eberhardt 2006: 128).

As mentioned, all the festival attendees, not just the parents and sponsors of the *sang long*, prepare financially for the *poi*, with the three yearly occurrence giving attendees time to save up money to cover the costs of their attendance. The monastery provides lodgings and two meals a day for all the *poi* attendees but there are still significant costs that must be considered. My interpreter informed me that many attendees spend a considerable amount of money on clothes and accessories in the run up to the *poi*. They also need to consider additional expenditure on food and entertainment while at the *poi*, and they must also budget how much money they will donate to the monastery. Many must also take time off work to attend the festival which is a substantial financial decision. Many of the attendees I spoke to travelled to Mohnyin by bus or rented mini vans and travelled in groups. Such transportation incurs a significant cost since the geographic spread of the Zawti lay community is broad and many of them travel great distances across Myanmar to get to Mohnyin in northern Kachin State.

Most attendees come from Shan State which neighbours Kachin State, but this does not necessarily mean that they live anywhere near Mohnyin. Shan State is the largest administrative region in Myanmar and makes up almost a quarter of the total area of the country, so despite neighbouring Kachin State, many Zawti lay people from Shan State still have to travel great distances to get to the monastery (for example, the distance from the Taunggyi, the capital of Shan State, located in the southern part of Shan State, to Mohnyin, is 450 miles, which would be a minimum thirteen hour long car journey). Zawti lay congregations also travel from different parts of Myanmar, including Myitkyina in the very north of Kachin State and Mandalay in central Myanmar. I was surprised when I met congregants from Mandalay, the second largest city in Myanmar after Yangon, because it meant that there were Zawti communities who remained hidden in plain sight not only in isolated and mountainous areas such as Shan State, but also in cosmopolitan areas (in addition to Yangon which I knew had a

small Zawti community). Mandalay is also somewhat of a hub for Burmese monasticism and is home to many notable monasteries and nunneries. It was therefore more surprising for me to think of Zawti lay people practising their Zawti customs among this milieu.

The contemporary geographical scope of the Zawti lay community in general reflects the extensive areas across which the Zawti monks migrated and established themselves as examined in Chapters One and Two. However, the geographical scope of the contemporary Zawti laity is now broader because, in recent decades Zawti lay people have moved away from the communities to cities like Mandalay and Yangon in pursuit of work. Others have been forced to flee their communities because of political instability and armed conflict. At the *poi sang long* I met lay people who had travelled to Mohnyin from Thailand. One middle-aged lay woman was forced to flee Mohnyin to Thailand in her youth to avoid forced conscription into the Kachin Independence Army. She has lived in Thailand ever since but tries to return to Mohnyin for the *poi sang long*. Forced conscription and abduction remains a problem in Myanmar and is a current issue in northern Shan State, an area home to many Zawti lay communities (OCHA 2022: 3).

The number of internally displaced people in Myanmar has grown since I conducted this fieldwork in 2020. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), as of December 2022 more than 1.5 million people in Myanmar remain displaced due to insecurity and violence exacerbated by the military takeover in February 2021, more than double the previous year (OCHA 2022:1).³² There has been a long history of ethnic violence in Shan State and Kachin State and the situation is getting worse. This is an ongoing and sensitive issue which I have not discussed with any Zawti informants. I do, however, imagine that the Zawti lay communities in Shan State, Kachin State, and beyond have been affected by the current conflict and displacement. Displacement is therefore likely to have had an impact on the geographical spread of the contemporary Zawti lay communities, who may have been forced to move to new areas where Zawti communities have not previously been established.

³² Key figures from the OCHA Myanmar Humanitarian Update No. 25: 1.5 million internally displaced across Myanmar, 1.1 million people currently displaced by clashes and insecurity since February 2021, 330 thousand people internally displaced due to conflict prior to February 2021, mainly in Rakhine, Kachin, Chin and Shan [States], 34 thousand civilian properties estimated burnt or destroyed since February 2021 (OCHA 2022:2).

The *poi sang long* brings together the Zawti laity from at least three different nation states: Myanmar, China, and Thailand. I did not ask the Zawti laity who I met at the *poi* what type of passports or national identity cards they possessed.³³ Some of the congregants who had travelled to the *poi* from China remarked that there were no checkpoints at the border, which they crossed without showing ID. They said that they attached *sāsana* flags to their minivan which indicated that they were crossing the border to worship and so they were never stopped by any officials on either side of the border. The Tai Zawti's status as Theravada Buddhists, displayed through the flying of the *sāsana* flag, means those crossing the border do not attract attention to themselves from either the non-Zawti Shan or the Burmese since both groups are Theravada. Further, given the paucity of Theravada monks and monasteries in Yunnan, it would not be strange to have Dai Chinese nationals crossing the border into Myanmar for religious purposes.

The porosity of the border may have changed since the COVID-19 pandemic, when the land borders were shut, and in light of the military coup that took place in Myanmar in February 2021. Even if the congregants did have to show their passports, Burmese and Chinese passports detail nationality but not ethnicity and so from the perspective of the Burmese and Chinese nation states, there would be no way of knowing that they were Zawti or Shan. Within the environment of the Zawti *poi*, national identity was superseded by religious identity, and was a site for the Zawti laity to be united in their shared religious identity. The historic fluidity of the Myanmar-China and Myanmar-Thailand land borders, and the lack of ethnicity or religion categories on Chinese and Burmese passports, contributes to the invisibility of the Tai Zawti in each nation state.

3.2.4. Preparing the Site of the *Poi*



(Figure 2: Map of the *poi sang long* site with difference zones marked out. 1: the *nai hen som*'s quarters, 2: the temporary ordination hall, 3: the administrative zone, 4: the amenities zone, 5: the entertainment zone, 6: the washing zone. The area marked out in yellow is the Paññālaṅkāra Monastery compound. The area marked out in dark green is the *poi sang long* festival site).

The *poi sang long* festival site was set up on land owned by the monastery, next to the Paññālaṅkāra Monastery compound. The festival site was divided into four key areas. The area labelled as Area 1 in Figure 2 was the *nai hen som*'s building, a permanent building where the *nai hen som* (the women responsible for food preparation) prepare all the food for the monks and Buddha images all year-round. This area was largely restricted from the festival attendants and was reserved for the *nai hen som* and some other lay elders. Aside from area 1, all the following areas of the *poi sang long* site were temporary structures erected specifically for the *poi sang long*.

Area 2 marks out the semi-outdoor ordination hall, a partially enclosed structure with a roof but no walls, spanning approximately fifty metres in length. A path ran through the middle of the hall, connecting the entrance to the main stage at the front of the ordination hall. The main

stage was elevated from ground level by about three steps. The path to the stage was lined with handmade patchwork mats for the monks to walk over. At multiple points during the *poi*, whenever the monks were expected to walk down the path to get to the stage, women placed their scarves underneath the patchwork mats as an act of *dāna* (P: generosity, offering), an opportunity to make merit. In Burmese Buddhism it is common for women to place flowers on the carpets or shawls on which monks walk over, and such offerings are thought of as meritorious acts of service (Personal Communication Kawanami 03/11/22). The ordination hall was used for multiple events including the opening ceremony and *lik long* recitations in the evenings. Most importantly it was where the *pabbajjā* ordination itself was held, which means that the *pabbajjā* ordination itself took place in a temporary structure. Theoretically, it could take place anywhere since it does not require a valid *sīmā* (monastic boundary) which is needed for an *upasampadā* ordination (see Chapter Four for more on *sīmā*).

Area 3 could be thought of as the administrative zone which included a donation centre, the first aid centre, and an area for the *go pa ka* lay committee to hold meetings and socialise. I visited this area on the day of the official inauguration of the *poi sang long* ceremony. While sitting in this area my guide began having animated conversations with members of the *go pa ka*. He asked the *go pa ka* to seat us in the VIP area to observe the opening ceremony later in the day. The *go pa ka* committee member was reluctant to give us VIP badges, which would allow us to sit at the front of the ceremony but, after some back and forth, it was decided that we would be given the badges. My guide informed me that the committee member who he had talked to did not have an issue with us being given VIP badges, but he was worried that if we sat with the VIPs, we might draw attention from the Burmese government representatives who had been invited to the opening ceremony. He relayed that the Burmese officials might question what I, as a foreign research student, was doing there and why I would be interested in the Zawti tradition. This interaction made it clear to me that Shan cultural events were still monitored by Burmese government officials. It also indicated that the Zawti were worried about how they might be perceived by the Burmese officials. It was not clear to me if the concern was related to Shan ethnic identification, as a minority ethnic group in relation to the Bamar Burmese majority of which the government official belonged, or to Zawti religious affiliation more specifically.

We were given orange VIP rosettes and remained in the *go pa ka* seating area as the Burmese government delegates began to arrive. The Burmese officials stood out in their traditional

Burmese *longyi*s and Western clothes, which contrasted against the Shan men who all wore traditional Shan trousers. I was introduced as a foreign visitor doing a PhD on Shan traditions and no further questions were asked. Area 3 therefore also acted as a ‘reception’ area for entertaining Zawti outsiders, such as Burmese officials and foreign PhD students!

I would categorise Area 4 as the amenities area, which included the cooking area, pot washing area and accommodation for the festival attendees. In this area there was an outdoor kitchen where food was cooked by volunteers to provide two free meals per day for the festival attendees. Some attendees stayed with family in the neighbouring Zawti villages next to the monastery, some booked accommodation in small local hotels (including the same hotel where I was staying), but most of the attendees camped in the temporary accommodation provided by the Zawti monastery. Area 6, next to Area 4 in Figure 2, was an area of the river at the edge of the festival site where attendees could bathe and wash their clothes. Area 5, the largest area, was the entertainment area which included vendors, food stalls, a funfair, and a main stage for evening entertainment.

3.2.5. Final Preparations: The Opening Ceremony

The official opening ceremony took place in the semi-outdoor ordination hall labelled as Area 2 in Figure 2 on the day before the first ordinations. The Zawti monks invited non-Zawti monks for neighbouring monasteries to attend the inauguration ceremony.

The opening ceremony began with the Zawti monks being led to the main stage by the *khing kyong* (Shan: နိင်: *khing* ‘elder’; ဂျင်: *kyong* ‘monastery’ refers to the head *zare* of the temple).

The Zawti monks walked to the front of the stage and once they reached the stage, they sat on the stage floor facing out to the audience. They sat behind low level tables which each had a large metal bowl placed on top, containing offerings of green bananas and coconuts. Once all of the Zawti monks were seated, the non-Zawti monks began to arrive.

A car arrived outside and two very elderly non-Zawti monks from a nearby temple exited and made their way to the stage with the help of three helpers. Nine more non-Zawti guest monks were invited to the stage to participate in the opening ceremony. The Zawti monks sat on the same stage with the non-Zawti monks, and they all recited together for about half an hour. The

khing kyong then made a speech to commence the beginning of the festival. Once this was done, the non-Zawti monks began to leave. As they were leaving, each monk was presented with a bowl of offerings which included items such as toothpaste, cream crackers, sweets, etc. I am not aware if they were offered money or not. The Burmese government officials left with the non-Zawti monks. The departure of the non-Zawti monks and Burmese government officials soon after the official inauguration speech signalled that they had acknowledged that the festival was taking place, and extend their support to the Zawti community, but were not interested in staying around for very long.

This interaction demonstrates that the contemporary Zawti monastic community interact and perform rituals with non-Zawti monks, and that the Zawti laity pay respects to non-Zawti monks. This has not always been the case. Historically the Zawti laity did not revere non-Zawti monks, and this attitude was part of the reason why the Zawti were mistakenly confused with the Paramats in scholarship (see Chapter One). The historic lack of regard for non-Zawti monks also came up in discussions of the Zawti with non-Zawti Shan monks as a factor that contributed to the idea that the Zawti were divergent or unorthodox by non-Zawti Shan outsiders. One middle-aged informant from a Zawti village in Mohnyin told me that she had grown up only revering Zawti monks and when she went to Shwedagon pagoda in Yangon for the first time in her early adulthood she was shocked to see everyone worshipping non-Zawti monks. Equally, everyone else there was shocked to see her not paying her respects to the non-Zawti monks. She said now things had changed and the Zawti laity honour all monks, not just Zawti monks. This shift in attitude happened after the Zawti were absorbed into the Thudamma *gaing* in the 1980s and began to interact more with non-Zawti monks and lay people (see Chapter One and Chapter Five).

After the outsiders left the Zawti monks led another chanting session which lasted for forty minutes. The first chanting session with the guest monks was exclusively Pali, and the second session with just the Zawti monks was a mixture of Shan and Pali. After the monks finished chanting, the *go pa ka* members who were sitting on stage with them, pulled down a yellow curtain which had been rolled up on a wire above the stage. The yellow curtain screened off the stage, concealing the monks. This type of curtain is not used in mainstream Shan Theravada. A Zawti *zare* explained that the curtain was used so that the Zawti monks could make themselves comfortable e.g. rearrange their robes, cough, spit into their spittoon, or drink some water, in private. The *zare* explained that the curtain maintained the dignity of the monks

in the eyes of the laity, conceived as being for the sake of the latter. If the lay people saw the monks engaging in such mundane activity, they might laugh at the monks or see them in a dishonourable light which would have a negative karmic effect on the lay people.

I have not come across anything in the Pali Canon or commentarial material which either calls for, or prohibits, the use of a curtain. I interpret the curtain as a physical manifestation of the protective anxiety which defines the Zawti monastic tradition. It physically and symbolically protects the laity from having bad thoughts about the monks, and it protects the monks from being perceived in any way beyond what is considered appropriate. The use of the curtain is an example a distinctive feature of the Zawti tradition which outsiders find peculiar. I had heard about the use of the curtain from non-Zawti Shan scholar monks, who spoke about it in a rumour-like tone. The distinctive features of the Zawti monastic tradition are examined in further detail in Chapter Five.

After a few minutes, the curtain was rolled back up so that the monks could return to the main monastery. The Zawti monks walked off the stage with an entourage of *go pa ka* members on both of their sides. At the final step down from the stage, a man lay prostrate across the ground with his hands in a *wai* (palms together in prayer position). Each monk placed one foot on the man's back to step on him and then over him. The laymen aiding the monks stepped over the man without stepping on him. This tradition of offering the body as *dāna* for the monks to step on is also practised by Arakanese Buddhists in Bangladesh (Personal Communication Kate Crosby 23/10/22). The tradition is based on the story found in the *Jātakanidāna*, a biographical text about the previous lives of the Buddha. In the story of Sumedha, Sumedha is an ascetic who came across villagers preparing a road for the Buddha Dīpaṃkara's (a previous Buddha) visit (Jayawickrama 2000). Sumedha had not yet finished repairing his section of the road when the Buddha Dīpaṃkara arrived. So, he prostrated his body and asked the Buddha and his disciples to use it as a path. As he was lying on the ground, the Buddha Dīpaṃkara predicted that Sumedha's path to spiritual awakening would be successful. Sumedha then made a vow to himself that he would not gain arahatship³⁴ there and then for making such a bodily sacrifice for Buddha Dīpaṃkara but would instead become a Buddha himself (Crosby 2013: 27). This story is popular in Myanmar and is commonly depicted in art. Offering the body as *dāna* (P. generosity) to the monks is thought of as a meritorious act and a great honour for the Zawti

³⁴ Arahatsip refers to the status of a being who has achieved personal enlightenment and will not be reborn in any world.

laity, and the prostrator must first ask for permission from the *go pa ka*, who determine the individual is suitable to do the task.

The Zawti monks were led back to the monastery and the *poi sang long* activities had officially commenced. The ordination of the *sang long* began the next day.



(Figure 3: A Zawti lay devotee re-enacting the story of Sumedha. Photo taken by Olivia Porter in Kachin State 02/02/20. Photos have been anonymised for privacy purposes.)

3.3. The 2020 *Poi Sang Long*

3.3.1. The Procession

Over six days one hundred and seventy-five *sang long* were ordained at the 2020 *poi sang long*, the 22nd *poi sang long* held at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery. In this Chapter I will describe the first day of the *poi sang long* festivities, which was repeated each day, in the same pattern of procession followed by ordination until all of the *sang long* were ordained.

The *sang long* ordination activities began with a ceremonial procession which led the *sang long* from the monastery to the ordination hall in the main festival site. At around 11 am families began gathering at the entrance of the monastery. The families of the *sang long* waited outside with their *sang long*'s umbrella and other personal items. The *sang long* emerged from the main monastery at around midday, dressed in their finery.

The *sang long* procession is a re-enactment of the Buddha's path from royalty to austerity. The Buddha was a prince who had every luxury at his disposal. He renounced it all when he was exposed to the four sights: an old man, a diseased man, a dead man and an ascetic. This experience exposed him to the suffering in the world, and he decided to abandon his home and possessions in the quest of spiritual truth (Crosby 2013: 17-18). The Buddha's renunciation is thought to be particularly striking since he gave up such a comfortable and lavish life for a life of religious austerity. The *sang long* emulate the Buddha's transition from princehood to monkhood through their style of dress: they exit the monastery dressed ornately in Shan royal dress, and when they return after ordination, they will be dressed in monastic robes.

The Shan royal dress worn by all the boys at the Zawti *poi sang long* consisted of Shan trousers with a matching long-sleeved top, a fabric belt, a head-dress adorned with flowers, and an ornate harness fastened across their chest. Each day the boys wore different matching colours, on the first day they all wore green, on the second day they all wore pink, and so on. The boys got dressed together inside the monastery and a makeup artist was employed to give the boys matching makeup. Each boy had peach coloured powder brushed across his eyes and cheeks, and their lips were covered in a matching peach lipstick. The boys carried a bunch of flowers

in their left hand, and a set of three handkerchiefs in their right hand. Each *sang long* was dressed identically in the exact same makeup, outfit and velvet slippers.

Each *sang long* walked in the centre on the procession, framed by two male relatives, who each carried elaborately decorated golden umbrellas. In Myanmar the umbrella is symbolic of royalty and status, and can be traced back to pre-colonial Burma, when the size and colour of one's umbrella indicated social rank. The king brandished a white umbrella while royal princes and high-ranking government officials were given golden umbrellas (Scott 1910: 409-410). The *sang long's* golden umbrellas, in addition to their princely outfits, therefore represent the new temporary royal status of the boy. The umbrellas were also practical in protecting the *sang long* from the hot sun. On one occasion during the festival, one of the *sang long* fell over from heat exhaustion but was quickly helped up by his entourage. My guide informed me that in the past the umbrellas were decorated with fresh flowers, but now most of the umbrellas were embellished with brightly coloured plastic flowers and tinsel.

Other members of the *sang long's* entourage on the procession included someone who carried a traditional ceramic water vessel, which was covered with a handkerchief, and a small drinking cup. Another relative carried an ornately carved enamel spittoon. Traditionally, the spittoon was for the *sang long* to spit out betel nut which, once chewed, produces a red liquid, but nowadays both the water vessel and spittoon are decorative rather than practical since young boys no longer chew betel.³⁵ Other family members carried plastic bottles of water or juice for the *sang long*. Each item was labelled with the number that corresponded to the label attached to the *sang long's* outfit. Their entourage also made sure to brush off the popped rice confetti which onlookers threw on to the *sang long* in celebration. In mainstream Shan ordination processions, the male entourage bring along a bottle of whiskey to enjoy but this is not the case for the Zawti who abstain from alcohol (Eberhardt 2006: 130, see Chapter Eight of this thesis for the Zawti attitude towards alcohol).

The elaborate outfits worn by the Zawti *sang long* is consistent with the types of outfits worn in mainstream Shan *poi sang long* ceremonies, in which sponsors go all out in supplying opulent outfits and regalia for the *sang long*. A noticeable difference is that the Zawti *sang long* do not wear *thanaka*, a paste made from bark, commonly worn on the face and arms in Myanmar, and often worn by Shan *sang long* for their procession (Ferguson 2021: 229).

³⁵ It is possible that young boys in Myanmar still chew betel, but I did not see any doing so myself.

Another key difference between the Zawti *sang long* and mainstream Shan *sang long* is that the Zawti boys have matching outfits, makeup, and paraphernalia. The outfits are paid for centrally by the monastery and are covered in the costs paid for by the parents or donors of the *sang long*. The uniformity of the *sang long*'s dress is a distinctive feature of the Zawti tradition. In the wider Shan Buddhist tradition, outfits are dependent on the *sang long*'s sponsor, the person who is funding the ordination. Some sponsors might choose to spend excessive amounts of money on the *sang long*'s outfit while others might only be able to afford a modest amount, which leads to disparity among outfits. The Zawti *sang long*'s matching outfits and paraphernalia create a sense of shared identity among the boys and their sponsors, ensuring that there is no disparity among the boys, irrespective of their family's financial situation.

Nancy Eberhardt, in her rich ethnographic exploration of novice ordination among the Shan in Chiang Mai, focuses on the role of the individual sponsors rather than the *sang long* in novice ordination. She highlights how the ritual is as much of a coming-of-age ceremony for the mothers who tend to sponsor the ordinations as it is for the *sang long* being ordained. Mothers begin preparing for the ceremony weeks in advance and talk of the arrangements in the same way American mothers-of-the-bridal talk about wedding plans (Holt in personal communication with Eberhardt 2017: 161). The preparations and costs involved in the ordination therefore become a talking point and ordination sponsorship acts as an articulation of wealth, generosity, and prestige (2006: 136-141). While the Zawti mothers are involved in the *sang long* ordination preparation and procession, and incur prestige from ordaining their sons, the uniformity of the *sang long* outfits and paraphernalia limits the scope of the mother's involvement in the practical planning for the event since the clothes, makeup, etc, have already been decided.

The uniformity of the Zawti *poi sang long* means that families are less likely to be competitive about out-doing other sponsors in the lavishness of their donations. Zawti *poi sang long* sponsorship is therefore less likely to be a display of status and wealth, and more about the opportunity to make merit and reaffirm Tai Zawti identity through *sang long* sponsorship. The differences of motivation between Zawti sponsors and the Shan sponsors in Chiang Mai observed by Eberhardt, are related to the social and communal contexts in which they both operate rather than their economic situation.

Gustaaf Houtman, writing of Burmese novice ordination, observes the differences between novice ordination in the monastery setting ('received path'), and novice ordination in a

meditation centre setting ('interpreted path'). The 'received path' refers to the typical Burmese novice ordination ceremony in the monastery setting which also includes the procession, propitiation of supernatural agencies and the Abhiseka ceremony (1984: 61). In contrast, ordination held in meditation centres are associated with the 'interpreted path' reduces the novitiation ceremony to the sole event of ordination, removing most of the "pomp and ritual", including the procession, music, and royal dress (ibid: 61). Houtman observed that those who opted for the meditation centre ordination were relatively wealthy and could have afforded a full-scale 'received path' novice ordination ceremony. Their choice for a simpler ceremony was therefore a reflection of their overall orientation towards their 'interpreted' path and their understanding of merit (ibid: 61). The Zawti's preference for a more uniform novice ordination, in contrast to a more individualised ordination, in the case of the Chiang Mai Shan, might then reflect a difference in orientation with regard to merit and a difference in social pressures between the two communal contexts.



(Figure 4: A *sang long* at the entrance of the monastery taken by Olivia Porter in Mohnyin, Kachin State 05/02/20. Photos have been anonymised for privacy purposes.)

Each *sang long* had a blue label fastened to their top with a safety pin. The label was numbered to indicate their position in the procession and to make it easier for relatives to find their *sang*

long in the crowd. The *sang long* formed a line at the entrance of the main temple hall with the tallest *sang long* leading the procession, and the rest following in height order. In mainstream Shan *sang long* ordinations, the boys' feet never touch the ground, to reflect the Buddha's departure from the royal palace by horse. Rather, the boys are carried on the shoulders of male relatives, or sometimes on horses, or on top of pick-up trucks (Eberhardt 2006, 129; Ferguson 2021: 225). In contrast, the Zawti *sang long* walk the procession themselves. My interpreter informed me that since the Tai Zawti *sang long* must be twelve or older when ordaining, in contrast to Shan boys more generally who are usually about ten years old at lower ordination, they are simply too big to go on their relatives' shoulders, and therefore they walk the procession themselves.

Some of the *sang long* at this *poi sang long* were in their late teens, and for the Zawti *sang long* ordination can be taken up to the age of twenty years old. Undertaking novice ordination at twenty is not unheard of in mainstream Shan Theravada. However, it does stand out, since the first occasion for novice ordination usually occurs at a younger age. Twenty is also the age when men can undertake *upasampadā* ordination, or higher ordination, to become a *bhikkhu*. In the wider Shan tradition, individuals who have never been ordained and are aged twenty or above, can undertake *pabbajjā* and *upasampadā* during the same ritual occasion, even if it is only a temporary higher ordination (Personal Correspondence with Jotika Khur-Yearn). In contrast, for the Zawti, *pabbajjā* and *upasampadā* are two strictly separate ritual occasions and therefore twenty-year olds are included in the same cohort of younger boys for *pabbajjā*. The age of the Zawti *sang long* is also related to the infrequency of the *poi sang long* festival. As already noted, the opportunity to ordain at the *poi sang long* occurs only once every three years, therefore there are few opportunities for boys to ordain during their teen years, leading to some older ordinands.

The Zawti *sang long* procession was led by a large metal cart which carried a sound system linked to a microphone. Women took turns singing traditional Shan folk songs which resounded from the speakers. The cart was pulled by a fire marshal and some *go pa ka* members. It was followed by a group of women playing instruments. One woman played the cymbals which were embellished with long tassels in the colours of the Shan flag, yellow, green and red. The cymbal-player was followed by a woman playing a Shan *ozi* drum which she carried on a sling across her shoulder. This was followed by the traditional Shan gongs which were carried on the shoulders of two women who beat the gong in time with each step.

They led groups of Shan women who danced along with the procession in a traditional Shan style. The women divided themselves into three rows. The outside rows danced to the sound of the instruments which were played by the women who formed a line in the centre. The style of dancing involved making small steps forward whilst twisting the body with arms raised at each step, all in synchrony. Multiple troupes of women from different regions joined the procession with their own instruments and dance formations which produced a clashing cacophony of sounds. The different troupes were identifiable by their outfits, as they all wore the *longyi* skirts associated with their hometowns.



(Figures 5 and 6: The procession of Zawti lay women playing instruments. Photos taken by Olivia Porter in Mohnyin, Kachin State 06/02/20. Photos have been anonymised for privacy purposes.)

The men followed the women with their own set of instruments. The *khing kyong* led the procession of *sang long* who began to proceed from the monastery to the temporary ordination hall (Area 2 in Figure 2). The *khing kyong* carried a small metal tray filled with fresh flowers and popped rice. Onlookers placed money onto the tray, first bringing it to their forehead, and then placing it onto the tray with both hands. These offerings to the *khing kyong* acted as a service fee, acknowledging him for his part in leading the procession. He had a *go pa ka*

member on each side of him who transferred the money from the overflowing tray into black plastic bags.



(Figure 7: The *khing kyong* accepting a cash offering. The *go pa ka* members stand on each side with the black bags for the cash. Photo taken by Olivia Porter in Mohnyin, Kachin State 06/02/20. Photos have been anonymised for privacy purposes.)

The cacophony of cymbals, drums, gongs and singing filled the air with an atmosphere of celebration and unity. Gavin Douglas, in his study of ethnic identity in *myelat* (the transitional zone between the Burman lowlands and the Shan highlands of Myanmar, home to several ethnic minorities), explores how the gong and *ozi* drum are enlisted as primary tools for building *communitas*, the experience of intense feelings of social togetherness put forward by Victor Turner (2013:194-5). In particular, he notes how the drumming of the Shan *ozi* at festivals and communal Buddhist events allows participants to share their common Buddhist identity while simultaneously asserting their unique ethnic identity. It is not only the sound of the Shan *ozi* that unites the community in a sense of shared ethnic identity, but also the symbolism of the drum. Images of the Shan *ozi* are ubiquitous in Shan State in both public and private spaces, seen on bumper stickers and tote bags, adorning lobbies of hotel rooms, and on

display in buildings dedicated to Shan literature and culture (ibid 2013: 203). The *ozi* is a signifier of Shan-ness, unifying the immediate crowd at the festival, and also the wider Shan community at large (Ferguson 2021: 216). In this case, the sound and symbolism of the *ozi* drum unified the Tai Zawti crowd as a group united in their religious affiliation and their ethnic affiliation with the broader Shan community.

As the *sang long* made their way down the procession, they were flanked by lay onlookers on either side of them. The laity were told, via megaphone, to throw the popped rice below the shoulders of the *sang long* so that they would not be disturbed. My interpreter remarked that some of the *sang long* had travelled from remote villages and it was not possible for their family to join them as their entourage. When this happens, men from other villages volunteer to help by carrying their umbrella and personal items. The procession from the monastery to the festival site took around 60-90 minutes to complete (it varied from day-to-day).

Once the boys arrived at the festival site, they took a two-hour break to have lunch and take family photos. The boys were led to a seating area and sat in two rows, facing each other. In front of each *sang long* was a large metal basin filled with items such as biscuits, crackers, dried persimmons, fresh fruit, cartons of soya milk, which had been offered by lay people attending the *poi*. There was also a bowl of *khao swe* Shan glutinous noodles in front of each boy. Once most of the boys were seated, a curtain was drawn so the *sang long* could eat, out of sight from onlookers. After the boys had finished their meal, there was an opportunity for them to join their families to take professional photographs. This happened behind the convocation hall, next to the river. A carpet was laid out, and there was a brightly coloured green back drop with yellow and blue accents. Stools were arranged for the older members of the family to sit on, with the *sang long* standing in the middle. At the top of the backdrop was a banner reading *poi hūm him khām sāng Zawti pok kam (22)*, Paññālaṅkāra wat Zawti Weng Mong Yang, *pī tham 2563 (2020)* ‘The 22nd Ceremony of Zawti Collective Novice Ordination in 2020’. The ‘22nd’ refers to the fact this is the twenty-second *poi sang long* held at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery since they established their monastery there in 1966. It was around 3p.m. by the time the boys had finished lunch and taken group photos.



(Figure 8: Ladies offering snacks in the bowls for the *sang long*. Figure 9: The *sang long* having their lunch break after the procession from the monastery to the festival site. Photo taken by Olivia Porter in Mohnyin, Kachin State 03/02/20. Photos have been anonymised for privacy purposes.)

3.3.2. The *Pabbajā* Ritual

Lay people began entering the convocation hall at around 2.30 p.m. to find a seat with a good view of the ceremony. Most of the audience were women who, in accordance with Southeast Asian social norms, sat on the ground with their legs tucked to one side to ensure that their feet would not face the direction of the monks. On the far left of the stage there was a raised platform which doubled as a sleeping area for the elderly male festival attendees. Elderly men sat on this platform to watch the ceremony. At around 3p.m. the cloth mats were placed on the ground for the monks to walk over, and women began to place their scarves underneath the cloth mats in preparation for the procession of monks. At 3.30p.m. fourteen Zawti monks, accompanied by their aides, walked through the centre of the convocation hall and made their way to the top of the stage. The laity sat with their hands in a *wai* and with their heads lowered down. At the top of the stage there were three ornate golden thrones. The Zawti abbot sat on the middle throne with his right-hand monk and left-hand monk on the thrones on either side. The senior monks sat cross-legged on their thrones. The other Zawti *bhikkhus* sat on the floor

in line with the thrones. The forty-eight *sāmaṇera* novice monks, who had been ordained in previous ordination seasons, sat in two long rows in front of them. The *bhikkhus* and *sāmaṇera* all sat faced out to the audience.

Once all the monks were seated, the *sang long* filed in, each holding a small bunch of their flowers between their raised palms. They stood in one line facing the *bhikkhus* and *sāmaṇeras*, with their backs to the audience. When everyone was in position, the abbot instructed the boys to squat, kneel, and bow three times. He then requested that they start chanting and after this he requested that they squat, kneel, and bow a further three times. The boys then slowly raised themselves up from a squatting position until they were in standing position. I was told by my interpreter that if a *sang long* accidentally squatted when he should have knelt, or made any other type of error, then he would have to leave the stage and join the group the following day. Whilst standing, a few monks, including the abbot, got up and approached the *sang long*. They proceeded to straighten up the boys' outfits, making sure that there was no residue of popped rice caught in their clothes, and readjusted their head pieces. This was done slowly and carefully. The monks smiled at the boys and gently fixed their outfits, talking to them quietly as they made last minute readjustments. One monk approached the *sang long* and asked if they wanted to take traditional Shan herbal pills to help aid digestion. Some *sang long* were given water to drink.

The monks treated the *sang long* with warmth and smiled at them reassuringly, making sure that the *sang long* were comfortable in anticipation of the next part of the ceremony, which involved almost two hours of uninterrupted chanting with no breaks.³⁶ Observing the Zawti monks act in this way came as a surprise to me since all I had known of the Zawti monks, before seeing them myself, was that they were extremely austere, which had left me with impression that the monks were straight-faced and serious. The tender nature of these interactions echoes the type of relations described by Jeffrey Samuels in his exploration of aesthetic and affective dynamics in Sri Lankan monastic social life (2010). Samuels highlights the importance of human sensitivities and relationships in cultivating relationships between

³⁶ The Zawti novice ordination procedure takes almost two hours, longer than a typical Burmese novice ordination which usually takes about an hour and a half and follows the following structure: handing over the monastic robes by the novitiates to the monks, requesting the robes, requesting to become novices, requesting the Three Jewels, and the Ten Precepts, and finally requesting an instructor (Houtman 1990: 109).

monks and novices, aspects of monastic behaviour which have traditionally been overlooked in western academic literature.

Once each *sang long* had been seen to, the boys knelt on the floor in front of the *bhikkhus* and older novices. Each *sang long* had either a *bhikkhu* or an older novice sat directly in front of them. A cushion was placed just in front of the knees to make the boys more comfortable since they would be kneeling and squatting on the ground for a prolonged period. In addition to the cushion, the monks also had alms bowl in front of them, ready to hand to the *sang long* once the ritual was complete. The *sang long* were also given a small bundled-up mat to sit on. The *sang long* squatted with a bunch of flowers pressed between their hands and raised above their forehead. The monk sitting in front of them held the orange robes that the ordinand would later change into. The robes were neatly rolled into a pyramid shape with a small bunch of flowers and Shan prayer flag placed on the top.³⁷ The monk then handed the robes to the *sang long*.



(Figure 10: During the *pabbajjā* ordination ceremony. Photo courtesy of the Shan Herald Agency for News Facebook page 03/03/20.)³⁸

The abbot then led the chanting. He began by administering the three refuges followed by the five precepts for the laity. Then the abbot led the chanting of the *Karaṇīyamettasutta Sutta* (*Metta Sutta*), a *paritta* (protective) chant which describes how to develop *mettā* ‘loving kindness’ to all beings. This was followed by the *Ratana Sutta*, another *paritta* chant. The *sang long* recited over two hours of Pali chanting by heart. When the chanting came to an end, the

³⁷ Small Shan prayer flags are called *dōng* and are often used in offerings. They are small, around 15cm in height and consist of a thin bamboo stick with a paper flag attached at the top.

³⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/shannews/photos/pcb.619571768879804/619570535546594>

curtain was closed by lay men sitting on the stage (a mixture of *go pa ka* members, *khings* and *zare*), and the audience was no longer able to see the monks or *sang long* on the stage.

Around ten minutes later the curtain was drawn back up. The *sang long* had changed into their orange robes. Then the actual *pabbajjā* ceremony, the ritually transformative part of the ceremony, began. First, the abbot asked the boys the set list of questions: if he has the permission of his parents, if he is free from punishment from rulers (or services to the king), if he is free from debt and has five limbs (is healthy), etc. This is unusual. In Burmese novice ordination ceremonies this set of questions is exclusive to the *upasampadā* ordination ceremony and is not part of the novice ordination procedure. The Zawti novice replied yes, agreeing that they fulfilled the necessary criteria.

The *sang long* then made a request to the abbot, their *upajjhāya* (P. preceptor), to take the ten precepts required of novice monks. The ten precepts are: to refrain from causing death, to refrain from stealing, to abstain from sex, to refrain from lying, to refrain from intoxicants, to refrain from eating after noon, to refrain from spectating singing or dancing, to refrain from wearing garlands or perfume, to refrain from high beds or seats and to refrain from handling gold or silver (Crosby 2013: 118). As the boys were chanting, a *bhikkhu* approached the *sang long* who sat directly in front of the abbot. He proceeded to shave the boys head with a scalpel. This was symbolic, signifying the change in status of the *sang long* to a *sāmaṇera* (P. a novice male monastic), since the boys had already had their heads shaved at the monastery before the procession.

After the ten precepts were administered, the curtain was draw down again. When the curtain was drawn down, the laity had an opportunity to shift around and make themselves more comfortable. Five minutes passed and the curtain was drawn back up. The *sang long* now sat facing out to the audience in the same direction as the monks which marked their changed status. The *sang long* were ritually transformed into *sāmaṇeras*. The novices wore their robes wrapped up tightly across their shoulders. The ceremony ended with a final prayer to the Buddha, and to the senior monk. The laity bowed three times to the monks and new novices. The monks were then led out by their assistants, first the abbot and the *bhikkhus*, then the senior novices, and finally the newly ordained novices. Just as before, there was a layman spread prostrate across the floor for the monks to step on. The *bhikkhus*, senior *sāmaṇeras*, and newly ordained *sāmaṇeras* all stepped on the man gently with one foot. When they left the

convocation hall, the *bhikkhus* and senior novices were each met with a layman carrying an umbrella for them. The newly ordained novices walked back to the monastery without an umbrella. They carried their sitting mat, which had been folded and tied with a white string, in their right hand. The new *sāmaṇeras* made their way back to Paññālaṅkāra monastery, to begin their lives as *Zawti* monks. An examination of monastic life at Paññālaṅkāra monastery follows in Chapter Five.

The monks leaving the ordination hall marked the end of the ritual activity for the day. By this time, it was around 5.30p.m. and many attendees went for dinner, before enjoying the evening *poi* activities.



(Image 11: The new *sāmaṇeras* leaving the ordination hall and proceeding back to the monastery. Photo courtesy of the Shan Herald Agency for News Facebook page 03/03/20.)³⁹

³⁹ I can no longer find this image on the Shan Herald Agency for News Facebook page but it was originally posted in this [album](#) posted on 03/03/20.

3.3.3. The *Poi* as a Festival Site

I shall now examine the social, economic, and communal aspects of the *poi* as a festival site. This exploration of the daytime and evening activities outside of the religious ritual itself has been observed in recent literature on Shan *poi sang long* activities. Most notably in her account of a Shan *poi sang long* in a Shan border town (Myanmar- Thailand border), Jane Ferguson examines the *poi sang long* festival site as a site of Shan ethnic identity maintenance and enactment through Shan nationalist rock music performances held as part of the *poi* evening entertainment (Ferguson 2021: 231-234).

The largest area of the Zawti *poi sang long* festival site, marked as Area 5 in Figure 2, was what I have labelled the entertainment zone. This zone was made up of temporary structures which functioned as market stalls, food stalls, a main stage for evening entertainment, and a funfair. The market stalls and food stalls were popular among festivalgoers in the daytime while the main stage and funfair were more popular in the evening.

The market stalls sold a range of items. Many of the stalls sold clothes, predominantly traditional Shan outfits. It was possible to tell where the vendors had travelled from by the style of *longyi* they sold since each Tai sub-group has their own distinct *longyi*, the traditional long skirt worn by Tai women. As previously mentioned in this chapter, my interpreter informed me that given the importance of the *poi sang long* to the Zawti community, attendees would have already spent a considerable amount of money on clothes and accessories in the months running up to the festival in preparation. This meant that attendees were less inclined to make significant purchases at the festival, which was reflected in the decision of many vendors to reduce the price of the clothes items by the end of the festival. My interpreter joked that the best time to shop was the last day of the festival, when the vendors needed to sell their stock before packing up and going back home. On the first day of the festival the average price of a *longyi* was 10,000 kyats (approx. £5.70), and by the fifth day some *longyi* were being sold for as little as 4000 kyats (approx. £2.30). Several other stalls sold Shan CDs ranging from traditional Shan folk music to modern Shan rock music. DVDs of Shan TV series and films, as well as Burmese dramas which had been dubbed in Shan were also popular. I was told by my interpreter that outside of Shan State, it was difficult to find such CDs and DVDs so for those who lived outside of Shan State, the festival was a good opportunity to stock up on Shan entertainment.

Book stalls sold a range of books in Shan script, including *dhamma* texts, Shan grammar books, and Shan translations of popular novels and autobiographies. It was one of the book vendors at the festival who gifted me a copy of *Long Khoe Zawti* (1997), one of the three Zawti-authored text which have played an integral part in this thesis. Tai (Shan) paraphernalia was another popular theme among items sold at the festival. Vendors sold Tai flags, items adorned with the Tai iconography, and patriotic banners. I had seen such items sold and worn in abundance in Shan State, especially in the form of traditional Shan crossbody bags. The popularity of such items at the market stalls at the *poi sang long* festival illustrates the bricolage of ethnic, religious, and political identity, which constitutes Tai Zawti identity.

The name of the tradition itself blends ethnicity and religion, with Tai referring to the Tai (Shan) ethnic group of which the majority of the Zawti population belong, and Zawti referring to Varajoti, the founder of the religious group. I am hesitant, however, to refer to the Tai Zawti as an ethnoreligious group since being Tai is not an essential prerequisite to being or becoming Zawti (see Chapter Seven). One of the boys ordained at the *poi sang long* was Black Palaung, which was identifiable from the style of dress worn by his family members. The Black Palaung, also known as the Rumai, are members of the broader Palaung ethnic group, a transboundary upland group with sizeable populations in Myanmar and China where they are known as the Ta'ang (Takahiro and Badenoch 2013, Weymuth 2016). While one does not necessarily have to be Tai to be Zawti, Tainess is inextricably linked with Zawti identity.

This link with Tai-ness was explicitly expressed in a banner that I was given by a book vendor at the festival when I purchased a Shan dictionary from his stall. The banner was divided into three coloured stripes, the yellow stripe was printed with 'Yellow Skin', the green 'The Green Land of Mother Tailand', and the red 'Brave of the Blood'. The language of the banner was overtly ethnic and political rather than religious despite the occasion of the *poi sang long* being a religious affair. The sale of such items, with such strong ethnic and political sentiments, indicate that the *poi sang long* is not only an opportunity to celebrate Zawti-ness, that being religious affiliation, but also Tai-ness, ethnic affiliation, which, in the context of Myanmar, is also political. Similar observations of the *poi sang long* as an opportunity to express Tainess/Shan-ness are raised by Ferguson, who highlights how the *poi sang long* is considered as a "presentation of Shan Buddhism" from the perspective of the dominant national gaze in both Thailand and Myanmar, where it is "as much of an ethnic festival as it is a Buddhist ritual"

(2021: 225-226). Tannenbaum also comments that the Shan in Maehongson use the *poi sang long* as an opportunity to “perform their Shan ethnicity” in the context of the modern multi-ethnic Thai state (Tannenbaum 2009:182).

The Zawti *poi sang long* is similarly an opportunity for the congregants to perform and celebrate their Shan ethnicity in a controlled environment, which suits both the Zawti and the outside authorities. Burmese officials and outsider Sangha authorities were part of the *poi*, and therefore the event was sanctioned as appropriate. The approval of these outsiders authorizes the Zawti to act out their Shan identity in ways that might otherwise be considered controversial or threatening in other circumstances. In another context, the sentiment of the banner which refers to an imagined ‘Tailand’, hinting at a desire for an independent Tai state, might be considered inappropriate. However, when in the mix of merriment legitimized by the Buddhist nature of the *poi*, such sentiments go under the radar, or are at least overlooked. It may also be relevant that the banner is written in English, if it were written in Burmese then it may have garnered a different reaction from outsiders.

In the daytime the festival site was generally frequented by the Zawti festival attendees, but during the night the site was transformed into a carnival for both Zawti and non-Zawti visitors. The market, cafes, and fairground of the *poi* site were crowded with non-Zawti townspeople who came only in the evening to join in on the revelry and entertainment. The road leading from the monastery to the festival site was lined with women crouching over open fires making savoury and sweet crackers. Other food vendors sold steamed sweet potatoes and peanuts. Children crowded around the ferris wheel and fairground rides. The *poi* at night was a valuable opportunity for vendors to sell their wares and make a profit. My interpreter informed me that not all of the vendors were Zawti, some were non- Zawti Shan and Burmese outsiders who paid a fee to set up their shops at the festival.

In the evening, the convocation hall where the *sang long* ordination took place was full of lay women, and *zare* recited traditional *lik long* literature at the front of the stage. The *zare* faced out to the audience whilst a crowd of other *zares* sat on the stage with him, facing him. Multiple *zares* performed each night, covering topics ranging from meditation to *jataka* tales (stories of the Buddha’s former lifetimes). At the end of the recitation the *zare* thanked the audience for listening and told them that they were acquiring merit by listening to his recitations.

At about 8p.m., the main stage entertainment began. In Area 5 of the festival site (Figure 2) there was a large stage for hired entertainment. A large crowd huddled together to enjoy traditional Shan opera and dancing. First, the stage lights turned on and the first stage curtain was lifted. This revealed another large curtain with a printed image of a temple. Then this too was lifted, and the actual stage was revealed. A large gold statue of the Buddha was placed in the middle of the stage, framed by two umbrellas. The performers were on their knees in prayer position, facing away from the audience and towards the Buddha, paying homage to the Buddha before they continued with their performance. Once this was over, a troupe of six female Shan dancers took the stage and performed a series of traditional Shan dances. This was followed by a solo male dancer. Finally, a female folk singer took to the stage. Members of the audience handed her money as she performed. In return she called out their names in the song she was singing. The entertainment carried on into the small hours of the night.

I was told by my interpreter that this side of the festival was a relatively new addition. The Zawti lay committee proposed the idea to generate revenue for the temple to fund the festival. The costs incurred by the temple to fund the festival were significant since they provided temporary accommodation, washing facilities, and three meals per day for all attendees. By incorporating popular secular activities, the Zawti can attract a wider audience of non-Zawti visitors to spend money at the *poi*, and this in turn is used to financially support the festival. A middle aged Zawti follower, who was born and raised in a Zawti village next to the Zawti monastery, spoke of these changes as a compromise that the Zawti were willing to make to ensure that they could comfortably fund the *poi*. She also noted that while the Zawti were willing to introduce new means of entertainment, the Zawti ensured that these events were in-line with the expectations of Zawti lay people (as will be explored in Chapter Eight). For example, alcohol was not sold or consumed anywhere on the festival premises, in marked contrast to the alcohol present at the periphery of Shan ordination festivals (Eberhardt 2006: 130,132, 134). The introduction of new types of events at the *poi sang long* show how the Zawti have adapted to the current social and economic climate, while still maintaining their core practices and values.

3.4. Conclusion

This chapter has examined the triannual *Zawti poi sang long* festival as a communal event that involves both the monks and the laity, examining different aspects of the preparation for, and celebration of, the *poi* at Paññālaṅkāra Zawti Monastery. I explored the reputation of the *poi sang long* among outsiders and the distinctive timing when compared with Shan lower ordination, before turning to the extensive preparation that goes into organizing the festival. The Zawti *khing* (lay elders) begin the process ten months before the ordination is held by selecting who should be ordained in the upcoming batch. Once this is decided, the boys are sent to the monastery where the monks prepare the boys by training them for the *pabbajjā* ordination ritual. In the months leading up to the *poi*, the laity prepare by budgeting, spending money on new outfits, transportation, and taking time off work. The site of the *poi* itself requires preparation, temporary structures are erected to house, feed and entertain the congregants. I then turned to *poi sang long* procession and the *pabbajjā* ordination itself.

The extensive preparation, the large festivities and the high numbers of attendees who travel long distances to attend the event, indicate how the *poi sang long* is a major event for the Zawti that brings together the entire community, reinforcing Zawti identity across the distance and boundaries that were discussed in Chapters One and Two, and enabling the continuation not just of Zawti monastic and lay practices and learning, but also Shan literacy education, which is not provided within government schools.

Throughout this chapter I have highlighted similarities between Zawti, and mainstream Shan *poi sang long* festivities. For example, both involve elaborate outfits worn by the *sang long*, a celebratory ritual procession, and both groups use the festival as opportunity to express and reaffirm Shan ethnic identity. I have also noted the differences, features distinctive to the Zawti tradition, namely that the Zawti have a set date for the ordination every three years and that novice ordination can only take place in one location, at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery. The way the laity interact at the festival also diverges from mainstream Shan ordination festivities in the way that the Zawti mothers have little involvement in the dressing of the *sang long* before the procession and laity abstain from alcohol. Further, the provision of identical dressing and gifts create a sense of equality among the boys in contrast to the findings of Eberhardt who observed that Shan *sang long* were dressed up in the clothes provided by their sponsors which resulted in a range of outfits of different styles and costs (2006: 128-132).

The differences make it clear that the *Zawti poi sang long* is an occasion that reaffirms and marks Zawti identity across the extensive geographic spread of Zawti communities, with its occurrence only every three years both heightening the sense of occasion and allowing the far-flung community to plan and gather the resources necessary to join the event. It is also an occasion where the Zawti carefully negotiate their relationships with the broader Shan community, non-Zawti monks, Burmese government officials and outsiders who, by joining the festivities, help fund the event, which is marked by great hospitality on the part of the monastery to those traveling from afar. This overview of the *Zawti poi sang long* begins to introduce the different overlapping aspects of Zawti identity: a bricolage of religious, ethnic, and national identity, some of which are shared with the broader Shan community, others of which are distinctive and reflect both the Zawti's far flung community as well as their strict adherence to monastic values and lay ethics that will be explored in later chapters.

The chapter, then, has served as an introduction to the contemporary Zawti tradition, as a monastic and lay community, which comes together from regions across Myanmar, China, and Thailand, to celebrate their traditions. We have begun to examine the distinctive traditions that have been, and still are, misunderstood by outsiders within their own lived context and in academic scholarship. By introducing the Zawti lay tradition in this way, I aim to illustrate that while some Zawti practices are distinctive, there are also many shared similarities with the broader Theravada Buddhist tradition and the wider Shan community. In highlighting the similarities, I begin to challenge the notion that the Zawti are unorthodox or heretical, a notion which has been perpetuated in both scholarship and among the wider non-Shan community until now.

Chapter Four: Higher Ordination

In the previous chapter I examined *pabbajjā* novice ordination among the Zawti. I shall now turn to their *upasampadā*, the higher ordination. I shall first provide a general overview of *upasampadā* ordination within Southeast Asian Theravada before turning to the Zawti *upasampadā* higher ordination procedure. I shall then focus on one particular aspect of the Zawti *upasampadā* ritual, their use of the *udakukkhepa-sīmā*, the water *sīmā*.

The *upasampadā* ordination is the most important of all the *saṅghakamma* (monastic legal procedures) because it ensures the transmission of the monastic lineage. The validity of the *upasampadā* ordination, therefore, is of the utmost importance. In this chapter, I shall illustrate how Zawti *upasampadā* ordination follows standard Theravada ritual procedure and adheres closely to canonical and commentarial material. I shall also show how the Zawti have additional rules, such as restrictions as to when ordination cannot take place, which are not found in other Theravada traditions. These additional rules relate to the size of the Zawti monastic community, and are symptomatic of the Zawti history of geographic and social isolation. However, even these rules, and the more distinctive features of Zawti *upasampadā* ordination, are reflective of their particularly strong commitment to Theravada canonical orthodoxy. The orthodoxy/orthopraxy of the Zawti *upasampadā* ordination procedure highlights the orthodoxy of the Zawti monks, which challenges the perception of the Zawti as “unorthodox” found in previous scholarship (Mendelson 1975: 231). I shall also reveal how the Zawti higher ordination process offers new insights into the nature of Buddhism in Burma prior to 19th-century monastic reforms and overturns an aspect of the existing literature on ordination conventions in Burmese Buddhism, specifically in relation to *sīmā*.

4.1. Mainstream (non-Zawti) Higher Ordination

It is recorded in the *Vinaya Piṭaka* that ordination initially occurred through the personal invitation of the Buddha and was therefore immediate and minimally ritualistic (Carbine 2004: 114, Crosby 2013: 198). Separate rituals developed for lower and higher ordination because of the growth of the order of monks, and issues of distance and travel (Holt 1981: 113).⁴⁰ Chapter Three examined *pabbajjā* (lower ordination) which authorizes a new *sāmaṇera*, novice, and we will now turn our attention to *upasampadā*, the higher ordination ritual process which authorizes a new *bhikkhu*, monk. There are no nuns of any kind associated with the Zawti monastic lineages.⁴¹

Upasampadā ordination is a *saṅghakamma*, a monastic legal procedure. All valid *saṅghakamma* rituals must fulfil the five *sampatti* (accomplishments) which are detailed in the *Parivāra*, the third and final book of the *Vinaya Piṭaka*.⁴² The *Parivāra*, literally “the accessory” in Pali, is an appendix to *Vinaya Piṭaka*, which provides a summary and classification of the rules of monastic conduct and additional instructions regarding administrative procedures followed by the monastic community (Buswell et al 2013: 1171).⁴³ The five *sampatti* listed in the *Parivāra* are: *vatthu-sampatti* (object), *ñatti-sampatti* (motion), *anussāvana-sampatti* (proclamation), *sīmā-sampatti* (a properly dedicated boundary), and the *parisā-sampatti* (quorum). The *sampatti* refers to the validity of the aspect in question. This criterion applies to all legitimate Theravada *upasampadā* ordinations.

I shall now examine each *sampatti* as it pertains to *upasampadā* ordination specifically. The candidate for ordination is the *vatthu* (object). Candidates wishing to receive higher ordination must fulfil a basic set of criteria to be eligible for *upasampadā*. This includes having an *upajjhāya* (a preceptor), having an alms bowl and robes, being free from certain diseases, being

⁴⁰ For more on the development of the ordination procedure and how it is recorded in the *Vinaya Piṭaka* see Holt 1981: 112-113.

⁴¹ There are no fully ordained *bhikkhū* nuns lineages in mainland Southeast Asia, despite its reintroduction into Theravada in Sri Lanka. However, in both Myanmar and Thailand, women can ordain as ‘precept nuns’ under which they take an adapted form of ordination used for novices. This is not found in the Zawti tradition, however. On the different types of nuns and the controversies around female ordination in Southeast Asia see Crosby 2014 Chs. 9 and 10.

⁴² Other *saṅghakamma* rituals include: the *Pātimokkha* recitation on *uposatha* days, when the 227 rules *Pātimokkha* are recited by *bhikkhus* on full moon days, and *pāvāraṇā*, the celebration that marks the end of the three-month *vassa* period observed by *bhikkhus*.

⁴³ The *Parivāra* contains references to Ceylonese monks and therefore is likely to be of a later origin than the rest of the Pali *Vinaya*, representing the latest stage of canonical development.

a human male, being over twenty years of age, being free from debt, having parental permission and having proper intentions (Carbine 2011: 119). If all these criteria are met, then there is *vatthu-sampatti* (accomplishment of the object).

The *upajjhāya* announces the *ñatti* (the motion), informing the monks present that the candidate wants to ordain, and asks for the acceptance of the candidate into the monastic community. He then recites the three *anusāvana* (proclamations), words of consultation to the Sangha, stating that the candidate has met all the requirements. The silence of the monks present at the ordination indicates that there are no objections regarding the ordinand or ordination, and so *sampatti* is accomplished. The *upajjhāya* then chants the *upasampadā-kammavācā*, the litany used for the higher ordination ceremony.⁴⁴ The *upasampadā-kammavācā* is a paracanonical ritual texts that sets out the wording of the ordination procedure (Crosby 2013: 87).

The *upasampadā* ritual is carried out within a *sīmā*, a ritually prescribed monastic boundary. There are two broad types of *sīmā*, a consecrated *sīmā*, the *baddha-sīmā* which literally translates to ‘bound-*sīmā*’, and an unconsecrated *sīmā*, the *abaddha-sīmā*, literally ‘unbound-*sīmā*’, the former requiring more layers of process and being more permanent in nature (Nagasena and Crosby 2022: 21). *Upasampadā* ordination can be conducted in either type of *sīmā* but, as we shall examine in this chapter, the Zawti use an *abaddha-sīmā*. Great care is made to ensure that the *sīmā*, either consecrated or unconsecrated, is valid to ensure that *sīmā-sampatti* is fulfilled. This is because if the *sīmā* is faulty in any way, then the ordination is invalid, and the entire lineage of monks ordained using that *sīmā* is called into question (an example of such a dispute, the Balapiṭiya dispute, is examined later in this chapter). The final *sampatti* listed in the *Parivāra* is the *parisā-sampatti*. The *parisā* (assembly), refers to the minimum quorum of five or more qualified monks who must be present for the *parisā-sampatti* to be fulfilled.

If all these *sampatti* are fulfilled then the ordination is valid, and the candidate is pronounced a monk and is given a new monastic name. The group of monks will tell the new *bhikkhu* the season and date of his ordination so that he is always aware of his correct *vassa* age. The *vassa* age is the monk’s “spiritual age”, measured by how many *vassa* have passed since his *upasampadā* ordination (Holt 1981: 122). The new *bhikkhu* is then informed of the rules he is

⁴⁴ *Kammavācā* literally means ‘the litany for the [ecclesiastical] act’.

expected to keep as a monk. He is now bound by the 227 *pāṭimokkha* rules for fully ordained monks laid out in the *Vinaya Piṭaka*. By renouncing the world, and accepting the monastic path, the new *bhikkhu* is ritually transformed, taking on new commitments and a new status in society (Crosby 2013: 204-206). A close examination of the Zawti interpretation of the *pāṭimokkha* rules follows in Chapter Five.

Since the validity of monastic ordination rests on the fulfilment of the five *sampatti* (accomplishments), monastic ordination across the Theravada world always follows the same basic pattern. Where variation does occur, which it does across regional and cultural contexts, it is always within the parameters of these five fundamental *sampatti*. The requirements set down by the *Parivāra* of the *Vinaya Piṭaka* of the Pali Canon pertain to all Theravada higher ordination.

4.2. Preparing for the Zawti Higher Ordination Procedure

We shall now turn to the Zawti monastic ordination procedure. The following outline is based on the account of *upasampadā* higher ordination recorded in the Zawti-authored text *Pī Kon Kham* (2016), and videos and pictures posted on the official Zawti Facebook page. I shall first examine Table 1 to explore the preparatory steps taken before the *upasampadā* higher ordination ritual. I shall highlight features that are distinctive to the Zawti tradition, namely when the ordination can take place, and the roles of the abbot, right-hand monk and left-hand monk in the preparation of the *upasampadā* higher ordination ritual. These distinctive features are separate from the *upasampadā* higher ordination itself. The actual *upasampadā* ordination, which is presented in Table 2, is entirely orthodox and consistent with mainstream Theravada *upasampadā* higher ordination.

Preparation Before the Zawti <i>Upasampadā</i> Ordination Ritual (<i>Pī Kon Kham</i> 2016: 72-74)
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. First, the monks must decide on an appropriate date for the ordination. Zawti <i>upasampadā</i> higher ordination takes place on half-moon <i>uposatha</i> days outside of the <i>vassa</i> rains retreat period.2. Once this is decided, ordinands approach the left-hand monk, the third in command at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery (see Chapter Four for more on the position of left-hand monk), who will ask him if he is: over the age of twenty and has the permission of his parents to ordain.3. Once this is established, the left-hand monk will take the ordinand to the right-hand monk, and report to him that the ordinand is definitely over twenty and has the permission of his parents.4. The right-hand monk then takes the ordinand to the abbot.5. The ordinand asks the abbot for a series of texts to memorise before ordination.6. The ordinand studies these texts for three days, practising once per day with the other ordinands.7. Once the texts are memorised, a senior <i>bhikkhu</i> will ask for the permission of the abbot to fetch the requisites for ordination.

(Table 1: details the preparatory steps taken by the Zawti monks before the *upasampadā* ritual.)

Step 1 of the preparations that take place before the Zawti *upasampadā* higher ordination is to decide on an appropriate date for the ordination. Zawti *upasampadā* ordination must occur on

a half-moon *uposatha* day outside of the *vassa* rains retreat period (*Pī Kon Kham* 2016: 72).⁴⁵ This is more specific than mainstream Burmese, Shan, or Thai higher ordination procedures, which can occur on any day.

According to the Zawti account of higher ordination laid out in *Pī Kon Kham*, the reason why higher ordination takes place only on half-moon *uposatha* days outside of *vassa* is related to the availability of the monks. The monks are described as being too busy on the full moon and new moon *uposatha* days, and during the three months of *vassa* period, to carry out any ordinations (ibid 2016: 72).⁴⁶ The Zawti monks are busy on full moon and new moon *uposatha* days because these are days of heightened religious observance for both the Zawti monks and Zawti laity. The full moon and half-moon *uposatha* days are particularly important for the Zawti monks because, like all Theravada *bhikkhus*, on this day they ceremonially recite the entire *Pāṭimokkha Sutta*. The *Pāṭimokkha Sutta* is the litany which includes the 227 monastic rules for fully ordained *bhikkhus*. The recitation of the *Pāṭimokkha* is a collective declaration of the monastic community's *pārisuddhi* (P. complete purity). John Holt writes, “*pārisuddhi* can only be affirmed when all members of the monastic order are present, having gathered together on the appointed day (*Uposatha*) every two weeks to declare unfailing adherence to the over two hundred rules of discipline” (1981: 125). For the monks, the recitation of the *Pāṭimokkha Sutta* acts as a frequent reminder of the rules they are bound to, acting as a reaffirmation of their commitment to the monastic path.

In addition to performing the *Pāṭimokkha* rites on full moon and half-moon *uposatha* days, the Zawti monks must also attend to the Zawti laity. Lay congregants from the four neighbouring villages that surround the monastery take turns to make offerings to the Zawti monks on each of the four *uposatha* days per month. In addition to the standard *uposatha* day offering ceremonies, there are also several special rituals that fall on full moon and half-moon *uposatha* days, for example, the ‘offering firewood in the chilly season’ (S. ဗိဇ္ဇင်လူ့လှူဝါဒ်ခင်းခင်းလှူဝါဒ်) ceremony. By allocating a half-moon, rather than a full moon or new moon *uposatha* day, the ordination will still take place on an auspicious quarter moon day but avoid the two busiest such days.

⁴⁵ The “half-moon days” refers to first quarter moon and third quarter moon.

⁴⁶ “[on ordination days] the *bhikkhus* have to be in the *sīmā* boundary but on [full moon and new moon *uposatha* days] they don’t have enough time (*Pī Kon Kham* 2016: 72).

The Zawti also prohibit *upasampadā* ordination during *vassa* (the three months rains retreat period). This is distinctive since in Burmese and Shan Theravada *upasampadā* ordination can take place during *vassa* and some choose to ordain during *vassa* specifically so that they can attend retreats. In the *Vassūpanāyikakkhandhaka* in the *Mahāvagga* (The Chapter on Entering the Rainy-Season Residence) monks are encouraged to break *vassa* to ordain a novice seeking *upasampadā* ordination during *vassa* (MV 1.137–1.156).

The Zawti state that they are too busy to perform *upasampadā* ordination during *vassa*. *Vassa* is a busy period for all Theravada monks who are expected to spend more time on meditation and studying the *dhamma*. *Vassa* is especially busy for the Zawti monks because it is when they hold *lik long* workshops, studying the distinctive Shan form of religious texts (see Chapter Five). It is also an important time for the Zawti laity, who come to the temple on *uposatha* days during *vassa* to take part in temple sleeping. On these days, lay people stay at the temple overnight and engage in activities such as giving offerings to the monks, listening to sermons performed by monks and *zares*, and meditating (temple sleeping is examined in further detail in Chapter Seven).

The Zawti monks are especially busy during this period because there are so few of them to facilitate and lead the *vassa* activities. In November 2019, there were fifteen Zawti *bhikkhus* and forty-eight novices and at the time of writing this thesis, in November 2022, there are approximately nineteen Zawti *bhikkhus* and seventy novices at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery. If the Zawti monks were to hold *upasampadā* ordination on *uposatha* days, they would struggle to maintain a *parisā* of five *bhikkhus* because the *bhikkhus* are already committed to performing the *Pāṭimokkha* and attending to the laity on these specific days.

Through examining what the Zawti monks do during *vassa* and on the full moon and half-moon *uposatha* days, we can begin to understand why the monks are too busy to hold ordinations, and why determining the right day is the first step in preparing for an *upasampadā* ordination. There is no *Vinaya* prohibition stating when *upasampadā* ordination can or cannot happen and so the Zawti preference for the half-moon *uposatha* days outside of *vassa* is in-keeping with monastic code. The specificity of when they can hold *upasampadā* ordination is based on their own monastic constraints, which are exacerbated by how few Zawti monks there are.

Steps 2-4 in Table 1 highlight the roles of the abbot, the right-hand monk, and the left-hand monk in the Zawti tradition, touched on in Chapter One and examined in detail in Chapter Six. Steps 5-6 detail how the Zawti ordinands prepare by memorizing the litanies they will be expected to recite during the *upasampadā* ritual. This is common practice in the wider Theravada community, in which ordinands also spend time familiarizing themselves with the ritual texts included in the ordination ritual in the run up to their ordination. The final preparatory step, Step 7, states that once the texts are memorised, a senior *bhikkhu* will ask the abbot for permission to fetch the requisites for ordination. This refers to the material requisites that are the basic possessions a monk needs to be equipped with to survive, such as the alms bowl and monastic robes, and these are thus necessary to ensure *vatthu-sampatti* (validity of object), in this case the monk. Again, these standard requisites are required of all Theravada monks undergoing *upasampadā* ordination.

The first preparatory step of the Zawti *upasampadā* ordination preparation is the most distinctive in the sense that it is more specific than the mainstream, but it does not contradict any canonical or commentarial material. It is rather just an additional rule imposed in response to the small number of Zawti monks available to carry out ordinations. I will return to this point in my examination of the Zawti *upasampadā* ordination ritual itself. So far, there is nothing ‘unorthodox’ about how the Zawti prepare for ordination or implement the *sampatti* laid out in the *Parivāra* of the *Vinaya Piṭaka*.

4.3. The Zawti Ordination Procedure

On the Day of the *Zawti Upasampadā* Ordination Ritual

(*Pī Kon Kham* 2016: 72-74)

1. On the day of the *upasampadā* ordination, the right-hand monk and left-hand monks go to the abbot to ask for his permission to recite the *kammavācā* litany to ordain the ordinands.
2. The ordinands are arranged in lines determined by the grade of their study and seniority as a *sāmaṇera*. The individual who has been a *sāmaṇera* for the longest period and has attained the highest level of study will go first.
3. The *khing kyong* (the lay ritual practitioner who leads the laity in ceremonies involving the Zawti monks, see Chapter Six for more on the role of the *khing kyong*) invites the abbot to lead the ordination procedure. The abbot strikes a gong to begin the proceedings. The *bhikkhus* lead the applicants in a procession to the *sīmā*, a novice will hold a parasol over the ordinand. The *khing* will take all the necessary things. They walk over a carpet laid out for them. The ones who hold flowers in their hand and have the robe on their shoulder, walking behind the *bhikkhus*, are the applicants.
4. When they arrive at the *sīmā* boundary the *bhikkhus* prepare by doing the four *pubba karaṇa* (B. ပုဗ္ဗကရဏ, the preparations performed before a monastic ritual event).⁴⁷ Once the *sīmā* boundary is prepared the *upajjhāya*, (the *Tsau Sra Kammawā* (S. ဝဋ်းသြို,ဝမ်,မဝါ, ‘the Venerable teacher of the *kammavācā*), and the *kāraka sangha* (S. ဂါ,ရဂသင်,ခါ, ‘the *sangha* of the doers, i.e., all the monks involved in the ritual) enter the *sīmā* boundary. The monks then sprinkle water or sand around the *sīmā* boundary using sticks to establish the *udakukkhepa sīmā*. Once this is done, the novices are invited into the *sīmā* boundary.
5. Once *pubbakaraṇa* duties are fulfilled, the ordinands, in groups no greater than three, enter the *sīmā* and request an *upajjhāya* three times.
6. The *upajjhāya* (the Zawti abbot) replies “it is proper” (B. ဝဋ်းရှုပံ). The ordinand replies “yes, Venerable Sir” (B. ဘန္တသမ္ပဋိတမိ). Then, the *upasampadā kammavācā* is recited three times.
7. Once this is complete, the time, date, season, *sīmā*, township, village, *upajjhāya*, *kammavācā*, the *kāraka sangha*, and the lay devotees present at the ordination are all recorded in writing.

⁴⁷ I have included the Burmese script in brackets because the Burmese terms are used in the text itself. The use of the Burmese terms (usually Burmese Pali) stands out because the rest of the text is Shan.

(Table 2 details the Zawti *upasampadā* ordination ritual procedure itself based on *Pi Kon Kham* 2016: 73-74).

I shall now use Table 2 to go through the ritual procedure on the day of the *upasampadā* ritual itself, and explain how the Zawti ensure that each *sampatti*, (accomplishment) is fulfilled to ensure that the ordination is valid. Steps 1-3 are preparatory steps that involve organising the ordinands into the order of who will be ordained from first to last. This is decided based on the length of time an ordinand has been ordained as a *sāmaṇera* novice, and their level of study. The ordinand who has been a *sāmaṇera* for the longest period of time and has attained the highest level of study will go first. The abbot strikes the gong (Step 4) to mark the beginning of the ritual proceedings. The ordinands are led in a procession from the main monastery, to the *sīmā*, over a carpet that has been rolled out especially for them. This scene is depicted in Figure 12 below. The monk in the maroon robe is a Zawti *bhikkhu* and the monks following behind in bright orange robes are the ordinands, who are already novices. The monks carrying umbrellas and squatting in worship, are also novices. At the very back is a novice monk and a *khing* (lay ritual attendant) carrying items that will be used in the ordination ritual. The *sīmā* used for Zawti *upasampadā* ordination will be examined in further detail at a later point in this chapter.



(Figure 12: The novices on procession towards the *sīmā* pavilion. Courtesy of Jong Zaw Ti Facebook Page, 31 March 2022).

Step 4 details the preparation of the *sīmā* boundary. The *bhikkhus* prepare the *sīmā* by doing the four *pubbakaraṇa*. The *pubbakaraṇa* are the preparations performed by monks before a monastic ritual event. The details of the *pubbakaraṇa* preparations are found in the *Mahāvagga*

of the *Vinaya Piṭaka* which states that monks should prepare the *uposatha* hall on *uposatha* days by sweeping, preparing seats, setting up lamps, and laying out drinking water (Mv.II.20.1-5). If this is not done, then a *dukkata* (a minor offence) is committed. *Pubbakaraṇa* is usually coupled with *pubbakicca* (preliminary duties) which refers to the duties done when the *bhikkhus* have assembled. *Pubbakicca* is not mentioned in the account of the Zawti *upasampadā* ordination ritual procedure given in *Pī Kon Kham*. The term *pubbakaraṇa* is used by the Zawti here to describe the actual preparations that are done to prepare the *sīmā* for the ordination rather than a recitation of the *pubbakaraṇapubbakicca*. In Burmese Buddhism, the dialogue of the *pubbakaraṇapubbakicca* is recited before the recitation of the *Pāṭimokkha Sutta* on *uposatha* days. The *pubbakaraṇapubbakicca* in that context is a summary of the rules and regulations regarding the recitation of the *Pāṭimokkha* based on verses found in the *Kaṅkhāvitarāṇī*, Buddhaghosa's commentary on the *Pāṭimokkha* (Bhikkhu Ñāṇatusita 2014 lxxiv-lxxv).

Once the *pubbakaraṇa* preparations are complete, the *upajjhāya*, the *Tsau Sra Kammawā* and the *kāraka sangha* enter the *sīmā* boundary (Step 4). The Zawti abbot is usually the *upajjhāya*, but if he is unavailable then the right-hand monk will step in on his behalf (*Pī Kon Kham* 2016: 40). The *Tsau Sra Kammawā* is the *kammavācā* specialist who leads the recitation of the *ṇatti* and the *anussāvana* (Step 14). In the Burmese Buddhist tradition, the *kammavācā* specialist is referred to as the *Kammavācā Sayadaw* (Carbine 2011: 119). The *kāraka sangha* (the doers of the Sangha) refers to the other *bhikkhus* who enter the *sīmā* boundary. From looking at pictures of the latest Zawti *upasampadā* ordination posted on Facebook, held in March 2022, in addition to the *upajjhāya* (the abbot) and the *Tsau Sra Kammawā*, there were ten other *bhikkhus* (all the Zawti *bhikkhus*) inside the *sīmā* for the ordination. This means that the Zawti *parisā* consisted of twelve Zawti *bhikkhus*, well over the minimum five needed to ensure *parisā-sampatti*.

Step 4 details how the Zawti monks establish the *udakukkhepa sīmā*, the water *sīmā*. I will return to the nuances of the *udakukkhepa sīmā* at a later point in this thesis, but what is important here is that the *sīmā* used by the Zawti monks is established to the fulfilment of the *sīmā-sampatti* regulation. Once the *sīmā* is established, the ordinands are invited into the *sīmā* boundary (Step 10). The Zawti ordain no more than three ordinands at a time. At the Zawti *upasampadā* ordination held in March 2022, the pictures show that seven men in total were ordained, and they were divided into two groups of two and one group of three (see Figure 13). This means that the following steps, 5-7, were repeated three times for each group. Step 5

details how the ordinands enter the *sīmā* and request to receive higher ordination. The request is repeated three times. The *upajjhāya* then replies, ‘it is proper’ (Step 6).

The next step in the ordination procedure is the recitation of the *upasampadā kammavācā* which is repeated three times. The entire litany is repeated three times to ensure that at least one recitation is free from errors, which is standard procedure for Theravada monastic ordination. The account provided in *Pī Kon Kham* is a summary and does not provide specific details about the contents of the *upasampadā kammavācā*, but the *upasampadā kammavācā* is a standard litany used in Burmese Buddhism. It is in the *upasampadā kammavācā* that the *ñatti*, the motion informing the monks present that the candidate wants to ordain, is made. It also includes the *ñatti* that asserts that the candidates are free from the any qualities that disqualify one from ordaining, that they have the appropriate requisites for ordination, and that they have a preceptor (Carbine 2011: 129-130).



(Figure 13: Three novices being ordained using the *kammavācā* on the water *sīmā* pavilion built over the Nam Yang River. Courtesy of Jong Zaw Ti Facebook Page 31 March 2022).

The Zawti ask the eight questions regarding the eligibility of the candidate, and what disqualifies one from becoming a monk prior to the ordination itself (Steps 2-3 in Table 2). If all these eight requirements are fulfilled, then the ordinand is eligible for ordination and *vatthusampatti* is fulfilled. We can observe in Figure 12 of the Zawti ordinands on procession, that that the Zawti ordinands are in possession of their own alms bowl and robes.

Included in the recitation of the *upasampadā kammavācā* are the three *anusāvana* (proclamations), which state that the Sangha are satisfied that the ordinand has met all the requirements and will be accepted into the monastic order. When the *upasampadā kammavācā* is completed, both the *ñatti-sampatti* and the *anussāvana-sampatti* are fulfilled. The final step in the Zawti higher ordination procedure is verifying the particulars of the ordination (Step 7). Details such as the time, date, season, *sīmā*, location, *upajjhāya*, etc. are recorded in writing. These details are useful so that *bhikkhus* can keep track of their correct *vassa* age.

In examining each step of the Zawti *upasampadā* higher ordination ritual, I have illustrated how each of the five *sampatti* are fulfilled to ensure that the ordination is valid. The Zawti *upasampadā* ritual procedure is totally orthodox by Theravada standards, which challenges the outsider and earlier scholarly perception of the Zawti as unorthodox. I shall examine one aspect of the Zawti *upasampadā* that does stand out as distinctive in the next section.

4.4. The *sīmā* used at Paññālaṅkāra Tai Zawti Monastery

The *sīmā* used for *upasampadā* ordination, and all *saṅghakamma* procedures at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery, is an *udakukkhepa-sīmā*, a water *sīmā*. An *udakukkhepa-sīmā* is an *abaddha-sīmā*, literally “not-bound”, an unconsecrated *sīmā*, “that can be used for monastic ritual purposes without the need for a consecration ceremony to establish them as ‘sacred space’” (Nagasena 2012: 227). An *abaddha-sīmā* may be temporary or of a specific kind that is classified but not consecrated, in contrast to a *baddha-sīmā*, which is consecrated specifically in relation to the temporal village *sīmā* (*gāmasīmā*) or a ‘special temporal village *sīmā*’ (*visuṃgāmasīmā*), the latter requiring the determination of a king or king’s representative that a particular, smaller parcel of land can act as a village *sīmā* rather than needing to refer to an entire village (Crosby and Nagasena 2022: 21). An *abaddha-sīmā* does not rely on a temporal *sīmā* and can therefore be consecrated anywhere outside of a ‘village’. Through definitions provided in commentaries on the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, this means that an unbound *sīmā* is possible at a certain distance from a village or on a body of water, which is not considered to fall within the definition of village territory.

This independence from the village temporal *sīmā* awards some advantages to an *abaddha-sīmā*. One advantage is that it functions in the same way as a *baddha-sīmā*, but it is easier to establish and allows for greater monastic autonomy. Since the creation of a new *baddha-sīmā* relies on an existing boundary, a *gāma-sīmā* (a village boundary), the new *baddha-sīmā* is created somewhere within this existing boundary, and all the *bhikkhus* who live within the jurisdiction of the *gāma-sīmā* in question must attend the consecration of the new *sīmā* (Crosby and Nagasena 2022: 22). Creating a new *sīmā* thus requires communication with and compliance from other monks. The Zawti records state that when the early Zawti monks were in Sagaing, they used a *visuṃgāmasīmā* that had been donated to them by the king (see Chapter One). However, after the Zawti lost royal patronage in the mid-eighteenth century, they were exiled from the Burmese royal centre and had to leave their *visuṃgāmasīmā* behind in Sagaing. When they moved into the Shan States, they kept themselves separate from other monastic traditions, and therefore it would have been difficult to seek co-operation from outsider monks to establish a new *baddha-sīmā*. The Zawti monks began to use the more flexible *udakukkhepa-sīmā*, which they continue to use to this day.

While in practice they may have been in places where other monks were not an issue, the use of a *gāmasīmā* also requires the cooperation of villagers, and the use of a *visuṃgāmasīmā* requires the cooperation of a king inclined to support Buddhism, both impractical. Also, as examined in Chapter One, the fact that the early Zawti tradition moved around frequently once they were forced to leave Sagaing, settling in various remote areas throughout the Shan Hills, made the commitment to a *baddha-sīmā*, linking them indefinitely to a specific place, less likely. The contemporary use of the *abaddha* (unbounded) *udakukkhepa-sīmā* by the Zawti is therefore likely to be a continuation of their historic tradition of using this type of *sīmā*, which can be established independently of other monastic traditions, of non-Zawti villagers and of kings or their representatives. The definition of the *udakukkhepa-sīmā* can be found in the *Mahāvagga*, the second book of the *Vinaya*:

nadiyā vā bhikkhave samudde vā jātassare vā yaṃ majjhimassa purisassa samantā udakukkhepā ayaṃ tattha samānasaṃvāso ekuposathāti.

In a river, O *Bhikkhus*, in a sea or in a natural lake, the common share/ communion (*samānasaṃvāsā*) creates a single *uposatha* as far as an average man can splash water all around. (*Mahāvagga Pāli* 1979, Mv ii12, 7, cited and translated in Nagasena 2012: 230)

The phrase ‘single *uposatha*’ here is defined by a relatively small area, determined by the area covered when a monk of average strength splashes water outwards from the outermost monk of the congregation (*Pācittiyādi Aṭṭakathā* 1965: 334 as cited and translated in Nagasena 2012: 231). This is in marked contrast to a village-boundary based *sīmā*, which can include monks from a ‘single *uposatha*’, i.e., those who celebrate *uposatha* days together, from a wide area. When the water is splashed in each direction, the space is automatically considered a boundary without further consecration and operates in the same way as a consecrated *sīmā* (*baddha-sīmā*). The canonical description of establishing the *udakukkhepa-sīmā* in the sea or in a natural lake implies that the monks are physically in the water. However, the *Samantapāsādikā* commentary details that monks can perform *saṅghakamma* procedures in an *udakukkhepa-sīmā* by boarding a vessel such as a boat, or by standing on a temporary or permanent pavilion or bridge on or in a body of water which includes rivers, lakes, and the sea (Crosby and Nagasena 2022: 34).

Zawti *saṅghakamma* procedures, such as the *upasampadā* ordination held in March 2020, take place within an *udakukkhepa-sīmā* established on a pavilion. The Zawti take great care to establish their *udakukkhepa-sīmā*, to ensure that *saṅghakamma* procedures performed within the *sīmā*, such as *upasampadā* ordination, are legitimate. A wooden pavilion is built over the Nam Yang River which flows next to Paññālaṅkāra Monastery (see Figure 14). The Zawti monks have been conducting *upasampadā* ordination on pavilions built over the Nam Yang since they established themselves in Mohnyin in 1953. The two previous abbots before the current incumbent were ordained on the Nam Yang, Venerable Paññāsāra in 1959 and Venerable Wannapañña in 1964 (*Pī Kon Kham* 40-42).

The Zawti keep a gap between the pavilion and the bridge that leads to the pavilion. The gap is left to ensure that the *udakukkhepa-sīmā* established on a pavilion is not in contact with the land, which might be considered part of an existing *sīmā*, a *gāma-sīmā* (the village boundary). This is because the two types of *sīmā* are mutually heterogeneous (*P. visabhāga*) and must always be kept separate. If there is a connection between any two heterogeneous monastic boundaries, then any legal act (*kamma*) carried out inside either one of the boundaries is rendered completely invalid (Kieffer-Pülz 2022: 328). A debate over gap between the pavilion and the riverbank, and how this impacts the validity of a *udakukkhepa-sīmā*, dominated Sri Lankan monasticism for three decades. The energetically debated Balapitiya dispute, which began in 1851, centred around the gap between the bridge and the platform of the Balapitiya *udakukkhepa-sīmā*, and ultimately led to a split of the Amarapura Nikāya into the Mūlavamṣa *nikāya* and Saddhammavamṣa *nikāya*, both of which still exist today (ibid 2022: 327).

The Zawti ensure that there is a gap between their *sīmā* pavilion, from which the *udakukkhepa-sīmā* is established, and the riverbank, and they make note of this precaution in *Pī Kon Kham*:

You have to be careful that the bridge that goes up to the *sīmā*, and the *sīmā* [itself] are not attached. The space between the water *sīmā* and the bridge must be one ခဲးခဲးဝဲး ; *neung kheup* (the distance between the end of the thumb and the end of the middle fingers) and one ခဲးခဲးဝဲး ; *neung sop* (the length of the arm from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger) (*Pī Kon Kham* 2016: 74)

The Zawti establish their *udakukkhepa-sīmā* following the canonical description laid out in the *Mahāvagga*. Step 9 in Table 2 describes how on the day of the *upasampadā* ordination, to prepare the *sīmā*, they “sprinkle water or sand around the *sīmā* boundary using sticks to establish the *udakukkhepa-sīmā*”. I have not seen pictures or videos of the *udakukkhepa-sīmā* being established for *upasampadā* ordination. However, I have seen a video of an *udakukkhepa-sīmā* being established for *Pāvāraṇā* (the holy day that marks the end of *vassa*), which was posted on the official Jong Zaw Ti Facebook page and can be viewed [here](#).⁴⁸ In Figure 15, a still taken from the video, you can see that a different *sīmā* pavilion is used for the *Pāvāraṇā* ritual. This pavilion is built over Nong Phā lake, within the Paññālaṅkāra Monastery complex itself.⁴⁹ In the video you can see the Zawti abbot lean over the window and physically splash water out onto Nong Phā lake.⁵⁰

The physical act of splashing water to establish the *udakukkhepa-sīmā* signals a level of liturgical orthopraxy that is distinctive. In Burmese Buddhism, physically splashing water to establish an *udakukkhepa-sīmā* has been an ideological aspect of the ritual rather than a practical one since the mid-19th century. Ashin Sobhitāra provides an account of an ordination ceremony held in a river led by Ñeyyadhamma, the *thathanabaing* (the head of the Sangha) during Mindon’s reign (1853-1878). Ñeyyadhamma stopped a monk from attempting to splash water in front of him.⁵¹ He stated that the areas of splashed water were automatically counted as a boundary, and therefore it is was not necessary to physically splash water (Ashin

⁴⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/102257422373975/videos/1192201474976431>In this video you can see that a different *sīmā* pavilion is used.

⁴⁹ According to *Pī Kon Kham*, the Nong Pha *sīmā* pavilion was attended by Burmese and Shan together during the 1980 Sangha Purification (2016: 17).

⁵⁰ The Zawti note how *Nong Phā* sometimes dries up during the summer months, therefore it is unusable, and they must use the temporary *sīmā* on the Nam Yang river instead. The details of how weather can impact the validity of an *udakukkhepa-sīmā* is not found in the Pali Canon but in the commentarial material, specifically the *Samantapāsādikā*, a commentary on the Vinaya attributed to Buddhaghosa. The commentarial material records that there are three levels of water in a river: 1) the normal level of a river that exists throughout the year, 2) the monsoon water level which might last around four months or longer and 3) the excessive monsoon water level which does not stay long, or the area is not flooded regularly (Nagasena 2012: 236). The first two levels are considered appropriate for an *udakukkhepa-sīmā* while the third level is not appropriate and is invalid because the water does not stay for long enough or the area is not regularly flood throughout the monsoon season (*ibid*: 236). If the water does not remain for the full four months of the monsoon season (*vassa* season), then the ground that returns to dry land is considered a village boundary, a *gāmasīmā*. Since a new *udakukkhepa-sīmā* must be established for each *saṅghakamma*, it is possible that the two pavilions are for the visuals, since irrespective of whether or not dry bodies of water are valid according to the commentaries, the visual purificatory association with water is sought after.

⁵¹ Ñeyyadhamma was the was head of the Sangha during Mindon’s reign (1853-1878), a period characterized by monastic sectarian splits which resulted in the creation of the Dwaya, Weluwun, Hngetwin and other monastic groups who broke away from the state backed Thudhammā on the grounds that it was too lax (See Chapter One). It would be interesting to know if such splinter groups also retained this practice.

Sobhitācāra 1968: 75, cited in Nagasena 2012: 233). The parameters of the *sīmā* can instead be gauged by the areas where the splashed water *would* cover. Nagasena writes that this incident occurred in the 1870s, and therefore we can assume that monks were physically splashing water prior to this. However, according to the *Konbaung Set Yazawin*, the last royal chronicle of Burma, Ñeyyadhamma passed away in 1866 (as cited in Aye Kyaw 1984:182), which means that Nagasena's – or Sobhitācāra's – date must be out by at least five years. This shifts our timeline to 1865 or earlier, which means that the shift from the act of splashing being physical to ideological happened slightly earlier.

During this period the Zawti monastic headquarters were located in remote mountainous areas in China. They remained in Loi Lek from approx. 1777 until 1861, when their monastery was attacked, and they were forced to move to Mong Mao (present day Ruili) where they remained until at least 1864. Some Zawti monks travelled to Yangon in 1867 but remained for only five months before returning to Loi Lek (*King Si* 2021: 14-16). Throughout this period, the Zawti monks were geographically isolated, which in turn impacted their socialization. The Zawti had little contact with outsiders during these years, and it is likely that they would not have been aware of Ñeyyadhamma's declaration that physical water splashing was no longer a necessary part of establishing an *udakukkhepa-sīmā*. As a result, the Zawti have retained the water splashing step of the ritual, which was phased out of mainstream Burmese monasticism, presumably under Ñeyyadhamma's influence. Nagasena, writing in 2012, recorded that he, and other senior Burmese monks, have never seen an *udakukkhepa-sīmā* created by splashing water (2012: 233). No other contemporary monastic traditions in Burma, to my knowledge, have retained this practice outside of the Zawti tradition. The geographic and social isolation of the Zawti meant that they were likely unaware of a reform which fundamentally altered *sīmā* practice in Burma. This situates the Zawti as outside of the mainstream Burmese *Sangha* in the mid-19th century.

From an outsider perspective, the contemporary Zawti practice of physically splashing the water might seem unusual, given that it has not been a feature of mainstream Burmese monasticism for centuries. While unusual in the contemporary Burmese context, it is not heretical or unorthodox. Rather, it signals a commitment to liturgical orthopraxy as prescribed in the *Vinaya* and its most authoritative commentaries. The retention of the physical water-splashing, on the lines of a close reading of canonical material, also helps us understand why the Zawti might view themselves as having a greater commitment to orthopraxy than non-

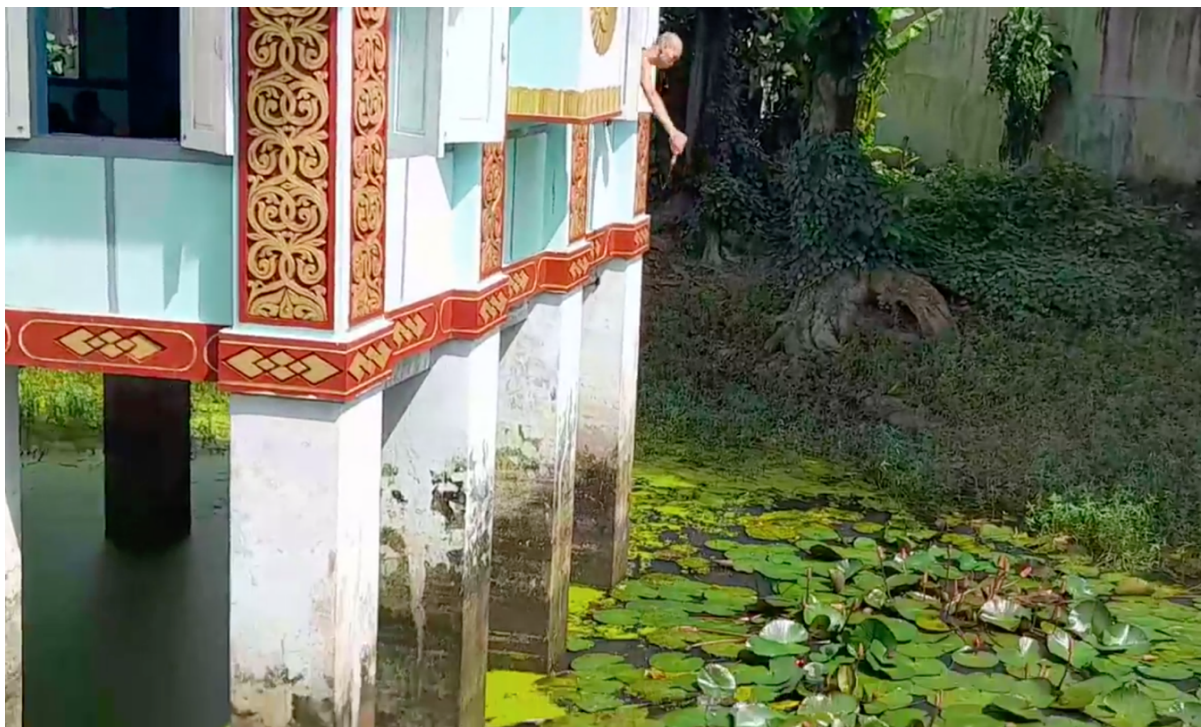
Zawti monks. The act of splashing water was lost in Burmese Buddhism because of reforms implemented by the *thathanabaing* Ñeyyadhamma in the nineteenth century. The Zawti, who bypassed this reform, could interpret their practice as being closer to the original ritual laid out in the *Vinaya*. It is also not clear if, given that all Zawti monks are educated at Paññālankāra Monastery and are therefore not exposed to Burmese interpretations of Vinaya or monastic practices, that the Zawti themselves are aware that their way of establishing an *udakukkhepa-sīmā* differs from the mainstream. So, while it is a marker of distinction, it might not be something that the Zawti themselves identify as an identity marker.

Until now the Zawti have been able to maintain their water-splashing practice, but whether the Zawti will be able to retain these practices in the future is not certain. Monks from different *nikāya* do not perform *saṅghakamma* procedures together and so outsider monks would not have been aware (or interested) in that fact that the Zawti continue to physically splash water. The fact that the Zawti use a *sīmā* that does not require communication with outsider monks or lay people to establish helps us understand how the Zawti have managed to remain hidden in plain sight for so long.

Communication between the Zawti and non-Zawti monks has changed in recent years. The Zawti were absorbed into the Thudhamma *nikāya* (also *gaing*) in the 1980s and therefore they are technically part of the same *nikāya* and can perform *saṅghakamma* procedures together. If, as the Zawti worry, the Burmese State Saṅgha Mahā Nāyaka Committee enforce the standard Burmese monastic curriculum on Paññālankāra Monastery, the future of such Zawti traditions may be susceptible to change (see Chapter Five).⁵²



(Figure 14: The Zawti *udakukkhepasīmā* pavilion during ordination. Note the gap between the bridge and the pavilion. Courtesy of Jong Zaw Ti Facebook Page 31/03/22).



(Figure 15: The Zawti abbot splashing water from a cup to establish the *udakukkhepasīmā*. Courtesy of Jong Zaw Ti Facebook Page 09/10/2022).

4.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined the *Zawti upasampadā* ordination procedure. I first analysed the preparatory steps taken before the *upasampadā* ordination ritual itself. Two features stood out in particular, the specification of when the ordination can take place, and the roles of the abbot, right-hand monk and left-hand monk in the preparations. The significance of the right-hand monk and left-hand monk in the *Zawti* tradition is explained in detail in Chapter Four, and so in this chapter, I have focused more on what the specificity of the date reveals about the *Zawti* monastic tradition. The *Zawti* themselves state that they are too busy on full-moon and new-moon *uposatha* days, and during *vassa*, to hold *upasampadā* ordinations. I have explained how this is related to the effect that the small size of the *Zawti* monastic community has on the availability of monks given their conformity to the religious rites tied to the solar (annual) and lunar (monthly) calendar found throughout Theravada. At the time of writing this thesis, from 2019 to 2022, the number of *Zawti bhikkhus* has fluctuated from fifteen to nineteen. Full-moon and new-moon *uposatha* days are important days of religious observance for both the *Zawti* monks and the laity. Since there are so few *Zawti bhikkhus*, they do not have the capacity to hold additional events like ordination, which require a *parisā* (quorum) of at least five for the *parisā-sampatti* to be fulfilled.

I then examined the steps taken on the day of the *upasampadā* ordination itself, identifying how the steps corresponded to the fulfilment of the five *sampatti* accomplishments that legitimate an ordination. In doing so, I highlighted how the *Zawti* ordination procedure is completely in line with the requirements set down in the *Parivāra* of the *Vinaya Piṭaka* of the Pali Canon. The orthodoxy of *Zawti upasampadā* ordination challenges outsider perceptions of the *Zawti* as ‘heretical’ or ‘unorthodox’ (for example, Mendelson 1975: 231, see Chapter One), and confirms the perceptions of those, such as non-*Zawti* Shan, who perceive the *Zawti* as particularly strict.

Following that, I looked at the *sīmā* used by the *Zawti* in closer detail. I examined what an *udakukkhepa-sīmā* is, why it is used, and how the *Zawti* establish their *udakukkhepa-sīmā* at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery. I highlighted the advantages of the *udakukkhepa-sīmā* for a migratory and isolated monastic tradition such as the *Zawti* is. In identifying the *Zawti* practice of literally splashing water, I have found an exception to the statement by Crosby and Nagasena that water is no longer splashed to create an *udakukkhepa-sīmā*. The fact that Nagasena’s

informants had never witnessed the literal splashing of water in any such ceremony in Burma shows how unusual it is and how isolated or unfamiliar to outsiders the Zawti practices are. This demonstrates that examining the Zawti overturns some of the existing understandings of Theravada monasticism. It shows how the Zawti have retained a tradition that precedes most and have, at least in this one example of one specific aspect of ritual practice, retained a practice that was changed throughout much of Burmese and Shan Theravada under the influence of the *thathanabaing*, the most powerful monk in Burma during mid-the 19th century reform. I have suggested that the Zawti uniquely retained this because of the combination of their close attention to textual orthopraxy and their relative geographic isolation at that time (as described in Chapter One). Studying the Zawti therefore opens the possibility of a wider discussion about the nature of pre-reform Burmese Theravada, and what we can learn from traditions that bypassed such reforms.

Chapter Five

Life as a Zawti Monk at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery

Chapter Three and Chapter Four of this thesis examined lower and higher ordination into the Zawti monastic tradition. I shall now turn my attention to life after ordination and what it means to be a Zawti monastic at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery. This chapter will provide an overview of the Zawti *upadesa* (instructions) for the novices and *bhikkhus* before turning to the everyday routine of the monks at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery. My analysis of the daily routine will illustrate how some of these *upadesa* rules manifest in everyday behaviour. I shall then focus on Zawti monastic education at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery, and more specifically on the distinctive training of the monks in Shan *lik long* literature.

In examining some of the more distinctive aspects of Zawti monastic discipline and daily life, I aim to demonstrate how these features are based on textual interpretations of the *Vinaya* that are totally compliant with mainstream Theravada. In this examination of Zawti monastic discipline I shall draw parallels with mainstream Theravada, and also more distinctive monastic traditions such as the Shwegyin, to situate the Zawti within the broader Burmese monastic milieu. In doing so, I challenge the trope that the Zawti are either “unorthodox” or “extremist”, as perpetuated in academic literature and among the wider Shan community (Mendelson 1975: 77, 233). In examining the Zawti’s distinctive training and use of *lik long* literature, I locate the Zawti within the broader Shan culture and highlight their efforts to maintain their distinctiveness. I also examine how this training can serve the monks in later lay life if they disrobe.

5.1. The Zawti Monastic *Upadesa* Rules

All Theravada *sāmaṇera* (novices) and *bhikkhus* undertake a commitment to adhere to their respective monastic codes of conduct when they receive ordination. After *pabbajjā* ordination *sāmaṇera* commit to the *sikkhāpadani* (ten precepts): to refrain from causing death, to refrain from stealing, to abstain from sex, to refrain from lying, to refrain from intoxicants, to refrain from eating after noon, to refrain from spectating singing or dancing, to refrain from wearing garlands or perfume, to refrain from high beds or seats and to refrain from handling gold or silver (Crosby 2013: 118). After *upasampadā* ordination, *bhikkhus* are bound by the rules of the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, specifically the 227 *Pāṭimokkha* rules. These basic sets of rules are universal to all Theravada monks but differences in interpretation do occur, and in some cases some monastic groups have their own additional rules.

The Zawti novices and *bhikkhus* have an additional set of ‘*upadesa*’ rules. The Pali term *upadesa* (derived from Sanskrit *upadeśa*) means ‘instruction’ or ‘teaching’. The Zawti define *upadesa* as “the rules for all Buddhists to follow and practise”, and the Zawti laity also have their own set of *upadesa* rules, which are examined in Chapter Eight (*Kyong Loi Zawti* 2003: 143). Other monastic groups, such as the Shwegyin, have their own “*Shwegin nikāya upadesa*”, a set of rules specific to the Shwegyin novices and *bhikkhus* (see Than Tun 2019:68-75). The *upadesa* rules for Zawti *sāmaṇeras* are presented in Table 3, and the *upadesa* rules for Zawti *bhikkhus* in Table 4. I shall use the Zawti *upadesa* rules to provide context to some of the more distinctive features of Zawti monastic discipline and behaviour.

5.1.1. The *Upadesa* Rules for the *Sāmaṇeras*

<p>The <i>Upadesa</i> Rules for the <i>Sāmaṇeras</i> (Novices) ၵုပတေ,သ ငဝ်းသၵ်းသၵ်းမၵေ,ခဝ် (Long Khoe Zawti 1997: 50)</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. You must offer robes to the monks. 2. You must ask for the robes back. 3. You must request to be a novice. 4. You must accept the three refuges and the ten precepts. 5. You must request for an <i>upajjhāya</i> (preceptor).

6. You must adhere to the ten *liṅganāsana* (P. *liṅga* (attributes) + *nāsana* (expulsion), meaning ‘attributes that lead to expulsion’, the term refers specifically to offences that break the ten precepts and result in expulsion as a *sāmaṇera*).
7. You must adhere to the ten *daṇḍa* rules (offences that result in punishment).
8. You must reflect on the robes, the food, the monastery, and medicine (the *paccavekkhaṇā* on the four basic requisites).
9. You must adhere to the *sekhiya* (training) rules.
10. You must adhere to the fourteen *khandhakavatta* (duties that govern day-to-day monastic life).

(Table 3: Table of *Upadesa* Rules for the *Sāmaṇeras* based on my translation of *Long Khoe Zawti* 1997: 50).

Table 3 lists all of the *upadesa* rules followed by the Zawti *sāmaṇera* novices. Rules 1-5 refer to the *pabbajjā* ordination ritual itself, which was examined in detail in Chapter Three. In effect, it turns the description of the ordination process into a set of rules. Rule 6 states that Zawti novices must adhere to the ten *liṅganāsana* (punishable offences committed against the ten precepts followed by all Theravada novices). If a novice is found guilty of committing a *liṅganāsana* offence, then his status as a novice is revoked. To reinstate himself as a novice he must retake the three refuges and request an *uppajjhāya* again, but he is not required to take the ten precepts again (Thanissaro Bhikkhu 2002). Rule 7 refers to the *daṇḍa* offences (offences that result in punishment), which are universal to all Theravada novices. The ten *daṇḍa* offences include:

- i. Eating inappropriate things at inappropriate times
- ii. Singing and dancing
- iii. Wearing garlands
- iv. Sleeping on a high bed
- v. Handling silver and gold
- vi. Trying to stop the *bhikkhus* from getting material gains
- vii. Trying to stop the *bhikkhus* from having accommodation
- viii. Trying to be unbeneficial, to bring danger
- ix. Threatening or verbally abusing *bhikkhus*
- x. Breaking the unity of the *bhikkhus*

The first five of the *daṇḍa* offences refer to offences against the ten precepts and overlap with the *liṅganāsana* offences. Rule 8 refers to the *paccavekkhaṇā*, the reflection on the four requisites, the necessities of monastic life: food, clothing, shelter, and medicine. I shall examine how the Zawti monks perform *paccavekkhaṇā* later in this chapter in an overview of the Zawti daily routine. Rule 9 concerns the *sekhiya* rules, the seventy-five training rules included in the *Pāṭimokkha*. The *sekhiya* rules are divided into four main categories: proper behaviour (*sāruppa*), food (*bhojanapaṭisamyutta*), teaching *dhamma* (*dhammadesanāpaṭisamyutta*), and miscellaneous rules (*pakiṇṇaka*) (Vajrañāṇavarorasa 1971: 26). Here, although the *pāṭimokka* rules theoretically apply only to fully ordained *bhikkhu*, the *upadesa* means that they apply to novices also. Since many of the rules are about correct monastic deportment and behaviour, including in the presence of lay supporters, matters that novices begin to receive training in even prior to their *pabbajjā*, and since the *upadesa* appear to cover the entire range of duties the befall novices, it makes sense that these rules would also be included. Rule 10, the final rule, concerns the fourteen *khandhakavatta*, the duties that govern the day-to-day life of *bhikkhus* laid out in the *Cullavagga*, the second volume of the *Khandhaka* found in the *Vinaya Piṭaka*. The fourteen *khandhakavatta* duties are described in the *Samantapāsādikā*⁵³ commentary as: “incoming monks, resident monks, leaving monks, thanksgiving, the refectory, walking for alms food, living in the forest, lodgings, baths, privy, preceptors, companions, teachers, pupils” (Sp 225, 27 translated by O. von Hinüber 1990: 130). Again, while these rules are laid down for fully ordained monks, it makes sense that they might apply to novices given that they govern day-to-day communal conduct at the monastery.

All of the Zawti *sāmaṇera upadesa* rules can be found in the *Khandhaka* and the *Khandhaka* commentaries. All Theravada novices are expected to keep the ten precepts and it is customary that they also receive training in the *sekhiya* and *khandhaka* rules. It is distinctive that the Zawti *upadesa* rules are regulated as applying to novices and not only monks, but this makes sense in terms of the Zawti’s high standards of monastic conduct. One aspect of the Zawti *upadesa* rules for novices that stand out to me as particularly distinctive relates to what constitutes grounds for punishment and expulsion. The consequences of committing an offence against an *upadesa* rule are not included in this *upadesa* list itself but I have learned about them from speaking with Zawti lay people.

⁵³ The *Samantapāsādikā* is a collection of Pali commentaries on the *Vinaya*, translated from Sinhala to Pali by Buddhaghosa in the 5th century.

Discipline is an important and universal aspect of Theravada novice training, and novices who fail to meet monastic disciplinary standards are punished. According to the commentaries, appropriate punishments for novices includes prohibiting them from entering certain places or making them carry water, firewood, or sand (Thanissaro Bhikkhu 2002). Thomas Borchert, in his exploration of monastic labour at Wat Pājie, a Tai Lue (Shan) monastery in Sipsongpanna in China, writes that physical labour is an important part of disciplining “naughty novices” and teaching them how to behave appropriately as monks. When students at the Wat Pājie monastic school fail to do their work, or miss the morning service, they are required to do extra “labour” to make up for their transgression. This labour is usually onerous in nature, such as cleaning the toilets, moving bricks, or cleaning the monastery (2011: 178).

The Zawti monks at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery enforce similar types of punishments for misbehaving novices. One informant from Mohnyin recalled that during his time as a novice in the 1990s he was caught jumping, an offence against the *sekhiya* rules 15 and 16 which prohibit monks from swinging their bodies and arms in inhabited places (Thanissaro Bhikkhu 2007). As a result of committing the offence, he was given the ‘jar punishment’. This involved walking from the monastery to the river and collecting a cup of water each time to fill up a jar at the monastery. He commented that another common punishment for novices involved being told to fetch twenty stones from the riverbank but being allowed to pick up only one stone at a time so that the novice would have to walk from the monastery to the river and back twenty times (Interview 14/02/19 Mohnyin Kachin). The Shwegyin monastic tradition employs similar punishments for novices found guilty of stealing food. It is listed in the Shwegyin novice *upadesa* rules that if a novice is found stealing food, he must carry a load thirty times and if he is found committing the same offence again, he must carry a load sixty times. If he commits the offence a third time, he is expelled for good (Than Tun 2019: 74).

Another informant, a *zare* from Laihka, commented that the grounds for what was considered a punishable offence or an offence worthy of expulsion had changed in recent decades. He recalled that during his time as a novice at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery, also in the 1990s, novices were expelled if they broke five *liṅganāsana* or *daṇḍa* rules. But now, breaking one rule can result in immediate expulsion. He remarked that now if a novice was caught breaking just one rule, such as listening to music, which breaks one of the ten precepts and is both a *liṅganāsana* and *daṇḍa* offence, then he would have to leave immediately. He went on to say that if a novice

listened to music and kept the offence secret, if one of the *bhikkhus* found out one or two years later that this had happened, then the novice in question would still need to leave the monastery (Interview with Laihka Zawti 06/12/19, Laihka, Shan State). The new one-strike policy implies that the novices are now held to a higher standard of behaviour and conduct. The Shwegyin also administer the immediate expulsion of novices from the order for certain offences, which include the theft of valuable items, fighting with a knife with the intention to cause grievous injury, and wasting all their time playing (Than Tun 2019: 74, see Appendix B for full list).

In the case of the Zawti, the *zare* from Laihka said that the stricter grounds for expulsion was the result of more novices being ordained and the limit on how many monks and novices there can be at the Paññālaṅkāra Monastery at any one time. The limit on how many monks can reside at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery at any one given time is four hundred (*Pī Kon Kham* 2016: 6). The limit was imposed in response to the fear of Paññālaṅkāra Monastery being forced to become a *pariyatti* institute, a large monastic education institution where the standardized monastic syllabus set by the Burmese State Saṅgha Mahā Nāyaka Committee is taught. I examine this fear in detail later in this chapter.

Expulsion on the grounds of committing just one *liṅganāsana* or *daṇḍa* offence stands out as stricter than the norm in mainstream Theravada. The ten canonical grounds for the expulsion of a novice are laid out in the *Mahāvagga*, in the following statement attributed to the Buddha:

I allow you, monks, to expel a novice who is possessed of ten qualities: if he is one who makes onslaught on creatures, if he is one who takes what is not given, if he is one who is unchaste, if he is a liar, if he is a drinker of strong drink, if he speaks dispraise of the awakened one, if he speaks dispraise of *dhamma*, if he speaks dispraise of the Order, if he is a holder of a false view, if he is a seducer of nuns. I allow you, monks, to expel a novice who is possessed of these ten qualities (Mv.I.60 translated by I.B. Horner 1951: 108).

According to the commentaries, if a novice commits any of these offences but sees the error of his ways then he should be punished but he can take the triple gem and ten precepts again, and he can remain a novice. If he does not see the error in his ways, then he should be expelled. The only offence that is totally irredeemable is the seduction of a nun, which results in lifelong expulsion from even the novice order (Thanissaro Bhikkhu 2002).

While novices are expected to uphold the monastic ideal of adhering to the ten precepts and accompanying rules for novices, many of these rules are negotiated, bent, and broken frequently. In his book *Little Angels*, Phra Peter Pannapadipo offers vivid ethnographic insights into novicehood through the stories of young novices in Thailand. One of the novices, Novice Bom, recalls that before he became a novice, he had thought that even the youngest novices were strict in keeping the precepts on account of their disciplined behaviour when collecting alms in the village. But when he became a novice himself, he realised that the behaviour of monks and novices in private was not always exemplary. He learned that novices often broke precepts by eating past noon, lying to the senior monks, and bullying other novices, and that such offences were commonplace and did not result in expulsion (2001: 60-63).

The contemporary Zawti's zero tolerance regarding a novice committing a *liṅganāsana* or *daṇḍa* offence therefore appears to be stricter than the guideline set out in the *Mahāvagga* and stricter than what is followed in mainstream Theravada. The Zawti appear stricter than even the Shwegyin, who also enforce the immediate expulsion of novices but follow a criterion limited to just a few offences considered particularly egregious.

The Zawti *sāmaṇera upadesa* rules listed in Table 3 are consistent with standard Theravada rules and regulations but go further in extending some rules laid down for *bhikkhus* to also apply to novices. This outline of the Zawti *sāmaṇera upadesa* rules is a helpful starting point to contextualise the Zawti monastic discipline which will be examined in further detail later in this chapter through an exploration of the monastic daily routine. Now let us consider the *upadesa* rules for fully ordained *bhikkhus*.

5.1.2. The *Upadesa* Rules for the *Bhikkhus*

The *Upadesa* Rules for the *Bhikkhus*

ကုပတေ,သပဓိ,တၢင်း (ရဂုခင်း) ခဝ်

(*Long Khoe Zawti* 1997: 51)

1. You must accept the way of the teaching from the monks.
2. You must accept the four rules of the *pubbakaraṇa* (B. ပုဗ္ဗကရဏ)⁵⁴
3. You must accept the four rules of *pubbakicca* (B. ပုဗ္ဗကိစ္စ)
4. You must accept the 227 *āpatti* offences (the *Pāṭimokkha*):
 - a. The four *pārājikas*
 - b. The thirteen *saṅghādisesa*
 - c. The two *aniyata*
 - d. The four *patidesanīya*
 - e. The thirty *nissaggiya pācittiya*
 - f. The ninety-two *suddha pācittiya**
 - g. The seventy-five *sekhiya* and the [seven] *adhikaraṇa*
5. You must listen to/ feel the guilt of the *āpatti* offence.
6. You must follow the *pārisuddhi*.
7. You must observe *vassa*.
8. You must observe *pavāraṇā* at the end of *vassa*.
9. You must perform *adhiṭṭhāna* on the robes (the nine things).
10. You must know how to do *uposatha* alone.
11. You must know how to do *uposatha* as a group.
12. You must ask for permission during *vassa*.
13. You must know how to do *pavāraṇā* as a group.
14. You must know how to do *pavāraṇā* between two monks.
15. You must know how to do *pavāraṇā* alone.
16. You must perform *adhiṭṭhāna* on the robes (You must perform *adhiṭṭhāna* on rice).⁵⁵
17. You must ask permission to enter a village.

⁵⁴ The Burmese terms are included in brackets in the text itself.

⁵⁵ Rules 9 and 16 are the same, the only difference being what follows in brackets. There is no explanation of why the rules repeat each other given in the text.

18. You must accept the rules for monks and novices.

(Table 4: This table lists the *Upadesa* rules for the *bhikkhus* as recorded in *Long Khoe Zawti* (1997: 51)

* In the *Long Khoe Zawti* text this reads as: သုတေ.ဝေဝါ,ဝိဝေဝိ (suttha from Pali *suddha* ‘pure’, *pātsitti* from Pali *pācitti*[ya]) သိဝးသွင် (twelve) ဝိင် (rules). I assume that the editor of the text made an error here and that it should read as the ninety-two *pācittiya* rules. The list is introduced as the 227 *āpatti* offences and the only category not included is the ninety-two *pācittiya* rules. The thirty *nissaggiya pācittiya* (e) are differentiated from the *suddha pācittiya* in that the former requires *nissaggiya* (relinquishing) an inappropriately acquired item and confessing *pācittiya* (the error), while the latter requires only requires one to confess the error.

The list of *Zawti upadesa* rules for *bhikkhus* provides a brief overview of the rules that govern *Zawti* monasticism. At first glance many of the rules appear general in the sense that they are broad references to rituals and customs followed by all Theravada monks such as the *vassa*, *pavāraṇā*, etc, and the *pāṭimokkha* rules. In contrast, the *Shwegyin upadesa* rules are far more specific. The *Shwegyin* monks follow thirty *upadesa* rules that cover topics such as monastic compartment, how to interact with the laity, and how to settle disputes (Than Tun 2019: 68-74 see Appendix B for full list). From reading the *Shwegyin upadesa* we can get a sense of why the *Shwegyin* are considered ‘orthodox’. The *Zawti upadesa* rules are not as specific or detailed even though the *Zawti* monks follow similarly specific rules, such as always covering both shoulders with the robe when preaching the *dhamma* and never handling money. The *Zawti upadesa* rules do not demonstrate how the *Zawti* monks interpret generic *Vinaya* rules and they inform *Zawti* monastic behaviour. I shall use the *upadesa* rules as a starting point to investigate some of the more distinctive features of *Zawti* monasticism, which I have either heard about from informants, read about in the *Zawti* texts, or observed in Kachin State.

Rule 1, ‘you must accept the way of the teaching from the monks’, is a general rule indicating that the *Zawti* monks must be committed to the *Zawti* monastic path. Rules 2 and 3 refer to *pubbakaraṇa* (preparations) and *pubbakicca*, (preliminary duties). The *pubbakaraṇa* and *pubbakicca* are the preparatory steps performed by monks before *saṅghakamma* procedures, which were examined in Chapter Four in relation to the *Zawti upasampadā* ordination ritual. Rule 4 states that the *Zawti* monks must accept the 227 rules of the *Pāṭimokkha* as standard to all Theravada monks. Rule 5 details that the monks must listen to and feel the guilt of committing an *āpatti* offence (an ecclesiastical offence). An *āpatti* offence is an infringement of any of the *pāṭimokkha* rules, of which there are seven kinds: *pārājika*, *saṅghādisesa*,

thullaccaya, *pācittiya*, *pāṭṭidesanīya*, *dukkata*, *dubbhāsita*.⁵⁶ The *pārājika* and *saṅghādisesa* offences are considered *garukāpatti* (serious offences) and the others are considered *lahukāpatti* (minor offences). *Pārājika* offences result in immediate and lifelong expulsion from the monastic order while *saṅghādisesa* offences result in the penalty of *mānatta* (penance) and *parivāsa* (probation) (Thānissaro Bhikkhu 1994: 101). This acknowledgement of the *āpatti* offences is particularly important as they relate directly to rules 10 and 11, which concern the observance of *uposatha*, and rules 8, 13, 14, and 15 which are all about the observance of *pavāraṇā*. Both *uposatha* and *pavāraṇā* are observed by all Theravada *bhikkhus*.

Rules 10 and 11 concern *uposatha*. On *uposatha* days monks perform the *pāṭimokkha* rite by reciting the entire *Pāṭimokkha Sutta* together as a monastic community. Before the recitation the *bhikkhus* voluntarily confess to any offences they might have committed, and through reciting the *pāṭimokkha* any offences are ‘removed’ (I.B. Horner 1951: xvii). Usually, the *pāṭimokkha* rite is performed as group but Rule 10 specifies that Zawti monks must know how to do perform it alone. This means that they must know how to confess their offences and recite the *Pāṭimokkha Sutta* if they ever find themselves alone on an *uposatha* day. Wandering forest monks might need to know how to perform the *pāṭimokkha* rites alone since they might be alone on *uposatha* days. But for a group like the Zawti, who all reside in the same monastery and never travel far from it, the need for such a rule is not obvious. Even in the early Zawti tradition, when the monks did move around and they had more than one monastery, the monks never travelled alone. Perhaps then, this rule is a protective rule, one that is not necessarily acted upon often, but is needed in the off chance that a Zawti monk might find himself alone to ensure that he does not cause an offence.

Rules 8, 13, 14, and 15 relate to the observance of *pavāraṇā*, specifically how to observe *pavāraṇā* as a group, between two monks, and alone. The *pavāraṇā* rite is observed at the end of *vassa*. It involves each *bhikkhus* in an assembly of other *bhikkhus* petitioning his fellow *bhikkhus* to judge his conduct over the *vassa* period according to the rules of the *Pāṭimokkha Sutta*. If he is found to be guilty of an offence, then he is charged by his fellow *bhikkhus* with the appropriate punishment as laid out in the *Suttavibhaṅga* section of the *Vinaya* (Holt 1978: 47). The observance of *uposatha* and *pavāraṇā* therefore relies on a detailed understanding of

⁵⁶ *Pārājika* (defeat), *saṅghādisesa* (entailing communal meetings), *thullaccaya* (grave offence), *pācittiya* (entailing confession), *pāṭṭidesanīya* (entailing acknowledgement), *dukkata* (wrong action), *dubbhāsita* (bad speech).

the *pāṭimokkha* rules and *āpatti* offences (Rule 4 and Rule 5). Similarly, I understand the specification of knowing how to observe *pavāraṇā* as a group, between two monks, and alone, to be protective rules for very exceptional circumstances since the Zawti usually observe *pavāraṇā* as a group. It is very unlikely that the contemporary Zawti monks would find themselves alone or in the company of only one other monk during *pavāraṇā*.

Rule 6 states that the monks must follow *pārisuddhi* (complete purity). As we learned in Chapter One, Varajoti's first sermon included the preaching of the *catupārisuddhi-sīla*, the four classifications of *sīla* (ethical precepts) followed by monks to achieve moral purification. I also touched on *pārisuddhi* Chapter Four when discussing the recitation of the *pāṭimokkha* on *uposatha* days. Both the *pavāraṇā* rites and *pāṭimokkha* rites are designed to maintain the *pārisuddhi* of the monastic community which reaffirms their monastic integrity. Rule 7 refers to the observance of *vassa*, the three-month rains retreat period, when all Theravada monks return to their home monastery to engage in heightened religious observance.

Rule 9 and Rule 16 both refer to performing *adhiṭṭhāna* on the robes, the monastic requirement to perform *adhiṭṭhāna* (determination) on the robes within ten days of receiving them. When a monk receives an extra robe-cloth he has ten days to perform *adhiṭṭhāna* on it to make it a legitimate requisite. If he does not, then he commits an offence against the first *nissaggiya pācittiya* offence, so must both forfeit the robe and confess the offense. Rule 16 mentions the *adhiṭṭhāna* 'on rice' in brackets. I assume that this refers to the *nissaggiya pācittiya* rule which states that any bowl (a vessel for rice) kept by a *bhikkhu*, except the bowl which he has determined for use (performed *adhiṭṭhāna* on), is considered an extra bowl. *Bhikkhus* are only allowed to keep extra bowls for ten days and if he keeps it for longer then he commits an offence (Vajrañāṇavarorasa 1971: 11). It is therefore important to perform the *adhiṭṭhāna* on the bowl to ensure that it is a legitimate requisite, and to prevent committing an offence.

Rule 17 of the Zawti *upadesa* states 'you must ask permission to enter a village'. This rule corresponds to *pācittiya* 85:

If a *bhikkhu*, without first asking leave of another *bhikkhu* who is living in the same monastery, goes to a village [meaning a place where lay people live] outside the proper time, it is a *pācittiya*. There is an exception when the business requires that he should go quickly (Vajrañāṇavarorasa 1971: 24).

It is stated in the *Mahāvibhaṅga* that any time after noon until the following dawn rise is considered ‘outside the proper time’ (Thanissaro Bhikkhu 2002).⁵⁷ This means that *bhikkhus* can only leave the monastery during these hours if they have informed another *bhikkhu* at the monastery first. It is only acceptable to leave the monastery during these hours without permission if there is an emergency. Thānissaro Bhikkhu writes that the purpose of this rule is to prevent *bhikkhus* from passing their time with householders in conversation that does not deal with the *dhamma*.

The avoidance of unnecessary monastic and lay interactions is also cited as a reason why monks are prohibited from eating after noon. Man Shik Kong writes that in the *Latukikopamā Sutta* we learn that monks originally consumed three meals a day, but then the Buddha instructed monks to abandon the afternoon meal and the evening meal. Lay people would offer delicious and non-staple food post noon which resulted in the monks experiencing undesirable feelings of craving and desire. In the Mahāyāna *sūtras*, eating food after noon is not problematic in itself but because going out for another round of alms takes up time that could be dedicated to religious practice. The prohibition on eating after noon therefore prevents the risk of interacting with the laity in activities that might result in undesirable feelings and prevents monks from passing their time with the laity in activities that do not deal with the *dhamma* (Man Shik Kong 2016: 105-108).

According to my Zawti lay informants, the Zawti monks rarely leave the monastery, and they cited two key reasons that limit how far the Zawti monks can travel. The first reason is that Zawti monks are prohibited from using any form of transportation except boat. The second is that the Zawti monks are prohibited from wearing any type of footwear. Both reasons were repeated to me multiple times by Zawti lay people and by non-Zawti Shan monks who had heard of the Zawti. The Zawti attitude towards transportation and footwear is therefore a defining characteristic of the contemporary Zawti monastic tradition.

The Zawti monastic prohibition against all forms of transportation except boat travel is rooted in the *Vinaya*. The *yānādipaṭikkhepo* rule laid out in the *Mahāvagga* prohibits monks from

⁵⁷ [The Buddhist Monastic Code I: The Pātimokkha Rules Translated & Explained by Thānissaro Bhikkhu](#)

travelling using vehicles pulled by cows and bulls.⁵⁸ This rule details how lay people criticized a group of six monks who were seen travelling on cart yoked to bulls and operated by a driver. The incident was reported to the Buddha who declared that monks should not ride in vehicles and whoever does commits a *dukkata* (offence). The only exception to this rule is in the case of a sick monk, who is permitted to travel by vehicle without causing an offence (Mv. V. 9.4). As far as I am aware, there is no rule in the *Vinaya* that prohibits monks from travelling by boat.

Modes of transportation have developed since the time of the Buddha when the only available means of transport were cart and boat. Monks had to reconfigure their interpretation of the *yānādipaṭikkhepo* rule after the invention and introduction of modern vehicles in the late nineteenth century. Michael Charney notes that while it is not clear when exactly monks in Burma began using new modes of transportation, the earliest records are found in the form of postcards. These postcards depict monks taking trams in Rangoon (now Yangon) and Mandalay and were often based on photos from the 1890s (Personal Correspondence with Michael Charney 20/12/2022). In modern Myanmar and throughout Southeast Asia it is not uncommon to see Theravada monks using all forms of transportation such as car, train, airplane, etc. Monks also travel by boat and in Thailand some monks go on alms round by boat (Bhikkhu Ariyesako 1998: 39).

The Zawti monks remain committed to the monastic ideal laid out in the *Vinaya* that it is not appropriate for monks to use transportation. Despite the pervasiveness of modern transportation in contemporary Myanmar, the Zawti monks maintain their tradition of only travelling by foot and by boat, as sanctioned in the *Vinaya*. The Zawti are not the only Theravada monks to follow this line of interpretation. The Shwegyin monks are also prohibited from using transportation and one of their *upadesa* rules reads “without being sick, never ride on coaches” (Than Tun 2019: 71). While this is a Shwegyin monastic ideal, in reality it is not strictly observed by the Shwegyin monks. The current Shwegyin *Upaukkaṭṭha* (headmonk, lit.

⁵⁸ *yāna* (carriage, vehicle) + *ādi* (starting point, beginning) + *paṭikkhepo* (refusing)= the prohibition against vehicles. https://www.dhammadatalks.org/vinaya/Mv/MvV.html#pts9_4

‘first and foremost’), Sitagu Sayadaw, is driven around Yangon in a car and travels by aeroplane.⁵⁹

The Zawti prohibition against wearing footwear is also rooted in the *Vinaya*. In the *Mahāvagga* there are multiple rules that prohibit certain types of footwear and where certain types of footwear can be worn by monks. The rule titled *sabbanīlikādipaṭikkhepo* details how monks originally wore leather footwear of all colours just like householders, which caused lay people to complain.⁶⁰ In response, the Buddha declared that monks should not wear blue, green, yellow, red, black, orange, or beige leather footwear, and if they do then they commit a *dukkaṭa* (offence). This indicates that only natural leather was permissible. The Buddha goes on to prohibit monks from wearing any type of leather shoes with coloured leather straps or heel-coverings or shoes made from the skin of various animals (Mv. V. 2.1). Monks are also prohibited from wearing wooden shoes (Mv.V.6.3). It is not appropriate for monks to wear new multi-soled footwear; however, they can wear multi-soled shoes that have been discarded (Mv. V.3.1). The *Vinaya* rule mentions multi-soled shoes rather than single-soled shoes so presumably single-soled footwear is permissible as long as it is an appropriate colour. These rules disallowed many types of footwear available during the time of the Buddha. Despite these rules, in contemporary Myanmar it is common to see monks wearing all types of footwear such as covered leather shoes, sandals and flip flops.⁶¹

Plastic footwear, specifically plastic flipflops and sandals, are now ubiquitous in Southeast Asia but plastic footwear was not widely used until the 1940s, when the Japanese began to produce and export plastic versions of their traditional wooden flip-flops (Olszewski 2012). During the time of the Buddha there was no plastic and therefore there is no *Vinaya* rule that prohibits monks from wearing plastic shoes. While the Zawti interpret the omission of boats in the *Vinaya* as a permit to use boats, the omission of plastic footwear in the *Vinaya* is not

⁵⁹ In 2021 Sitagu Sayadaw travelled to Russia on an aeroplane to accompany Min Aung Hlaing, the current Myanmar regime leader, to attend the closing ceremony of the International Army Games ([article link](#)). The Sitagu Sayadaw also appears to travel in a personalised car when in Yangon ([article link](#)).

⁶⁰ *sabba* (all) + *nīlika* from *nīla* (blue) + *ādi* (starting point, beginning) + *paṭikkhepo* (refusing)= the prohibition against blue [footwear/ leather footwear]

⁶¹ The topic of footwear was central to nineteenth century debates in Burma over conflicts of respect with the incumbent colonial powers. From the beginnings of British rule in Burma, Europeans had exempted themselves from removing their footwear before entering Buddhist temples and monuments which Burmese Buddhists interpreted as a lack of respect. The “shoe question” debate linked demonstrations of respect to the status of the moral community responsible for the *sāsana* which reflected Burmese religious autonomy (see Chapter Five in *Saving Buddhism* by Alicia Turner (2017: 110-135).

interpreted as a pass to wear plastic footwear. This is most likely because boats existed during the time of the Buddha and were not prohibited, while plastic did not exist and therefore, we do not know what the Buddha would have thought of them.

In addition to the *Vinaya* rules that prohibit different types of footwear, there are also rules regarding where it is appropriate to wear footwear. According to the *gihivikatānuññātādi* rule in the *Mahāvagga*, a monk should not enter a village wearing leather footwear unless he is sick (Mv.11.1).⁶² In contemporary mainstream Theravada monasticism, it is the norm for monks to wear shoes. However, in accordance with this rule, monks continue to go on their alms round barefoot. In the *Vinaya* there are also restrictions regarding the use of footwear in the monastery itself. According to the rule titled *ajjhārāme upāhanapaṭikkhepo*, also in the *Mahāvagga*, monks are prohibited from wearing leather footwear in a monastery and if they do then they commit a *dukkata* (Mv.V.4.1).⁶³ Within this rule it is detailed that if a monk lives in a monastery where his seniors do walking meditation barefoot, then they should do the same or else they commit a *dukkata* (offence).

The Zawti monks follow these *Vinaya* rules closely, which restricts how far they can travel but this does not mean that they do not travel at all. The Zawti monks are still able to travel to locations in walking distance from the monastery. On occasion, the Zawti monks enter the villages that neighbour Paññālankāra to give blessings at events such as new house consecrations and funerals. There are five villages that surround Paññālankāra Monastery in Mohnyin township: Oke Kyin, He Lon, Nyaung Kone, Ma Pyin, and Bi Lu.¹ The first two are Zawti villages, where all of the inhabitants are Zawti, while the latter three are mixed, with Zawti, non-Zawti Shan, and Burmese inhabitants. So, while the travel of the Zawti monks is limited, they are still able to maintain a reciprocal relationship with the Zawti laity who live close to the monastery. The lay people support the monks by preparing food on *uposatha* days and the monks support the laity in carrying out community rituals (see Chapters Six and Chapter Seven).

⁶² *gihī* (householder) + *vikata* (pp.of *vikaroti* meaning ‘altered’) + *anuññāta* (allowed) + *ādi* (starting point, beginning) = the rule/section beginning with the allowance of what is altered by householders.

⁶³ *ajjhārāme* (*adhi* + *ārāma*= within a park or monastery) + *upāhana* (sandal, shoe) + *paṭikkhepo* (from *paṭikkhepa* = refusal) = refusing sandals in the monastery.

One informant from one of the villages that surrounds Paññālaikāra Monastery recalled that when her mother passed away, she invited the monks to her family home to perform a blessing. A carpet was laid down from the monastery all the way to her house which the barefoot Zawti monks walked across. She remarked that traditionally the Zawti monks never actually entered the homes when they came to give blessings. However, she said that in the last seven years the *go pa ka* met and discussed this with the monks, and it was decided that the monks could enter the homes but only on very special occasions (Interview 05/02/20 Mohnyin, Kachin State). This change indicates that the contemporary Zawti monks are adaptive and receptive to change.

Not only is the Zawti's lack of footwear distinctive in contrast to mainstream Shan and Burmese Theravada, but so is their style of robe. While not explicitly mentioned in their *upadesa* rules, the Zawti monks wear the 'traditional style' of robes worn by Lanna monks. The aspect of the Zawti monastic dress that stands out as distinctive is the chest binding, as you can see in Figure 12 in Chapter Four. The chest binding is not a common feature of mainstream Shan monastic comportment anymore. However, this style of monastic robe was once common among Shan monks.⁶⁴ Francois Bizot writes that the chest binding existed in Burma before disappearing at the end of the 18th century, in Thailand until it was banned in 1851, and in Cambodia until 1975 (1993: 76). These periods are all moments of radical reform or disruption, with canonical based reform looking to the description of the three robes used by the Buddha in 18th-century Burma and mid-19th century Thailand, and the Khmer Rouge persecution of Buddhism in the 1970s, leaving no or only a few monks in the country by the mid-1970s, until after the Vietnamese took control of Phnom Penh in 1979. At the time of writing, Bizot noted that this style was still used in Laos, in Sipsongpanna, and in the Shan region of Burma. I do not know when this change in Shan monastic comportment occurred, though the loss of the chest binding is likely related to the rise in Shan monks receiving their monastic training at Burmese monastic institutions and adopting the Burmese style of robes, which does not usually feature the chest binding.

In examining the Zawti *upadesa* rules, we find that basis of all the *upadesa* rules can be found in the Pali Canon. The list of Zawti *upadesa* rules are not exhaustive of everything considered appropriate or inappropriate to Zawti monasticism. It is only in observing what the Zawti

⁶⁴The renowned Shan Buddhist monk Phra Khuva Boonchum, known best for his solitary meditation practices, sometimes wears the chest binding. Khuva Boonchum follows the Northern Thai Forest Tradition (Lanna) who, according to Bizot, wear the 'traditional style' or robes which includes the chest binding.

monks actually do that we can get an idea of how the Zawti interpret the *upadesa* rules. Characteristic aspects of Zawti monasticism such as their prohibition against footwear and all forms of transportation are not written into their *upadesa* rules but are enacted in their day-to-day behaviour. It is customs like these that highlight the Zawti as ‘extreme’ in comparison to mainstream Theravada yet other groups like the Shwegyin have the very same prohibitions written explicitly in their *upadesa* rules. The difference in outsider perceptions of the two groups is likely related to the fact that the Shwegyin have had royal patronage (of Mindon Min in the 19th century) and were given *gaing* status during Ne Win’s 1980s reforms. Outsiders are not as familiar with the Zawti and so their strict monastic conduct is considered outside of the mainstream. There is also the possibility that the Zawti monks are more extreme than the Shwegyin monks in some ways, in that the Zawti monks adhere to the prohibitions examined in this chapter resolutely while such rules are bent and negotiated by Shwegyin monks.

The Zawti commitment to these rules might appear ‘extreme’ to outsiders yet the basis of such rules is rooted firmly in the *Vinaya*. As we have learned in this chapter, the *Vinaya* proscribes that monks are prohibited from wearing most types of leather footwear and all types of wooden footwear, and they are also prohibited from wearing leather footwear when entering a village (Mv.11.1) and also in the monastery (Mv.V.4.1). The Zawti blanket prohibition regarding the use of footwear therefore conforms to what is recorded in the *Vinaya*. So, while the Zawti attitude towards footwear might appear extreme in comparison to mainstream monasticism, and even in comparison to notoriously strict groups like the Shwegyin, it would be inaccurate to say that the Zawti view is heretical or unorthodox since their reasonings are compliant with *Vinaya*.

The Zawti *upadesa* rules have served as an introduction to Zawti monastic discipline, which I shall now explore in more detail through an examination of the Zawti monastic daily routine.

5.2. The Daily Routine of the Zawti Monks

<p style="text-align: center;">ဂါဆတူင်.ဆိုင် လဝ်းသင်,ခါ, တါ,ဆိုင်;ဝဆ်း</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Daily Routine Activities of the Zawti Sangha (<i>Pī Kon Kham</i> 2016: 78)</p>		
1.	4 a.m.	Wake up.
2.	5 a.m.	Pay homage to the Buddha [in front of the Buddha image] and share <i>mettā</i> in the <i>dhamma</i> hall.
3.	5.30 a.m.	Breakfast.
4.	6 a.m.	Memorizing texts together.
5.	7 a.m.	Consider the texts in the monastery, at your own pace. ⁶⁵
6.	8 a.m.-11 a.m.	Attend class on reading and writing <i>dhamma</i> texts. Reflect on the words of the Buddha. Fetch water and bathe.
7.	11 a.m.	Lunch
8.	11.30 a.m.	Memorizing the texts at the main monastery.
9.	12.30 p.m.	Study the texts at your own pace.
10.	1.30-3 p.m.	Writing letters and writing <i>dhamma</i> . Change the water.
11.	3 p.m.- 4.30 p.m.	Studying လွှ်းတြးလင်,ဂါ,လှိုင် <i>lik trā langkā long</i> , Buddhist <i>lik long</i> literature.
12.	4.30-5 p.m.	Take a bath.
13.	5 p.m.	Memorization in the great hall.
14.	6.p.m.	Chanting to the Buddha at the Buddha Shrine (/ Buddha Hall).
15.	6.30-7 p.m.	Massage the teacher monks (senior monks).
16.	7.30-8 p.m.	Revise the texts in the great hall.
17.	8.30 p.m.	Pay respects to the abbot and go to bed.

(Table 5: The daily routine activities of the Zawti Sangha based on *Pī Kon Kham* 2016: 78)⁶⁶

Table 5 is a brief outline of an average day for the novices and *bhikkhus* at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery based on the account laid out in *Pī Kon Kham*. The schedule is slightly different on

⁶⁵ လှိုင်. *tsuny* (consider) + လှိုင်; *lik* (texts) + ဆိုင်; *nai* (in) + ချိုင်; *kyaung* (monastery) = consider the texts at the monastery. No further details of which texts are provided in the *Pī Kon Kham* text.

ritually significant days such as the *uposatha*, *pavāraṇā*, *kaṭhina*, etc. I shall now explore the daily routine in further detail, using an account of the Zawti monastic routine in *Pī Kon Kham* as a guide.

According to the further account of the Zawti monastic daily routine laid out in *Pī Kon Kham*, both the *bhikkhus* and *sāmaneras* wake up at 4 a.m. and begin their morning activities. This involves preparing water to wash their faces, sweeping the temple, and meditating. During this time, the *bhikkhus* come together for confession. Meditating and coming together for confession are not presented in Table 5, which is only a brief outline of activities, but are included in the further explanation of the activities provided in *Pī Kon Kham* (2016: 79). The expanded explanation states that some monks start earlier and others later. If a monk wakes up earlier and completes his morning tasks, then he can return to his room and study while he waits for the sound of the gong.

At 5 a.m. the abbot strikes the gong and the monks put on their တုန့် *takuk* (B. *dukot*, P. *saṃghāṭi*), the outer robe which is worn on top of the *anatarvāsa* (the inner robe), and the *uttarāsaṅgha* (the robe that covers the upper body). They make their way to the *dhamma* hall where they arrange themselves in rows. They then do their morning chanting session, pay homage to the Buddha, and share *mettā*. Once this has finished, they go back to their rooms and do private study.

Breakfast is served in stages, starting at 5.30 and ending at about 7am. The food is cooked by the အိုးဝိုင်းသွမ်း *nāi hoen som* (lay women who prepare food for the monks) in a building outside of the monastery complex. The *nāi hoen som* deliver the cooked food to the dining hall in the monastery. The တုမ်းဝုတ်လွင်း *tsum wut long* (the team of novices who prepare food) then take over and prepare for serving the food. The ဝိုင်းဝုတ်လွင်း *ho wut long* (head novice in charge of the team of novices who prepare food) begins by striking the gong to indicate that it is breakfast time (see Chapter Six for details of monastic hierarchy and roles at the monastery). The team of novices then prepare by laying out the seating cushions for the monks to sit on while they eat and preparing the cloths the *bhikkhus* put on their laps while they eat. They also lay out cups of water for the *bhikkhus* to use to wash their hands. Once they have made these preparations they go outside and wait on the veranda. Meanwhile, the head novice in charge of

food preparation serves the abbot, the right-hand monk, and the left-hand monk. Then the rest of the *bhikkhus* are served. The team of novices in charge of food preparation is split into two groups, one group serves the rice and the other serves the curry. The schedule of who eats first is based on status and monastic hierarchy. The respect shown by the novices to the *bhikkhus* during mealtimes is reflective of the type of deference all Theravada monks show to monks of a superior status to their own.

At the Paññālankāra Monastery the *bhikkhus* never share tables with each other and they each eat from their own bowl. There is always only one *bhikkhu* per table and he sits with two novices. This stands out as distinctive in contrast to mainstream Burmese and Shan Theravada in which it is common for *bhikkhus* to share tables, and dishes, with other *bhikkhus* at mealtimes. The eating arrangements of each monk sitting at their own individual place/table served separately by the novices appears to reflect a rule found in a passage of the *Khuddakavattukkhanda* of the *Cullavagga* of the *Vinaya Piṭaka* which outlines multiple minor offenses (*dukkāṭa*) that are not contained in the 227 rules of the *Pātimokkhasutta*. In a section dealing with the proper use of the requisites, the Buddha is recorded as prohibiting monks from sharing bowls, cups, and beds in response to lay people complaining that the notoriously mischievous ‘group of six’ monks are doing so and thereby acting like lay people. The Pali passage reads: *Na, bhikkhave, ekabhājane bhuñjitabbaṃ ...pe... na ekathālake pātabbaṃ* “Monks, you should not eat from the same (lit. single/shared) bowl; you should not drink from the same (lit. single/shared) vessel (Kd 15).⁶⁷

The passage in *Pī Kon Kham* is paraphrased in Pali language and Burmese script with slightly different wording as follows: *Bhikkhuno ekathālakam bhojanam na bhuñjitabbaṃ na dhāretabbaṃ* “For a monk, food in a shared vessel should not be eaten and should not be accepted.” In other words, “A monk should not eat and should not accept food from a shared vessel” (2016: 79). The practise of eating only from one’s own bowl is one of the thirteen *dhutaṅga* (ascetic practices) followed by *dhutaṅga* monks. The sixth *dhutaṅga* rule, *pattapiṇḍika* (to put food in a bowl), which states that monks should eat from own bowl in which food is mixed rather than from plates and dishes.

⁶⁷ <https://suttacentral.net/pli-tv-kd15/en/brahmali?layout=sidebyside&reference=none¬es=asterisk&highlight=false&script=latin>

The duty of the novices who sit with the *bhikkhu* is to make the food appropriate for the *bhikkhu* to eat. Before the *bhikkhu* starts eating, the novice pays their respect to the *bhikkhu*. When the *bhikkhu* is ready to eat he will first say “*kappiyam karohi*”, the Pali phrase meaning “make it appropriate [to eat]” and the novice replies “*kappiyam bhante*” meaning “[it is] appropriate Venerable”. The *bhikkhus* and novices must go through this question and answer when the *bhikkhu* eats vegetables with sharp cutlery. It is stated in *Pī Kon Kham* that this same refrain is also repeated when the *bhikkhus* eat meat. When the *bhikkhu* picks up a piece of meat with cutlery, he will say “*kappiyam maṃsa [sic] khā khā [sic]*” meaning “make the meat appropriate” (2016: 79).⁶⁸

Pācittiya 11 states that if a monk causes damage to a tree, plant, or grass in anyway, then he has committed a *dukkata* (an offence) that must be confessed. It is stated in the *Samantapāsādikā* commentarial material that if a monk wants to eat a *bhūtāgama*, (living plant), which includes almost all types of vegetation, then he must ask a layman or novice “*kappiyam karohi*” (Sp.IV.767-768).⁶⁹ The layman or novice will then cut the vegetable with a knife or pierce it in some way before saying “*kappiyam bhante*”, and then the *bhikkhu* can eat it without committing an offence. The exchange of words between the Zawti *bhikkhus* and novices at mealtimes is therefore in line with the textual account of monastic conduct. But the canonical material explicitly references vegetables rather than meat, so the Zawti refrain *kappiyam maṃsa khā khā* stands out as distinctive. Further, while this exchange between *bhikkhus* and novices regarding the consumption of plants is rooted in canonical texts, in mainstream Burmese and Shan Theravada it is no longer common practice, and so despite its textual legitimacy, it does stand out as distinctive from the mainstream.

A mutual exchange takes place between the Zawti *bhikkhu* and the novices. The *bhikkhus* benefit from having the novices close to make their food edible, and the novices learn how to behave as a *bhikkhu* by engaging in such interactions. The novice’s liminal status as ordained, but not bound to the same 227 *pāṭimokkha* as fully ordained *bhikkhus*, allows them to assist the *bhikkhus* in tasks that *bhikkhus* are prohibited from doing, and might otherwise be considered inappropriate for a lay person to do. The Zawti *bhikkhus* eating habits demonstrate the Zawti

⁶⁸ In Burmese society people often say that meat, vegetables, and fruits, should be cut into bitesize pieced for monks. This could be the result of a close reading of the commentaries or it might have developed out of necessity over time. Either way, Burmese Buddhists cut food that will be offered to monks into small pieces and so monks do not usually need to use sharp cutlery (Personal Communication with Pyi Phyo Kyaw 10/03/23).

⁶⁹ <https://bhikkhu-manual.github.io/includes/docs/Bhikkhu-Manual-Reference.pdf>

monks' commitment to respecting *pācittiya* rules and their close reading of the *Samantapāsādikā* commentarial material. This signals a level of orthopraxy that is beyond the Theravada norm since in mainstream Burmese and Shan monasticism *bhikkhus* eat food without the assistance of a novice to make it appropriate.

It is stated in *Pī Kon Kham* that the novices eat after the *bhikkhus* are served. The head novices go in first and then their teams join them. There are usually five novices on each table. When they finish eating the novices in charge of serving the food come and clean up. After breakfast, all the novices do their chores which include cleaning the lavatories, gathering firewood and sweeping. When they finish their chores, they go back to the *dhamma hall* to work on studying and memorizing texts (Steps 5 and 6 in Table 5). The novices might not finish their chores at the same time, so this period is more like a “study period”, when they can study the texts at their own pace. During this session they only work on Pali texts and the novices are not allowed to bring Shan or Burmese texts with them. They practise using small blackboards (2016: 80).

According to the account in *Pī Kon Kham*, from 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. the novices attend class. There they read Pali texts for an hour. After that they have more personal study time when they can read anything related to the *sāsana* (the teaching of the Buddha). Alternatively, they can reflect on the *paccavekkhaṇā*, a reflection on the four monastic requisites: the robe, food, lodging, and medicine. The monks reflect on the requisites when they receive them and when they use them, to express appreciation for their material needs, which enables them to perform well the monastic duties the items were supplied to support, and in turn give merit to the donors who supplied them. During this time, novices can also wash their robes and towels, or they might wash the *bhikkhu's* sitting cloths (cloths that they sit on when meditating, studying, etc). They can also fetch water or have a bath. Lunch is usually served at 11am and it follows the same structure as breakfast. When there are temple sleepers at the monastery on *uposatha* days, the monks eat lunch at 10.30 a.m. and the temple sleepers eat at 11 a.m.

After lunch the monks return to the main monastery and memorise texts until 1.30 p.m. Then they rest, or complete tasks such as refilling drinking water or washing their hands and feet. From 3 p.m.- 4.30 p.m. they study *lik trā langkā long*. These are poetic *dhamma* texts written in the traditional Shan *lik long* style, which I shall explain in further detail later in this chapter. If the novice cannot read the text himself, he can take it to another novice or a *bhikkhu* who

can and ask them to recite the text. Here we begin to see how *lik long* training is a part of the Zawti daily routine and is core subject in Zawti monastic education.

4.30 p.m. to 5 p.m. is bath time. When the monks have finished bathing, they go and wait in the *dhamma* hall. At 5 p.m. the monks take their blackboards and *dukot* robes and go to the *dhamma* hall to study. The abbot strikes the gong at 6 p.m. The abbot leads all the *bhikkhus* and novices to the Buddha shrine in a line of descending order from the most senior to the least senior. All the *bhikkhus* and novices cover themselves in their *dukot* robe. The Zawti monks cover themselves with their *dukot* robe when they study the *dhamma* and when they pay respect to the Buddha. When they reach the Buddha shrine, they offer flowers, water, candles and incense to the Buddha images. They chant and pay homage to the triple gem in Pali, then they *kantaw* (bow three times) and pay homage to the Buddha in Shan. The detail of the monks worshipping Buddha images overturns J.G. Scott's claim that the Zawti "reject the worship before pagodas and images" (1909: 147). I shall examine the Zawti attitude towards Buddha images in further detail in Chapter Seven of this thesis. This account the Zawti monastic daily routine also illustrates how Pali and Shan are the languages of chanting and ritual at Paññālaikāra Monastery rather than Burmese. The monks then make their way back to the *dhamma* hall and the right-hand monk leads the monks in paying homage to the abbot. After this, the abbot or a senior *bhikkhu* gives a *dhamma* talk to the novices. When this is over, the novices go back to the dormitory to rest.

At 6.30p.m. the novices ask their teachers, or any of the *bhikkhus*, if they want a massage. Or they ask to listen to a recording of a *dhamma* talk. The abbot strikes the gong at 7p.m., and all the novices go to the *dhamma* hall to revise what they have learned that day. During this revision session they practise memorizing texts by saying them out loud repeatedly. They are not allowed to look at texts while they do this. The Shwegyin monks and novices follow a similar routine. Dhammasami writes that in Shwegyin monasteries the student is given a Pali passage each day which he must memorise. In the evenings, the students are encouraged to recite the texts they have learnt that day since the next day, the student must read the passage and recite it by heart in front of his supervisor (2004: 57-58).

At 8p.m. the abbot strikes the gong which indicates that the revision session is over. All the novices bow down to the abbot and pay their respects. Although this role is not included in the hierarchy of novices examined in the following chapter, Chapter Six, according to *Pī Kon*

Kham, there is a novice who oversees preparing the beds for the *bhikkhus* and switching off all the lights in the monastery (2016: 82). When all the *bhikkhus* and novices are in their dormitory getting ready for bed, they reflect on the four *paccavekkhaṇā*. In *Pī Kon Kham*, a quote from a *Tipiṭaka* (Pali Canon) expert from Southern Shan State called Tsau Kawlī is included, warning that “if you fail to reflect on the *paccavekkhaṇā*, even one of them, then you will be reborn as a yellow ox with horns, the horns will pierce your eyes and cheeks and you will suffer immensely” (2016: 82).

The *paccavekkhaṇā* reflection is common to all Theravada monks and is often chanted either at the beginning or end of the day.⁷⁰ The account of the Zawti monastic daily routine in *Pī Kon Kham* ends with the comment that all these tasks must be completed each day and none of the tasks can be left for the next day. If a monk fails to complete a task, then he was to report it to the abbot (2016: 82).

The overview of the daily routine of the Zawti monks at Paññālankāra Monastery highlights the importance of respect and deference shown among the monks. It also confirms that Shan is the language of instruction among the Zawti monks since daily chanting and ritual is done in Pali and Shan rather than Burmese. The centrality of Shan language and literature is reaffirmed by the daily teaching of *lik long* texts at Paññālankāra Monastery. The use of Shan, especially through the study of *lik long*, emphasizes how Shan-ness is intertwined with Zawti monasticism and Zawti identity. The enthusiasm for Shan language and literature is found also in the wider non-Zawti Shan community with whom they share the same linguistic and ethnic identity.

In terms of the structure of the daily routine, most of the day is dedicated to monastic education and activities that uphold the maintenance of the monastery. In this way, it is similar to the routine of the Shwegyin monks at Mahagandayon Monastery in Amarapura, near Mandalay. Mahagandayon Monastery is a *pariyatti* institute, known for its dedication to monastic education (Kyaw 2015: 407). E.M. Mendelson provides an outline of the daily schedule of the Shwegyin monks in Sangha and State, where he describes the Shwegyin as “extremely strict”, and their routine as “the most orthodox of the orthodox”, (Mendelson 1975: 149-150; for the Shwegyin daily routine see Appendix C). The Shwegyin are widely considered to be the most

⁷⁰ <https://dharma-records.buddhasasana.net/texts/traditional-monastic-reflections-adapted-for-lay-people>

orthodox *nikāya* in Burma and the Shwegyin monks are revered for their strict adherence to the *Vinaya*.

The parallels between the Shwegyin monastic routine and the Zawti routine highlight that while stricter than the mainstream, the Zawti monastic routine does not diverge from what is accepted as orthodox in the Burmese Buddhist milieu. The Zawti daily routine and its similarities to the Shwegyin demonstrates the orthodoxy and strict orthopraxy of the Zawti monks, whose daily routine is also reflective of a dedication to monastic discipline and education. Some specific similarities may in part have arisen in the period when the Zawti monastic group settled in Shwegyin for seven years (1896-1903), though I have no evidence that the Zawti monks did in fact interact with the Shwegyin monks at this time.

The Zawti laity acknowledge the orthodoxy of the Shwegyin monks. One Zawti informant remarked that while in the past the Zawti laity only paid respects to Zawti monks, they always respected the Shwegyin monks, who they considered to be of the same level of orthodoxy as the Zawti monks (Interview 05/02/20 Kachin State). As I have discussed previously in Chapter Two, despite the similarities between Shwegyin and Zawti monasticism, the Zawti chose to accept absorption into the Thudhamma *gaing* over the Shwegyin *gaing*, which was likely related to the fact that the Shwegyin and Zawti have two distinct monastic lineages and therefore a merger would be problematic for the Zawti.

The fact that traditionally the Zawti laity did not pay reverence to non-Zawti monks suggests that the Zawti did recognise themselves as distinct from non-Zawti Buddhists. Now, the Zawti laity pay respect to non-Zawti monks and invite them to Zawti community rituals. I observed this in Nang Li Kham, a Zawti village in southern Shan State, when the villagers invited a non-Zawti Shan monk to their *tai wat* on *wan sin* (*uposatha* day during *vassa*) in August 2019. I also observed non-Zawti monks being invited to the opening ceremony of the *poi sang long* festival at Paññālankāra Monastery in February 2020. On both occasions the Zawti laity paid their respects to the non-Zawti monks. While the Zawti laity may have always considered the orthodoxy of the Shwegyin monks comparable to that of Zawti monks, I am not aware if the Zawti monks themselves agree with this comparison.

5.3. Monastic Education at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery

I shall now take a closer look at the nature of monastic education at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery. I shall draw on conversations with lay men who were once ordained as Zawti novices, and the brief textual accounts of monastic education recorded in *Kyaung Loi Zawti* and *Pī Kon Kham*. In what follows, I highlight some distinctive aspects of the Zawti monastic education to situate the Zawti within the broader Burmese and Shan monastic context.

From reading the overview of the daily routine of the Zawti monks at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery, it is clear that monastic education takes up the majority of the Zawti monks' day. One might assume then that Paññālaṅkāra Monastery is a *pariyatti* institute. The term *pariyatti* is used in two ways. *Pariyatti* or 'textual study' is one of the three dimensions of the Buddha's religion, the other two being *paṭipatti*, meaning practice or meditation, and *paṭivedha*, meaning realization. In contemporary Burmese Buddhism, monks who focus on *pariyatti* over *paṭipatti* are referred to as 'pariyatti monks'. *Pariyatti* monks are usually trained in *pariyatti* institutions, specialized teaching monasteries where the monks are trained to sit standardized monastic examinations. Therefore, the term *pariyatti* is used to describe both textual study as an ideological dimension of monasticism, and also to describe a specific type of contemporary monastic institution.

In the introductory "Appeal Letter from the Abbot" in *Pī Kon Kham*, the abbot states that there are several တခွေတခွေ (dangers) to the Zawti tradition (2016: 6). He concludes the letter with the remark that danger arises if the number of monks at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery reaches four hundred, and that "to make our temple like a large *pariyatti* institute like others, would not be appropriate for us" (*Pī Kon Kham* 2016: 6). I interpret this to mean that the Zawti monks do not want their monastery to become a 'mega' monastery with hundreds of monks, and they do not want to have to change their monastic curriculum to the exam syllabus taught in *pariyatti* institutes.

The fact that none of the Zawti *bhikkhus* have honorary titles associated with the attainment of monastic examinations suggests that the Zawti monks do not take part in the formal monastic examinations. In Myanmar, honorary suffixes are awarded to monks, and added to their names, when they complete and perform well in monastic examinations. For example, the title

pathamakyaw is awarded to monks who pass all three levels in the *Pathamapyan* examinations, the lowest-level series of examinations for *bhikkhus*, and score the highest marks in the *pathamagi* level examinations (Dhammasami 2004: 129). The monastic title *Dhammācariya* is given to monks who pass the *Dhammācariya* exams. The suffix *-abhivaṃsa* is awarded to those who pass private *Dhammācariya* examinations, called *Sakyasīha*, sponsored by the *Pariyatti Sāsanaḥita* in Mandalay, and the *Cetiyaṅgaṇa*, sponsored by the *Pariyatti Dhammānuggaha* Association at Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon (Dhammasami 2004: 137-138). These titles afford status in Burmese monastic circles, and it is only through achieving such qualifications that monks can progress in the Burmese ecclesiastical hierarchy. To attain such titles, monks have to study the government syllabus and sit government exams.

It is surprising that the Zawti monks have resisted formal monastic examinations until now. Burmese monasticism has a long history of formal monastic examinations, dating back to at least the early years of the Konbaung period (Dhammasami 2004: 40). It was during the reign of King Mindon (r.1853-1878) that formal monastic education began to develop into what it is now in contemporary Myanmar. Amidst the precarious political and social backdrop of the fall of the Burmese Empire to the British colonial powers, Mindon persuaded the Burmese Sangha to accept formal examinations as a way of promoting and perpetuating Buddhism (Dhammasami 2004: 20). It was during this period that monks were put under increased social and cultural pressure to complete such exams. As I shall examine later in this chapter, the emphasis on formal monastic exams which were taught using a standard syllabus, resulted in a privileging of such texts at the loss of all else. The fact that the Zawti monks have not taken part in these examinations suggests a disinterest in the status acquired from attaining such titles, and a commitment to their own monastic syllabus.

The Zawti monastic syllabus at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery includes subjects outside of the national curriculum such as Shan literacy training and *lik long* training. Shan literacy is a central component of monastic education at the monastery because many novices speak Shan at home but do not know how to read or write Shan. This is because Burmese is the only official language in Myanmar, and Shan language learning is not part of the Burmese education curriculum. Shan, or Dai as it is referred to in China, literacy is not on the government syllabus in China either. In both Myanmar and China, if students want to learn to read and write Shan, then they must do so outside of school hours, usually during the holidays at centres for Shan

literature, or boys will learn it when ordained as novices.⁷¹ For the Tai Zawti and the broader Shan community, learning Shan language and literature is an important aspect of preserving Shan cultural heritage. This means that ordination and novice training at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery is a valuable cultural opportunity for Shan boys to learn Shan language and literature, even if they do not intend to stay ordained for a prolonged period of time. The novices at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery are taught the standardized *Tai Long* script which is widely used in southern Shan State (see Introduction for more on Shan language).⁷² Once the novices have a grasp of reading and writing Shan, they move on to learning *dhamma* texts in Shan. The Zawti monks read the *Tipiṭaka* in Shan, they learn to chant in Shan, and they learn *lik long* in Shan. The Zawti monks are trained in Shan and Pali, but also in Burmese, according to national requirements.

The Zawti fear of becoming a *pariyatti* institute reflects the anxiety, induced by the fear of *sāsana* decline, that is characteristic of Zawti monasticism. If they were to become a *pariyatti* institute, then they would have to open up their monastery to more novices rather than just those from a Shan background or with good relations with the Shan, which could cause tensions, and they would have to change their curriculum, which would put their traditions at risk. This is a legitimate fear. The Zawti have been able to withstand many monastic reforms over the centuries and as a result they have been able to retain aspects of their tradition, such as *lik long* training which has been lost elsewhere. The pressure to assimilate by adopting the standard Burmese monastic syllabus is great. It is intertwined with legitimating the tradition and could be a means of gaining status among the wider Burmese monastic population, but it would mean abandoning the traditional Zawti monastic syllabus.

5.3.1. The Process of Teaching *Lik Long* at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery

The study of Shan *lik long* is a distinctive feature of monastic training at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery. *Lik long* ‘great writing’ or *lik langkā long* ‘the text of great poetry’ is a type of vernacular traditional Shan poetic literature used in Shan ritual performance, which covers an array of topics from history to folklore, to manuals for ceremonies, as well as a range of genres

⁷¹ The monastery is the site of ‘informal’ Shan language learning for young Shan boys. While girls have the option to learn at cultural associations, it does appear that options are more limited for Shan girls and leads naturally to the question of what this might mean for the future of Shan literacy among the new generations of Shan women and girls, and in turn the next generations of children.

⁷² The standardized Tai Long is also referred to as *lik to mon* ‘round shaped alphabet’.

of religious texts (Khur-Yearn 2012: 26). *Lik long* of a religious nature is called *lik trā langkā long*, ‘the text of great poetry about *trā*’, meaning ‘the *dhamma*’. The recitation of *lik long* literature has been practised by Shan communities for centuries and learning how to compose, read and recite *lik long* was part of traditional Shan monastic training.

Despite its long tradition and the cultural significance of *lik long* in the Shan community, *lik long* is no longer a pillar of Shan monastic education. There are several reasons why this is the case. Firstly, for centuries, Shan monks have been sent to Burmese monastic institutions in central Burma, where they are taught Burmese Buddhist texts and learn to practise Burmese monastic rules and traditions (Khur-Yearn 2012: 201). When the monks return to their home monasteries in Shan State, they teach the Shan students what they have learned in central Burma. This results in a process of assimilation into the Burmese monastic tradition, even in the geographic and political periphery of Shan State. Secondly, even among Shan monks who are trained and remain in Shan State, there is pressure to follow the modern Burmese system of monastic education. Venerable Dhammasami states that modern Shan monasteries are “under pressure to develop along the line of its Burmese counterpart, with the narrowly defined, government-sponsored written examination-based education system” (Khammai Dhammasami 2009: 39 as quoted in Khur-Yearn 2012: 201). There is a social and political pressure on student monks and novices to focus on government-sponsored examination papers, to the neglect of all else. Pali canonical texts that appear on formalized syllabuses, designed for monastic examinations are privileged, and a result texts that were once studied in the past but are no longer on the contemporary syllabi are neglected (Dhammasammi 2018: 4).

Lik trā langkā long is not on the contemporary Burmese syllabi and therefore it does not help novices and monks in pursuing monastic qualifications. As a result, the popularity of teaching the subject to young novices has become less and less popular in contemporary Shan State. *Lik long* and *lik long* training is reflective of traditional ‘informal’ monastic education before formal monastic education was standardized to emulate secular education models in the post-colonial era. Despite these changes in the wider Burmese and Shan monastic context, the Zawti are still committed to training their novices and *bhikkhus* in *lik long*, and they are renowned for this training among Shan monastic scholarly circles in Myanmar.

Before I explain the contemporary *lik long* training at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery, I first want to make a comment about script. The Zawti monks are now taught to compose in Tai Long

rounded script however, traditionally Zawti *lik long* was composed in *lik hto ngawk* ‘bean sprout script’, the script of the Tai Nuea in northern Shan State and Dehong, China.⁷³ This is not surprising considering the Zawti monks were located in areas of Shan State and Dehong, where Tai Nuea is spoken, for centuries. I am not aware of when the transition to Tai Long was implemented, but it is now language of instruction and communication at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery (see Introduction).

According to *Pī Kon Kham*, each year the Zawti monks hold a ပါဠိသုခေ လခေ,၈၂, *pāng son langka* (poetry workshop) during the *vassa* season, when the monks are taught how to compose *lik long* literature (2016: 107). The account in *Pī Kon Kham* details that anyone who is good at *lik long* or capable of leading a class can teach the subject, but the class is only open to novices and *bhikkhus*, and lay devotees are not permitted to attend. In this class the monks are taught how to rhyme, compose, and recite *lik long* literature (2016: 107). *Lik long* literature is composed in a complex and distinctive poetic style. There are numerous metrical forms, and each metre has its own name according to the rhymes used and the tones used (Khur Yearn 2012: 37).

As we have seen in earlier in this chapter, studying *lik long* is part of the daily Zawti monastic routine. The general study of *lik long* involves reading *lik long* texts or listening to recordings of *lik long* while the *pang son langka* workshop focuses specifically on learning to compose *lik long*. The Zawti monks are only able to begin composing *lik long* texts after they have completed the *pāng son langka* (poetry workshop). The Zawti monks are not allowed to spend time on *lik long* composition on *uposatha* days, on days when they are honouring the Buddha, or if they have other studying to do. In this way, it is more of an extracurricular subject. The art of *lik long* composition is not pursued by all of the Zawti monks, rather only those with an interest and aptitude for it, which is described in *Pī Kon Kham* as: “they all make an effort and try to compose but whether they can do it or not depends on ability and interest” (2016: 107).

For those who do pursue *lik long*, and want to compose a text, they must first decide what type of metre they want to use (2016: 107). Once a monk has decided this, he must discuss it with a more experienced *bhikkhu*. Once the monk has composed a text, he must memorize and perform it to his teacher by heart. The monk will then recite it to the abbot and request that he

⁷³ David Wharton has written extensively about Tai Nuea lay Buddhist texts and practice (2017, 2018, 2019).

give comments. Only after it has been edited by the abbot, is it written down on paper and made into *lik long*. Once it is transcribed, the monk ceremonially offers it to the monastery. In this ceremony, all the monks gather in the *dhamma* hall and listen to the recitation of the *lik long* (2016: 107).⁷⁴

The preservation of *lik long* training is important to the Zawti monastic tradition, and it is described as taught “with love, kindness and compassion for the new generations... in fear that the disciples of new generations might not do the same according to the *dhamma* and *vinaya*” (2016: 106). There is a fear that if they do not maintain these traditions, then they will be lost, a fear that relates to prediction of *sāsana* decline found in both the canon and commentaries. At the turn of the twentieth century Burmese society was deeply concerned about impending *sāsana* decline. The Burmese feared that the challenges and changes of the colonial condition threatened the moral fibre of Buddhism in Burma (Turner 2014: 84). I shall discuss the fear of *sāsana* decline in the colonial period and how this impacted lay Buddhism in further detail in Chapter Eight. In the case of the Zawti, given the demise of *lik long* training in mainstream Shan monasteries, this fear is now a legitimate and imminent concern. *Lik Long* is important to the Zawti because both because of the religious nature of its contents, but also its cultural significance, as a bastion of Shan cultural identity.

Lik long training is also important because it is a vocational skill that can be utilized once a Zawti monk disrobes. I would assume that a Zawti novice or *bhikkhu* must remain ordained for a number of years to acquire the level of skill in *lik long* that would allow him to utilize his knowledge of *lik long* as a *zare* when he returned to lay life.⁷⁵ A *zare* is a lay ritual practitioner who is employed to compose, transcribe, and recite *lik long* at all sorts of Shan religious and cultural events such as weddings, house warmings, new shop openings, even birthdays. The *zare* tradition is also common to the wider Shan community.

Most of the *zares* I met in Shan State, both Zawti and non-Zawti, laughed when I asked if they were full time *zares*, and responded that they were paid a modest fee for their services. In their

⁷⁵ How long a Zawti novice remains ordained for varies widely, some for a week, some for months, some for years. Given the paucity of Zawti monks, however, we can assume that most novices do disrobe, and it is likely that the number of novices declines steadily over the year. In terms of Zawti *bhikkhu* ordination, I am not certain. Higher ordination is less common and far fewer men take higher ordination so while the number of Zawti monks is low, it does not mean that turnover is high. It could be the case that given the austerity of Zawti monasticism very few men decide to ordain but, those who do, anticipate lifelong monkhood.

survey of *zares* in Maehongson, Crosby and Khur-Yearn found that most of the *zares* they interviewed were not able to live entirely from being a *zare* and most did manual work, specifically farming (2010: 11). While being a *zare* might not be a lucrative vocation for many *zares*, it does serve as a means of additional income to supplement their full-time work.⁷⁶ There are also some very successful *zares* in northern Shan State who are career *zares*. They have celebrity status in Shan State and can make considerable amounts of money through their work as *zares*.⁷⁷ In addition to monetary benefits, there are other types of benefits to being a *zare*, namely, an elevated status in society. *Zares* are well respected because of their mastery of *lik long*, and their association with monasticism, since this is usually where they received their training.⁷⁸ In this way, the *lik long* training the monks are offered at Paññālankāra Monastery is a transferable skill, which benefits them in their later lay life.

5.3.2. New Approaches to *Lik Long* Scholarship

The fear that traditional Shan *lik long* will be lost in future generations is also a concern among the wider Shan population. In recent years, partly in response to this fear, there has been a resurgence of interest in Shan *lik long* literature among Shan scholarly circles. Shan *lik long* literature was virtually unknown to Western academic scholarship until about twenty years ago when Barend J. Terwiel and Chaichuen Khamdaengyodtai compiled and edited Shan *Manuscripts Part 1* (2003) and Jotika Khur-Yearn began to catalogue *lik long* and study *zares* (2012). A key reason why *lik long* was overlooked in scholarship for so long is because the medium of *lik long* is Shan. Buddhist Studies scholarship has traditionally privileged the study of texts in classical languages such as Pali and has overlooked vernacular literature in languages such as Shan (see Introduction).

In 2007 Khur-Yearn, Venerable Khammai Dhammasami and Kate Crosby co-hosted the first Conference on Shan Buddhism and Culture at SOAS University with the Shan Cultural Association UK. In 2013 Venerable Khammai Dhammasami held the first *Lik Loung*

⁷⁶ This contrast with how historically, before the Union of Burma was created and while each Shan territory had its own *soapha* and court using Shan, expertise of a *zare* (clerk, secretary) was related to high office, specifically the secretary of the *soapha*. Only later did *ho lu/ ho lik* come to be known as *zare* (see Chapter Seven of this thesis and Crosby and Khur-Yearn 2012: 2).

⁷⁷ Successful contemporary *zares* are prominent on social media. They use platforms like Facebook to post videos of themselves performing and connect with the lay community.

⁷⁸ Some *zares* learn their craft from other *zares* or family members rather than at the monastery but this is rare.

Conference in Yangon, with the intention of promoting the study of *lik long* literature.⁷⁹ The *Lik Loung* Conferences spotlight *lik long* as a valuable means of preserving Tai culture, tradition, religious and history.⁸⁰ Since then there have been six conferences which have attracted monks, *zares*, Shan scholars and foreign academics. Zawti *zares* began to attend these conferences and while the Zawti would have been known to some, for others it was the first time they learned of their existence. Zawti *zares* are now regular attendees of the *Lik Loung* Conferences and a Zawti *zare* was the keynote speaker at the Third *Lik Loung* Conference held in Lashio, Shan State in 2016 (Personal Communication with Jotika Khur-Yearn 29/11/22).

In 2019, Shan State Buddhist University, of which Venerable Dhammasami is the founder-rector, introduced a new B.A. degree course in *Lik Long* Studies. The aims of the degree programme are described follows:

To bring together the rich heritage of traditional *Lik Loung* scholarship and a multidisciplinary approach of contemporary academic study of Theravada Buddhism. To develop awareness and knowledge of conservation and preservation of *Lik Loung* literature and its culture. To equip students with academic skills necessary for critical studies of *Lik Loung* and Theravada Literature.⁸¹

The course is aimed at *zares* who have already been trained ‘informally’ e.g., in the temple or by other *zares*. Several *zares* ordained from the Zawti community have undertaken this course at Shan State Buddhist University. The B.A. *Lik Long* course at SSBU is in its infancy, and so at this point it is not clear how it might change the current climate of *lik long* scholarship in the broader Shan monastic and lay community. I am very interested in the academification, as it were, of *lik long* and how this might impact the Zawti. Can secular academic approaches be applied to traditional forms of scholarship? How might privileging the study of Pali and the selected Pali literature that constitutes Burmese monastic education affect the Shan *lik long* tradition? And what risks might such a pursuit involve? I hope to explore these questions in future research projects.

⁷⁹ The transliteration of လိလုံ; လုံလုံ varies among scholars. I follow Jotika Khur-Yearn who uses *lik long* but *lik loung* is another common transliteration of the term.

⁸⁰ <https://www.ssbu.edu.mm/research/the-revival-of-tai-manuscript-studies-in-the-21st-century-9LHtG>

⁸¹ <https://www.ssbu.edu.mm/admissions/apply/2021-2022/ba-degree-in-lik-loung-studies>

5.4. Conclusion

What do the Zawti *upadesa* rules and monastic daily routine tell us about the contemporary Zawti monastic tradition? In this chapter, I have coupled textual accounts of the Zawti *upadesa* rules and monastic daily routine with narratives from members of the Zawti community to provide a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary Zawti monasticism. I have highlighted some of the most distinctive features of Zawti monastic discipline, such as their rules around mealtimes, where they can travel, and what is included in their monastic syllabus, to demonstrate how the Zawtis' commitment to liturgical orthopraxy manifests in monastic discipline and behaviour. I have also shown how this is taught to the novices not just through the education they receive, but through their distinctive relationship in serving the fully ordained monks. Novices progress in status and experience in these acts of service and support that are particularly visible during mealtimes.

In examining the *upadesa* rules and the daily routine at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery, I have highlighted the orthodoxy of the Zawti monks in terms of monastic discipline, which challenges misguided outsider perceptions that the Zawti are unorthodox and heretical. In this chapter we learn that the Zawti monks worship Buddha images as part of their daily routine, a fact that overturns misconceptions of the tradition which had led to their long-standing association with the Paramats and which I surveyed in Chapter One.⁸² In this investigation of the Zawti *upadesa* rules, I have also challenged outsider interpretations of the Zawti as unorthodox and heretical by highlighting parallels between the Zawti and other Burmese monastic traditions, specifically the Shwegyin. The Zawti interpretation of the *Pāṭimokkha* rules and the Zawti daily routine share similarities with those of the Shwegyin, who are widely considered to be more orthodox in their observance of the Vinaya than the more populous Thudhamma *nikāya*, to which the Zawti now belong.

Despite the similarities between the Zawti and the Shwegyin, the Zawti daily focus on education is culturally distinctive and situates the Zawti among the wider Shan monastic community, particularly in relation to their preservation of Shan *lik long* literature, an aspect

⁸² Specifically Sangermano's claim that the Zawti "despise... the statues of Godama" (Sangermano 1833: 111) and J.G. Scott's statement that "they reject the worship before pagodas and images" (Scott 1909: 147-49).

of Shan monastic education that is in decline outside of the Zawti tradition. It is through Zawti monastic education, which takes up most of the Zawti daily routine, that the Zawti monks learn to be Zawti monks. It is also through examining the Zawti monastic syllabus that we learn more about how the Zawti differ from the wider Shan monastic community. The Zawti are committed to maintaining their traditional monastic syllabus which includes learning *dhamma* texts in Shan, and teaching Shan *lik long* literature. These are features of monastic education that have been lost, or at risk, in the broader Shan monastic community, but have been preserved by the Zawti through their history of geographic and social isolation.

All Zawti monks are trained at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery. They are not sent away for training at other monasteries, which means that there has been limited outsider influence over their education system. The Zawti *lik long* training at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery is therefore important in terms of the preservation of traditional ‘informal’ Shan monastic education, as it was taught before formal monastic education became standardized in the post-colonial era. In the broader Shan context, it is only the older generation who preserve the tradition, which is at risk of endangerment because of lack of interest and lack of access to training. The reason the Zawti are explicitly anxious about the prospect of Paññālaṅkāra becoming a *pariyatti* institute, despite their commitment to textual study, is because they fear the loss of their custom. They describe Paññālaṅkāra becoming a *pariyatti* institute as a ‘danger’ to the Zawti tradition (*Pī Kon Kham* 2016: 6). If the Zawti were to pursue *pariyatti* status, then they would have to cater their syllabus to the state-set syllabus, at the cost of their own syllabus. Shan language training and *lik long* training would be at risk, both of which are central to Tai Zawti monastic identity. In response to this threat, the Zawti keep the number of novices and *bhikkhus* at the monastery down to avoid forced *pariyatti* status.

In examining the Zawti *upadesa* rules and monastic daily routine, I have demonstrated how the Zawti simultaneously remain committed to *lik long*, their traditional vernacular literature, while maintaining strict monastic discipline that is comparable to the Shwegyin, “the most orthodox of the orthodox” of the Burmese monastic tradition. The Zawti straddle different axes of orthodoxy and traditionalism which leaves them on the peripheries of both the wider Shan monastic community and the Burmese monastic community.

Chapter Six

Administration at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery

So far in this thesis, I have located Paññālaṅkāra Monastery as the hub of the contemporary Zawti tradition. I have examined how the triannual *poi sang long* celebration is held at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery and brings together the entire Zawti lay and monastic community. I have also explored daily monastic life at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery, mainly through the lens of discipline and monastic education. I have not yet examined the hierarchies and administrative structures that support the maintenance and organization of activities that go on at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery. In this chapter I aim to provide an outline of both the monastic and lay hierarchies and examine how each role contributes to the maintenance of the monastery. In doing so, I highlight the relationship between the Zawti monks and the laity, and what this reveals about the nature of Zawti monasticism.

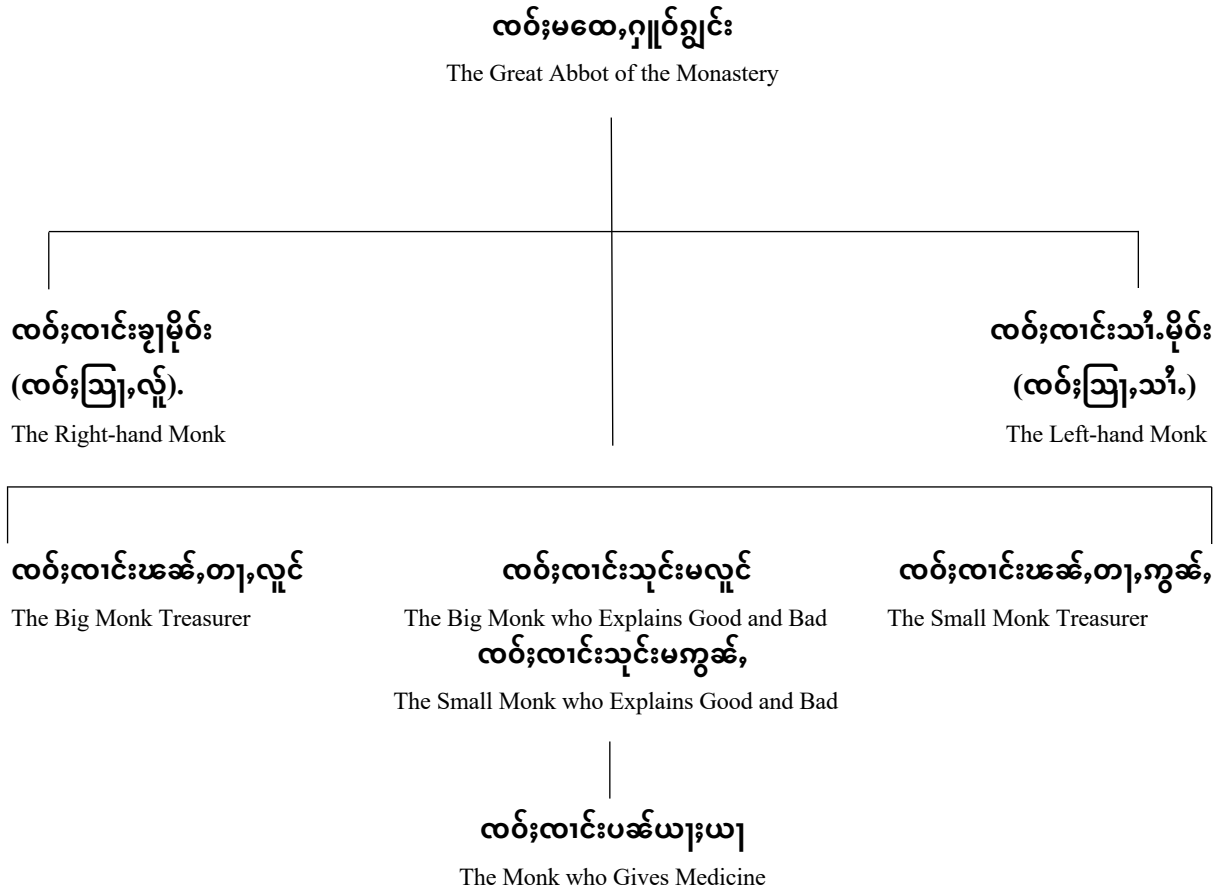
6.1. Monastic Administration at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery

The Theravada monastery is a democratic institution in that monastic recruitment and promotion is decided using universalistic criteria rather than secular distinctions of family, wealth, or rank. But even so, the monastery is still hierarchically organized according to a monastic status and achievement (Spiro 1982: 310). The head of the hierarchy is the abbot of the monastery. Thomas Borchert describes the role of the abbot as “the chief administrative officer of the small non-profit which is their temple” (2011: 180). It is the abbot who oversees everything that goes on at his monastery, from monastic education and discipline, to ritual events and interactions with the laity. In the monastic hierarchy of a monastery, the next in line are the *bhikkhus* aged twenty and above who have received *upasampadā* ordination. Among the *bhikkhus*, seniority is determined by their *vassa* age, meaning how many rainy seasons have passed since their *upasampadā* ordination. In addition to *vassa* age, in the broader Burmese context, monastic qualifications are another status marker within monastic communities (see Chapter Five).

Under the *bhikkhus*, there are the *sāmaṇera* novices who have received *pabbajjā* ordination. Next in the hierarchy are young boys usually under the age of eight, who live at the monastery but have not yet been ordained. Monastic status is therefore related to the number of precepts kept and how long they have been kept, which is often linked to age. This basic hierarchy is enacted in day-to-day monastic life through deference, which is shown to all monks of a superior status to one’s own, and in the types of duties and responsibilities assigned to the monks (Spiro 1982: 311).

I shall now examine the hierarchy of the Zawti monks at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery specifically, who are organized according to their own administrative system of hierarchy based on seniority and responsibilities. The *bhikkhus* have one system and the *sāmaṇera* have another, both are presented in Figure 16 and Figure 17 below. I shall first look at the hierarchy of the *bhikkhus* as displayed in Figure 16.

ပန်းပိုင် ဖုင်, ပျားခိုင်
The Model of *Bhikkhus* at the Monastery
(Pī Kon Kham 2016: 86)



(Figure 16: Chart of *bhikkhu* hierarchy at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery from *Pī Kon Kham* 2016: 86).

6.1.1. The Abbot and his Right-Hand and Left-Hand Monks

The abbot of the monastery is the head of the Zawti monastic hierarchy, which we can see in the top position, labelled as လင်းမထေ, ဂျူဝ်ရွှင်း: “the Great Abbot of the Monastery”, in Figure 16. The abbot has jurisdiction over the entire Zawti monastic and lay community and is treated with the utmost respect. The abbot is supported by his second in command, the right-hand monk, and the third in command, his left-hand monk. The trio of the abbot, the right hand-monk, and the left-hand monk are central to Zawti monastic organization. The seniority of the three senior *bhikkhus*, and the hierarchy among them, is visible in the way Zawti monks perform community rituals. When I saw the Zawti monks at the *poi sang long* festival in 2020,

the abbot was the first to lead the procession of monks from Paññālankāra Monastery to the temporary ordination hall. The second in line was his right-hand monk and the third in line was his left-hand monk. When they reached the stage, they each sat on elaborate gold *palin*, thrones, in a row at the top of the stage while the other *bhikkhus* sat on the ground. The spatial arrangement of the Zawti senior monks in public settings is a physical manifestation of their hierarchical structure.

In terms of the duties and responsibilities of the right-hand and left-hand monk, they are described in *Pī Kon Kham* as “doing everything to help the abbot” (2016: 89). They assist the abbot in ritual activity for example, as described in Chapter Four, during higher ordination, the ordinands first approach the left-hand monk who asks if they meet the basic criteria for ordination. If they do, he then takes them to the right-hand monk, who then takes the novices to the abbot who acts as the *upajjhāya*, the preceptor (*Pī Kon Kham* 2016: 72, for more see Chapter Four of this thesis). If, for whatever reason, the abbot is unable to act as the *upajjhāya*, then it is the duty of the right-hand monk to step in as the *upajjhāya* (*Pī Kon Kham* 2016: 40). If this does occur there is a caveat that the ordination must take place beyond the border of the county, but no further explanation of why this is the case is provided in the Zawti texts available to me. This indicates that while it is possible for the right-hand monk to act as the *upajjhāya*, it is not the same as the abbot doing so.

The role and hierarchy of the three senior Zawti *bhikkhus* is likely to be a preservation, or emulation, of early Indian monasticism as it is recorded in the Pali Canon. As I described in Chapter One, the tradition of having a right-hand monk and a left-hand monk replicates canonical descriptions of the Buddha and his principal disciples. Sāriputta, his most important pupil, sat on the right side of the Buddha, and Mahāmoggallāna, his other great pupil, sat to the left (J. L. Taylor 1993: 28). This practice of the right-hand monk and the left-hand monk of the Buddha is depicted in a model of a Burmese shrine room from Mandalay palace in the 19th century.⁸³ Although I have not come across if this practice of having the right-hand and left-hand monks, emulating the Buddha’s retinue, in contemporary Burmese or Shan monasticism, it is observed in the Cambodian tradition.⁸⁴ In the Cambodian tradition the right-hand monk is

⁸³ <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O57777/shrine-unknown/>

⁸⁴ The Burmese terms for right-hand monk (*lat-wae-taw-ya*) and left-hand monk (*at-yar-taw*) refer specifically to Sariputta and Moggallana and so these terms are reserved for those chief disciples of the Buddha. Burmese monks would therefore not use such terms in their monasteries for fear of being accused of emulating the Buddha, which

usually elected as abbot when the incumbent abbot passes away or disrobes and the left-hand monk is elevated to the right-hand position (Davis 2015: 28). This is also the case for the Zawti. When the abbot passes away or steps down, it is the right-hand monk who is his successor, and the left-hand monk is promoted to the right-hand monk. In a way, the right-hand monk and the left-hand monk can be thought of as abbots-in-training.

The Zawti system of the succession of the right-hand monk ensures that there is no confusion over who should succeed as abbot. Although the Zawti have this system in place, disputes over succession have occurred, as we learned in Chapter One. In the nineteenth century, when the abbot Vāradhamma passed away, he was succeeded by his left-hand monk, Venerable Yasodhamma, because his right-hand monk, Venerable Paññāvaṇṇa, was in Yangon and they were not sure of when he would return. When Venerable Paññāvaṇṇa returned to the main monastery, and found that this was the case, he could not accept the situation. So, he returned to Yangon and established Aung Bon Tha as a Zawti monastery, taking thirty-one monks with him.

Monastic succession differs across monastic traditions. In Burmese village monasteries there are two methods of appointing a new successor. The first is called *thin-ga keik-sa*, when the abbot appoints his successor before his death. If he fails to do so, then the laymen of the village and the chief supporters of the monastery invite a monk of their choosing to the successor. This second method is called *lu keik-sa* (Spiro 1982: 311).⁸⁵ The Shwegyin monastic tradition have their own method of appointing an abbot which also differs from the mainstream Burmese methods of *thin-ga keik-sa* and *lu keik-sa*. In the Shwegyin monastic tradition, if an abbot passes away without allocating a successor, then the Shwegyin monks vote for a new leader (Than Tun 2019: 73). In Sri Lanka, two other systems exist: the new abbot can be the first man whom the previous abbot ordained as a monk, if that person is still a monk, so their seniormost disciple, or the nephew of the previous abbot (Personal Communication with Kate Crosby 18/02/23). Terwiel comments that in the Thai Theravada tradition abbots were usually older monks with an aptitude for public relations and administration, but now it has become policy to appoint younger experienced monks, especially those who showed a remarkable aptitude for

in the Burmese context, is seen as something that one should not do (Personal Communication with Pyi Phy Kyaw 16/02/23).

⁸⁵ *than-ga-keik-sa* is the Burmese Pali term for *sangha-kicca* meaning ‘matter/function done by the sangha’. *lu-keik-sa*, i.e., the function/matter (*kicca*) done by laypeople.

monastic life and ecclesiastical studies when they first entered the Sangha in their early twenties and then chose to stay in the order (2012: 243).

The Zawti also value an aptitude for monastic life and ecclesiastical studies as important qualities in an abbot. So far, I have described the hierarchy of the senior Zawti monks and their system of succession, but I have not yet discussed the personal qualities associated with abbotship. In *Pī Kon Kham* there are a few short biographies of the late Zawti abbots. Tsau Kitidhamma is described as patient, being skilful in *lik long* literature, having a good voice for *lik long* recitation, having beautiful handwriting, being skilled in carving and weaving, and for teaching many monks and novices (2016: 40). Tsau Paññāsāra is described as patient, kind-hearted, and having the full virtue of the *brahmavihārā*.⁸⁶ He is described as a good orator and being polite in speech. He was also praised for being skilled in Burmese, Tai and Pali, *dhamma* literature and poetry. These appraisals of the Zawti abbots indicate how important personal, and often more affective attributes, such as being patient and kind-hearted, are admirable characteristics in an abbot. The descriptions also highlight the high regard the Zawti laity have for the mastery of *lik long* and *lik long* recitation, which suggests that the Zawti abbots must have an aptitude for textual study. This acknowledgement is particularly important since, as examined in Chapter Five, the Zawti monks do not take part in formal monastic examinations. They therefore do not have the signpost monastic accolades such as titles awarded for passing certain examinations, which in broader Burmese monastic society are an indicator that a monk has an aptitude for scholarship. The association between abbotship and a mastery of *lik long* also reaffirms the importance of *lik long* to the Zawti tradition.

6.1.2. The Duties of the Remaining Senior *Bhikkhus*

Under the tripartite Zawti monastic leadership team there is a senior committee of *bhikkhus* who take on key administrative roles at the monastery. These monks are: (1) ဝဝံးဝဝံးဖခံးတၢ်လူင်, *tsaw tsāng phan tā lūng* (the big monk treasurer); (2) ဝဝံးဝဝံးဖခံးတၢ်ကွခံး, *tsaw tsāng phan tā on* (the small monk treasurer); (3) ဝဝံးဝဝံးသုင်းမလူင် *tsaw tsāng sung ma lūng* (the big monk who explains good and bad); (4) and

⁸⁶ *Brahmavihārā* refers to the four virtues of: loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), empathetic joy (*muditā*) and equanimity (*upekṣā*).

တဝ်းတၢင်းသုင်းမတၢင်း, *tsaw tsāng sung ma on* (the small monk who explains good and bad). The တၢင်း (big) monk is usually older and therefore senior to the တၢင်း (small) monk (*Long Khoe Zawti* 1997: 42).⁸⁷

The role of the treasurer monks is detailed as:

[they] are responsible for looking after and keeping the belongings of the temple. He divides or gives away what should be given away to those who need it. (*Pī Kon Kham*: 89)

The administrative role of the treasurer monks is to organize the monastery funds and donations. They are the monks who the *khings* consult when they bring donations to Paññālaṅkāra Monastery (more on the role of *khings* and the relationship between the *khings* and monks to follow in Chapter Six). Similar roles can be observed in monasteries throughout the Theravada world. Terwiel describes how in Thai monasteries, a senior monk might be appointed to record all sources of income in a book especially set aside for this purpose, and to supervise all purchases (2012: 243). The monks who ‘explain good and bad’ are described as being responsible for teaching and guiding the novices (*Pī Kon Kham*: 89). They are the monks who are responsible for the education and training of the novices at the monastery, which means that they must have to have an in-depth knowledge of the texts and also an aptitude for teaching.

The final role in Figure 16 is တဝ်းတၢင်းပဆဲးယးယး *tsaw tsāng pan yā yā* (the monk who gives medicine). This monk is described in *Pī Kon Kham* as:

[he is] responsible for taking care of all the medicine belonging to the Sangha, and he gives the medicine to sick or unwell monks. To get rid of your illness, you have to get the medicine from this monk. If a monk is too sick, then this monk goes to his bed and looks after him. If the illness cannot be cured, then this monk will call and arrange for the outside doctor in the nearby area. (*Pī Kon Kham* 2016: 89)

⁸⁷ There are no further details provided about the differences between the ‘big’ and ‘small’ monks, so it is not clear if the ‘small’ monks acts as an assistant to the ‘big’ monk or how responsibilities are divided between the two monks.

The Shan term ဝါးဝါး refers to both traditional and modern medicine. When I was at the *poi sang long*, I observed a *bhikkhu* offering the *sang long* traditional Shan herbal medicine pills to aid digestion which suggests that Zawti monks use traditional herbal medicines. The Zawti monks also embrace modern medicine. In February and July 2022, the official *Jong Zaw Ti* Facebook page, posted pictures of the Zawti monks getting their COVID-19 vaccinations.⁸⁸ In the broader Theravada tradition monks are associated with traditional fields of medicine. Monks might administer *nam mon* (sacred water) to be rubbed over aches and pains, or they might suggest pills made from ground-up sacred objects (Terwiel 2012: 244, see Chapter Eight). The Zawti ‘medicine monk’ is unlikely to engage in these types of traditional esoteric medicinal practices because of prohibitions found in the *atsen ane*, the rules for the Zawti laity that will be examined in Chapter Eight.

In the *atsen ane* there are several rules that specifically prohibit traditional Shan medicinal practices. They are told “if you take water and flowers from the jar on the Buddha shrine or *dhamma* shrine, and mix them to make medicine, then you are turning your back on the triple gem”. Similarly, “if you take the dust/ash from the palm of the Buddha statue and make it into medicine, [then you have destroyed the honour of the triple gem, the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha].”. The Zawti laity are also prohibited from using alcohol or opium to aid ill people (these rules are examined in detail in Chapter Eight). It is likely that these prohibitions also extend to the Zawti monks, who follow a stricter moral code than the laity.

One form of traditional Shan medicine that the Zawti monks have participated in, at least in the past, is the tradition of tattooing (see Chapter Eight). In the wider Shan community, tattoos are thought of as medicine, and are analogous to vaccinations against various diseases (Tannenbaum 1987: 695). Specialist monks, and traditional doctors called *sara*, create diagrams that are encoded with the Buddha’s teaching, which they tattoo onto the (monastic or lay) patient’s body, while reciting *gāthā* (verses). The diagrams are designed using specialist

⁸⁸ While I was at the *poi sang long*, my interpreter commented that one of the younger *bhikkhus* was a qualified medical doctor. He trained and worked as a doctor for three years before ordaining as a Zawti *bhikkhu*. I do not know if this particular monk served as the resident ဝဝံးဝဝံးဝဝံးဝါးဝါး but I suspect that it would be very helpful to have a trained doctor on call at the monastery.

esoteric knowledge which utilizes knowledge of *dhamma* texts. Protective tattoos act as a barrier against illness, misfortune, and even bullets (Terwiel 1979: 163, 2012: 244, Tannenbaum 1995: 80). Traditional Shan protective tattoos draw on esoteric Buddhist knowledge rather than canonical knowledge. Given what we know about Zawti monasticism, which is that the Zawti monks observe the *Vinaya* very strictly, it might seem incongruous that tattooing is a feature of Zawti monasticism.

I interviewed many lay Zawti elders who had protective tattoos, which they got while ordained as novices. This suggests that tattooing does happen at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery, or at least it did in the past. I did not notice any current Zawti *bhikkhus* having tattoos. Nonetheless, I have seen pictures of the late Zawti abbot Tsau Vaṇṇapañña, who passed away in 2019, whose forearms were tattooed in their entirety.⁸⁹ His tattoos, however, resemble a type of tattoo which is different from the protective type of tattoo. Tsau Vaṇṇapañña's tattoos appear more similar to the traditional Burman or Shan 'pants' tattoos, that begin at the waist and extend down to the knees but can be located anywhere on the body, except the palms of the hands and soles of the feet (J. G. Scott 1927: 41, Tannenbaum 1987: 695). This type of traditional Burman and Shan tattoo is primarily decorative rather than protective. Receiving such tattoos was traditionally part of a young Burmese or Shan man's coming-of-age transition into manhood. However, this type of tattooing is less common among the contemporary Burmese and Shan youths and has been replaced by the *shinbyu* [Burmese term for the *pabbajjā* novitiation ceremony] and *poi sang long* as the coming-of-age ceremony for Burmese and Shan boys. Tsau Vaṇṇapañña's traditional tattoos, which are associated with Shan culture rather than Zawti religious identity, demonstrate the interconnectedness of Shan and Zawti identity.

The Zawti monks have a history of having both protective and decorative tattoos associated with traditional Shan medicine and Shan culture. However, most of the Zawti laymen whom I met who had protective tattoos were middle-aged or older and spoke dismissively about them, except for one younger Zawti layman who had many protective tattoos and spoke of their power enthusiastically. Further, I did not see any of the current Zawti *bhikkhus* with traditional Shan forearm tattoos (it is possible that they might have their thighs tattooed, I have no way of knowing since they are always wearing the full monastic robes when in the presence of the

⁸⁹ I did notice that one of the *sang long* being ordained at the 2020 *poi sang long* was heavily tattooed. His arms were covered, and he had a facial tattoo however, they both appeared to be in a modern decorative style, likely to be done with an electric tattoo gun.

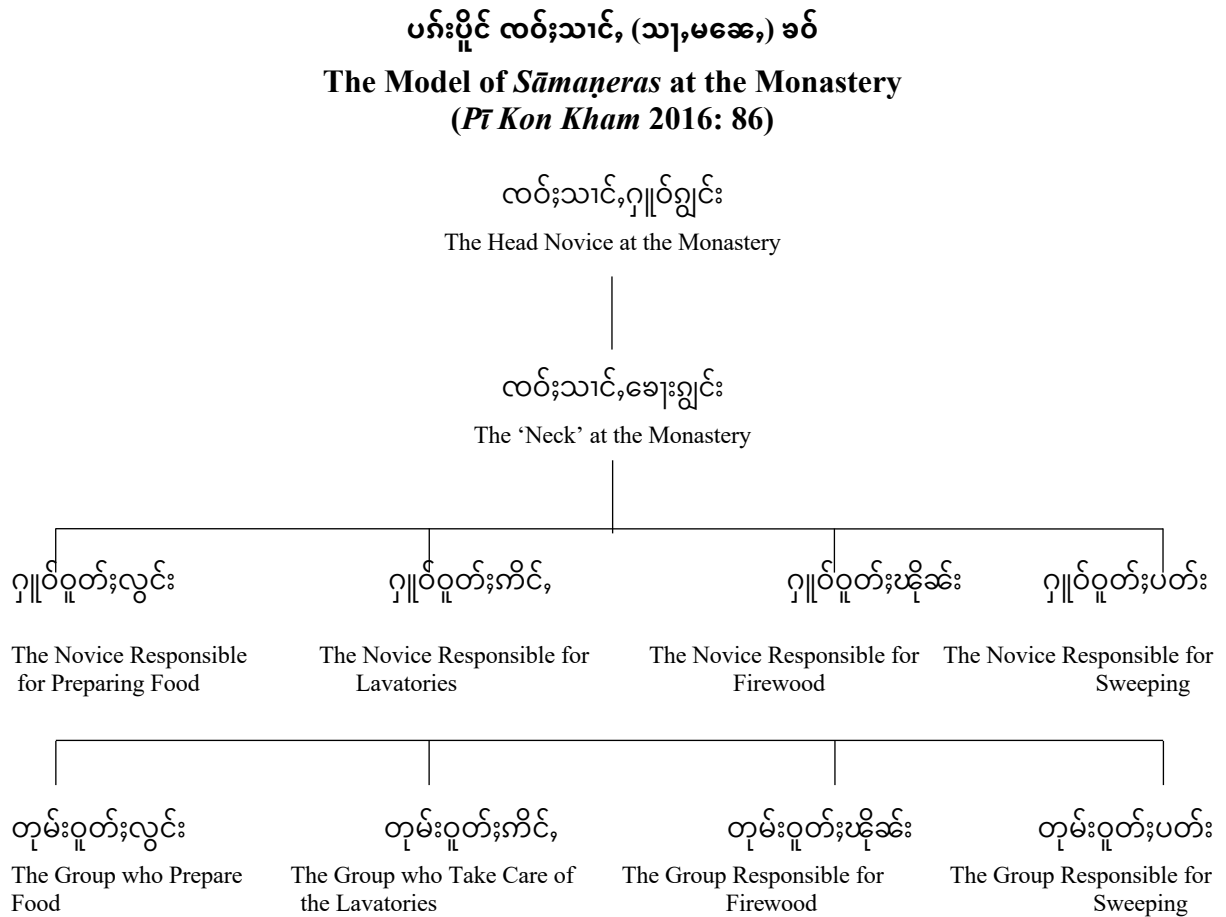
laity). This suggests that tattooing, and by association, traditional Shan medicine is not the type of medicine administered by the contemporary ငဝ်းငဝ်းပခင်ယုယု ‘medicine monk’. Instead, given the contemporary Zawti monk’s use of herbal medicine, as I observed in Mohnyin, and the fact that they had COVID-19 vaccinations, it is more likely that the Zawti medicine monk administers homeopathic and allopathic medicine.



(Figure 17: Zawti layman’s protective tattoos (4 February 2020 Mohnyin, Myanmar)

In this overview of the hierarchy of the senior *bhikkhus* at Paññālankāra Monastery we have learned of two important features of the Zawti monastic tradition. First, we have learned that the Zawti emulate the model of monastic hierarchy that was in place during the time of the Buddha through their system of the abbot having a right-hand and left-hand monk. This is distinctive because it is not part of mainstream Burmese or Shan practices, and it also suggests a close commitment to textual orthopraxy. Second, we learned about the roles and responsibilities of the Zawti monks, who take on key administrative duties such as being the treasurer of the temple budget, leaders of novice training and education, and the medicine monk. The Zawti monastic hierarchy of roles and responsibilities extends from the abbot, to the *bhikkhus*, to the novices, which I shall now examine.

6.1.3. The Duties of the *Sāmaṇera* Novices



(Figure 18: Chart of *sāmaṇera* hierarchy at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery from *Pi Kon Kham* 2016: 86).

The novices at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery are also organized into a hierarchical structure based on responsibilities. At the head of the hierarchy is the ကင်းသင်,ဂျူဝ်ရွှင်း, *tsaw sāng ho kyaung* (the head novice of the monastery). Under him is the ကင်းသင်,ခေးရွှင်း *tsaw sāng khaw kyaung* (the ‘neck’ of the monastery). I asked multiple Shan monks about the meaning of this term but nobody was familiar with it, so I can add no further detail at present, but it suggests a body-based model for the novice Sangha. Under him is the ဂျူဝ်ဝုတ်,လွင်း, *ho wūt long* (the novice in charge of preparing food), the ဂျူဝ်ဝုတ်,ကိင်, *ho wūt ing* (the novice in charge of the lavatories), the ဂျူဝ်ဝုတ်,ဖိုခင်း, *ho wūt pheun* (the novice in charge of firewood), and the ဂျူဝ်ဝုတ်,ပတ်, *ho wūt pat* (the novice in charge of sweeping). Each head novice oversees a team of novices who are

responsible for their allocated tasks. These roles, especially the work of the novices in charge of preparing food, were touched on in my examination of the Zawti monastic daily routine in Chapter Five. In Chapter Five, we learned that after the *bhikkhus* receive their meal, it is the head novices who are next in line to eat. This order is reflective of the levels of hierarchy at the monastery and the appropriate acts of deference afforded to monks and novices of a higher status to one's own. Chapter Five also details when these groups of novices do these activities for example, chores like cleaning the lavatories, gathering firewood, and sweeping, are done after breakfast.

Figure 17 gives us a sense of the types of responsibilities novices have at the monastery. The roles and duties of the novices reflect aspects of monastic training taught at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery that are not directly related to pedagogical and textual training. Idealised depictions of monastic life often emphasise pedagogical aspects of monastic labour, such as studying texts and chanting, and omit daily tasks such as cleaning the lavatories and sweeping the monastery compound. But physical labour, like preparing food, cleaning lavatories, collecting firewood, and sweeping, are all important aspects of a novice's education and training. It is through labour that novices learn how a monastery should be maintained, what it means to be a monk, and to be part of a Sangha (Borchert 2011: 178). This is true of Paññālaṅkāra Monastery, where novices are allocated specific responsibilities very early on in novicehood and complete physical tasks that contribute to the maintenance of the monastery.

The Zawti monks have a detailed hierarchy of roles that correspond to the daily routine of running a monastery as well as to the management and administrative duties of it. However, they do not run the entire monastery without the help of lay people. The Zawti monks have very limited interaction with lay people, but they do interact with lay attendants (*khing*) who play an integral role at both Paññālaṅkāra Monastery. The Zawti monks also rely on the support of the *nai hoen som*, the female lay attendees who prepare meals for the monks since the Zawti monks do not leave the monastery to collect alms. I shall now examine these lay roles in further detail.

6.2. Lay Roles at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery

The Zawti monks have no direct communication with the laity other than through specific intermediaries called *khings* and *zares*. Since direct communication between the monks and the laity is limited, the monks rely on a network of lay intermediaries to help them with a range of tasks. In the rest of this chapter, I shall examine the roles of the *khing* and *nai*, who help support with the daily activities of the Zawti monks and the maintenance of Paññālaṅkāra Monastery.

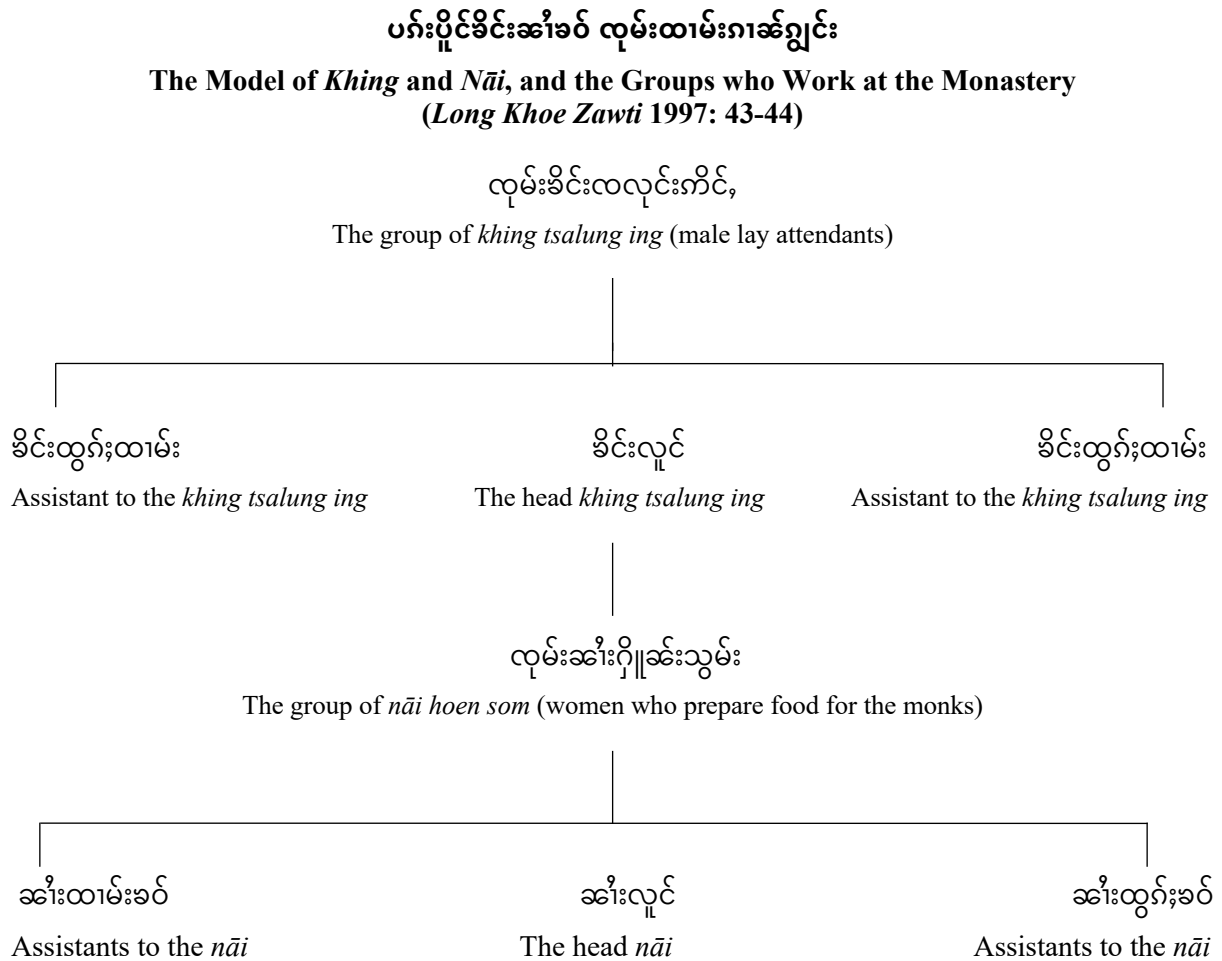
At the very top level of Zawti lay administration is a committee called the *gopaka*. *Gopaka* is a Pali term meaning ‘guardian’ or ‘watchman’. The role of the *gopaka* is similar to that of a board of trustees, who take overall responsibility of the management of Paññālaṅkāra Monastery and the *tai wat* in every Zawti community throughout Myanmar and China. The Zawti have a specific list of five criteria that must be met to become an elected *gopaka* member:

- (1) he must be a disrobed monk (*bhikkhu* or novice) or someone who the current *gopaka* approve of;
 - (2) he must know about the lower hierarchy of lay people who come and help at the temple;
 - (3) he must know the customs and traditions of those who stay in the temple;
 - (4) he should be morally correct, observe the precepts and conduct good behaviour and
 - (5) he should have faith in the Sangha and the teachings of the Zawti fully.
- (*Pī Kon Kham* 2016: 6).

According to this criterion, a *gopaka* member must be morally upright male elder who has a thorough understanding of the running of Paññālaṅkāra Monastery and the Zawti tradition. New *gopaka* members are voted in by the existing *gopaka* committee and the temple male elders, *khings*. The description of the *gopaka* provided in *Pī Kon Kham* indicates that the *gopaka* committee is exclusively male. All the *gopaka* committee members I met when I visited Paññālaṅkāra Monastery for the *poi sang long* festivities in February 2020 were male.

The *gopaka* oversee the overall management of the Paññālaṅkāra Monastery but it is the *khing* and *nāi* who are responsible for assisting the monks with the general maintenance and daily goings-on at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery, and whom I shall now examine.

6.2.1. Lay Administration: the *khing tsalung ing* and the *nāi hoen som* at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery



(Figure 19: Chart of the *khing* and *nāi* at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery from *Long Khoe Zawti* 1997: 43-44)

While the Zawti monks are responsible for the general maintenance of the monastery, they do not do this entirely without lay help. At Paññālaṅkāra Monastery there are a team of *khing* and *nāi* who help with upkeep of the monastery. The titles ‘*khing*’ and ‘*nai*’ are used as general terms to politely address elders, indicating position and status in the Zawti lay community.⁹⁰ The term ‘*khing*’ is broadly defined by the Zawti to mean ‘a male elder that has practised *sīlas* [the precepts]’, and ‘*nai*’ is the feminine version, but the terms are used more specifically to qualify roles within the lay hierarchy (*Long Khoe Zawti* 1997: 147). These roles are the lead

⁹⁰ In mainstream Shan usage, the terms *khing* and *nai* are given to temple sleepers. In wider Shan society, temple sleeping is usually associated with middle-age and seniority. The Zawti laity also engage in temple sleeping however, they begin much earlier, and the tradition is not associated with old age.

khing tsalung ing (male lay attendants) and *nāi hoen som* (women who prepare food for the monks). The *khing tsalung ing* and *nāi hoen som* are the lead lay male and female monastery attendants who organize the work that goes on at the monastery. In their role as lay attendants, they work with the Zawti lay delegations from regions across Myanmar and China (Long Khoe Zawti 1997: 44).

The *khing tsalung ing* is at the top of the lay hierarchy presented above in Figure 18. The original role of the *khing tsalung ing* was as the attendant in charge of overseeing the water used by monks for bathing, but the role is now more general (Long Khoe Zawti 1997: 148)⁹¹. The *khing tsalung ing* acts as an attendant to the *bhikkhus* and his duty is to help the monks in ဓမ္မဝိပဿနာ, “small tasks of *veyyāvacca*” (Long Khoe Zawti 1997: 43). The Pali term *veyyāvacca* means ‘duty’ or ‘service’ and refers to duties performed by the laity to serve the *bhikkhus* such as sweeping, cleaning, preparing meals. The term *veyyāvacca* is associated with the role of the *veyyāvaccakara* (one engaged in service), referenced in the tenth *nissaggiya pācittiya* offence in the *Pāṭimokkha*.⁹² This lengthy rule lays out that if someone sends money for the purpose of buying a robe for the *bhikkhu*, then he must have a *veyyāvaccakara* to act as his attendant and can accept the money for the robe on the monk’s behalf. In the Burmese Buddhist context, the term *veyyāvacca* has come to refer to small jobs or tasks involving physical activities around the monastery or Buddhist compounds such as pagoda, performed by both monks and lay people. As we have learned in this chapter, the Zawti novices perform such acts of services around the monastery however, the term *veyyāvacca* was not used in any of the Zawti texts to describe this work, and therefore it is not clear if, like the Burmese, the Zawti also use the term to describe the work of both monks and lay people.

The duties of the Zawti *khing tsalung ing* overlaps with the duties of canonical description of the *veyyāvaccakara* and the duties of a lay ritual attendant called the *kappiya*. The *kappiya* is a male ritual attendant found in most Theravada monasteries. The role of the *kappiya* is identified in the *Vinaya* as the *kappiya-kāraka* (suitable-maker). His role is to accept gifts which monks are not allowed to accept such as money and use them on the monk’s behalf

⁹¹ The term *nahāpaka* is used in the Pali Canon to refer to bath attendants.

⁹² Kieffer-Pülz comments, in a discussion on whether a *veyyāvaccakara* is a monk or not, that the term *veyyāvaccakara* is rarely used in Theravada canonical sources, and when it is used, it is always used to describe a non-monk. She notes that in the Theravada commentarial material, someone can become a *veyyāvaccakara* by doing some small jobs (2010: 73-74).

(Gombrich 1988: 94). The basic function of the *kappiya-kāraka* (*kappiya* for short) is to enable monks to receive otherwise forbidden donations without committing an offence against the *Vinaya*. In this way, the *kappiya* protects the integrity of the monks.

The role of the *kappiya* differs across cultural contexts. In the Burmese Buddhist context, the *kappiya* assists monks in business transactions such as accepting or trading land, things that monks are forbidden from accepting or handling themselves (Mendelson 1975: 125-126). Since a *kappiya-kāraka* can accept these donations on the monk's behalf, monks can acquire considerable property and wealth. In this way, the role of the Burmese *kappiya* is closer to that of a treasurer.⁹³ In contrast, in the rural Thai monastic setting, the role of the *kappiya* is assigned to the *dek wat* (monastery children), who act as servants to the monks by doing tasks like cooking, cleaning, and buying refreshments for the monks (Terwiel 2012: 59, 62).

The *khing tsalung ing* fills the role of the 'suitable-maker' at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery by helping the *bhikkhus* with *veyyāvacca*, and by helping the family of *sang long* arrange visits to see the *sang long* or send them items (Long Khoe Zawti 1997: 43). Under the *khing tsalong ing* in Figure 18 is the title *khing long* (head *khing*), which I believe also refers to the *khing tsalong ing*. On either side he has *khing thok thām* (assistants *khings*) who support his duties and take over when he is not available.

Next in the hierarchy are the *tsum nāi hoen som*, 'the group of *nāi hoen som*'. The term *nāi hoen som* literally translates to 'women who prepare the food for the monks'. The *nai hoen som* at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery are responsible for cooking for the Zawti monks at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery. They also prepare food that is offered to the Buddha images in the *dhamma* hall at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery (see Chapter Seven).

The *nāi long*, 'the head *nāi*', is the lead *nāi hoen som*, and she lives close to the monastery (Long Khoe Zawti 1997: 156). She is helped by the *nāi thām khao* and *nāi thok khao* (assistants to the *nāi*), who support her work. The *nāi hoen som* prepare food for the monks daily since the Zawti monks do not go out for alms. They are responsible for buying and preparing the ingredients to cook rice, curry, and other dishes for the monks which they deliver to the dining

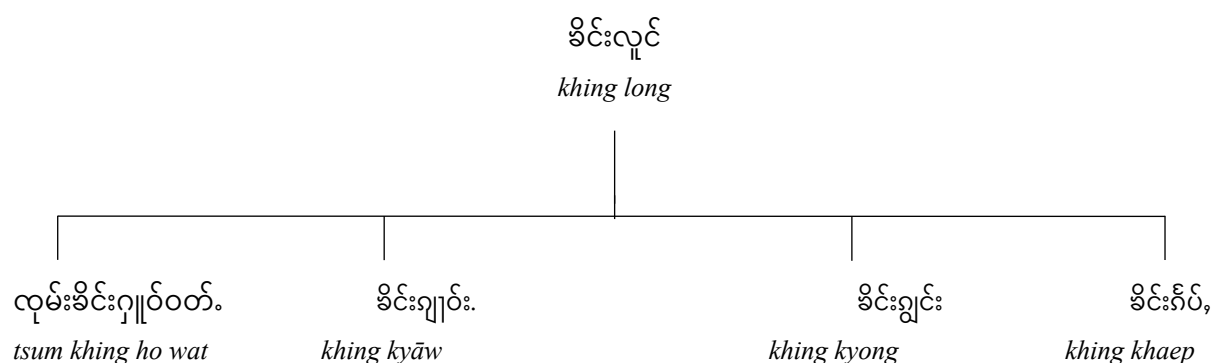
⁹³ In some smaller Burmese monasteries, the *kappiya* also carries out other tasks for the monks such as helping out around the monastery, etc.

hall in the monastery (*Long Khoe Zawti* 1997: 43). The food is prepared and stored by the *nāi hoen som* in a building outside of the monastery complex. This building is labelled ‘1’ and outlined in purple in Figure 2 in Chapter Three. Such a building is referred to in the canon as a *kappiya-kuṭi*. A *kappiya-kuṭi* (allowable hut) is a building on the perimeters of the monastery where food can be stored but is not considered to be ‘stored indoors’ (Mv. VI. 17.3). The *kappiya-kuṭi* is a loophole, established in response to *pācittiya* 38, which states monks are prohibited from eating food that has been kept overnight after it has been formally offered. Since food kept in the *kappiya-kuṭi* is not considered ‘stored’, the *nāi hoen som* can keep and cook food inside there for the monks without them committing an offence.⁹⁴ The work of the *nāi hoen som* is vital to the monastery; without her and her team, the monks would not be able to sustain themselves since they do not go out for alms, and they do not cook themselves.

The Zawti monk’s reliance on the *nai hoen som*, who live close to the monastery and prepare the food in the *kappiya-kuṭi* next to the monastery, stands out as surprising given how few interactions the Zawti monks have with lay people, especially women. The Shwegyin, in contrast, have an *upadesa* rules that states that the Shwegyin monks must “never have women (including nuns) to serve as cooks or stewardesses at the monastery. Do not give religious lessons to these females” (Than Tun 2019: 73). The key difference between the Zawti monks and the Shwegyin monks in relation to female attendants is that the Shwegyin monks go out for alms and therefore female lay attendants are less of a necessity. In the case of the Zawti, the *nai hoen som* do not live inside the monastery and they have the same type of access to the Zawti monks as any other female lay person, which is that they can listen to *dhamma* talks and attend ceremonies led by the monks, but they do not receive any formal ‘religious lessons’ from the monks.

⁹⁴ In *Long Khoe Zawti* the *khing tsalong ing* and *nāi hoen som* are described as being ‘unmarried’.

6.2.2. The roles of senior *khing* Paññālaṅkāra Monastery



(Figure 20: Chart of the roles of the senior *khing* at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery laid out in *Long Khoe Zawti* 1997: 45)

So far, we have learned about the roles *khing tsalong ing* and the *nāi hoen som* who are responsible for the work that goes on at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery itself. Now, we shall turn to a set of further Zawti male roles, some of which whose duties extend outside of Paññālaṅkāra Monastery. These roles include: (1) တုမ်းခိင်းဂျူဝတ်. *tsum khing ho wat* (the group of *khings* in charge of the *wats*); (2) ခိင်းဂျူဝ်း: *khing kyāw* (the *khing* in charge of meals); (3) ခိင်းဂျွင်း: *khing kyong* (the monastery *khing*) and (4) ခိင်းနီဝ်, *khing khaep* (the rice husk *khing*). At the top of Figure D is the *khing long* (an alternative term for *khing tsalung ing*), who is described as “keeping watch over all kinds of work, not only his own but also the upper groups”. This means that the *khing long/ khing tsalung ing* works with the *tsum khing ho wat*, *khing kyāw*, *khing kyong*, and *khing khaep*, but he is not necessarily of a more senior status than them.

The *khing kyaw* is the *khing* in charge of buying meals for the monks, a duty usually performed by the *kappiya* or *dek wat* in other Buddhist contexts (*Long Khoe Zawti* 1997: 148). No further information is provided and therefore I do not know how the duty of role differs from the work of the *nai hoen som*. It is possible that the *khing kyaw* works with the *nai hoen som* to buy the food. The *khing kaep*, literally ‘rice husk *khing*’, oversees managing the rice husk. His duty is to “roast the husk and take it to the monks for their use” (1997: 45). There is no explanation of how the rice husk is used by the monks. However, there are many practical uses of rice husk. For example, it can be used as building insulation, fertiliser, and traditionally it was used in pit

latrines in Shan villages, therefore it could be used by the Zawti monks for any of these purposes (Personal Communication with Jotika Khur-Yearn 2020). The commentary on the *nissaggiya pācittiya* (examined in Chapter Five) explains how *bhikkhus* can use the proceeds of a donation without committing an offence by using it to buy commodities such as unhusked rice. The commentary states that if a *bhikkhu* tells a lay steward (*kappiya*) to buy such-and-such using money that has been donated, the *bhikkhu* cannot make use of whatever is bought with the money. However, if the money goes towards commodities, such as unhusked rice, and the *bhikkhu* tells the *kappiya* to use the rice to trade for such-and-such, the *bhikkhu* who makes the order cannot use whatever is obtained from the trade, but other *bhikkhus* can without incurring a penalty (Thanissaro Bhikkhu 2007). This means that with the help of the *kappiya*, *bhikkhus* can accept and trade unhusked rice for other goods (and only the monk who instructs the *kappiya* is unable to benefit from them). The duty of the Zawti *khing kaep* could have originally been modelled on the lay ritual attendant who enabled monks to trade using rice husk. Now, from the description written in *Long Khoe Zawti*, it seems that the role is more to do with roasting the rice husk rather than trading it.

The *khing kyong*, literally ‘monastery *khing*’, is the *khing* in charge of making religious offerings to the Zawti monks in the Buddha Hall at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery (Figure 7 in Chapter Three is an image of the current *khing kyong* of Paññālaṅkāra Monastery). Another name for the *khing kyong* is *ho lu*, which literally translates to ‘leader of offerings’ (*Long Khoe Zawti* 1997:148). The term *ho lu* is also used in the broader Shan community to describe lay ritual specialists who lead the laity in ceremonies and recite *lik long*. In some instances, the term *ho lu* is used interchangeably with *zare*, but this depends on the community. I shall examine these terms and roles in more detail later in Chapter Seven.

The *khing ho wat* is the ‘head *khing* of the *wat*’. The Zawti use the term *wat* to refer to the lay-orientated Zawti temples built in Zawti communities. The *tsum khing ho wat* is the team of head *khings* in charge of each Zawti *wat*. In the context of Paññālaṅkāra Monastery, the *khing ho wat* leads the laity in offering ceremonies held at the monastery. The main difference between the *khing ho wat* and the *khing kyong* is that the *khing ho wat* leads the laity in ceremonies that do not involve the Zawti *bhikkhus*, while the *khing kyong* leads the laity in ceremonies that do. In the broader Shan tradition, the *zare* or *ho lu* can lead the laity in ceremonies with and without monks.

The Zawti monks have no direction communication with the Zawti laity which means that the *khings*, especially the *khing kyong*, play an integral part in facilitating Zawti monastic and lay relations. The *khing kyong* plays an especially important role on *uposatha* days when the Zawti laity visit the monastery to make offerings to the monks. As we learned in Chapter Four, there are five that surround Paññālaṅkāra Monastery in Mohnyin township: Oke Kyin, He Lon, Nyaung Kone, Ma Pyin, and Bi Lu. According to *Long Khoe Zawti*, the first four of these villages are part of a rota which alternates whose responsibility it is to visit the monks on each of the four *uposatha* days per month *Long Khoe Zawti* 1997:100).

The routine for making offerings to the Zawti monks on *uposatha* days is described in *Long Khoe Zawti* as following the same schedule each time. The preparations begin at 8 a.m. when the lay congregation meet and make their way to the monastery. When they get to the monastery they place their offerings of flowers, bananas, rice cakes, etc, on the tray of the *khing tsalong ing*, the head male lay attendant. The lay people follow the *khing tsalong ing* who carries the tray to the *bhikkhus* in the Buddha Hall (1997:101). Multiple informants, on multiple occasions, told me that the Zawti monks never directly accept anything from a lay person. Everything must be vetted first to ensure that it is suitable for the monks. The role of the Zawti *khing tsalong ing* is therefore a very conservative interpretation of the original canonical description of the *kappiya-kāraka* as the ‘suitable maker’, who protects the monks from breaking an offence by accepting items that are otherwise forbidden to monks such as money. In vetting every single item offered to the monks, even offerings of food and flowers, the Zawti *khing tsalong ing* goes beyond the standard Theravada *kappiya* as examined previously in this chapter, who usually accepts money, land, or other large offerings on the monk’s behalf.

Once they arrive in the Buddha Hall, the *khing kyong* takes over from the *khing tsalong ing*. The *khing kyong*, acting as the intermediary between the monks and the laity, leads the ritual offering ceremony. When the laity arrive at the Buddha Hall, the monks are sat behind a curtain that separates them from the laity. The *zares* I met in Laihka remarked that the curtain is only used at the monastery on formal occasions, such as *uposatha* days, though I observed the use of the curtain at another formal occasion, the *pabbajjā* ordination procedure, which is described in Chapter Three. When everyone has arrived, the curtain is raised and the *khing kyong* invites the laity to kneel respectfully as he begins the offering ceremony. The *khing kyong* then requests, on the behalf of the lay congregation, to receive the precepts and listen to the teachings of the monks. The monks then administer the precepts, recite *paritta* (protective

chant), and give a *dhamma* talk to the laity. They then perform the *yāt nam* ‘water pouring’ rite, when the lay individual seeking merit pours water from a small container into another container while the monks chant a blessing. Once this is complete, the *khing kyong* asks the monks about their health, then the laity kneel and bow to the monks three times before leaving the hall (Long Khoe Zawti 1997: 101).

The fact that the Zawti have specific lay intermediaries who perform specific roles in mediating interactions between the monks and the laity in formal occasions is itself not usual. As we have examined in this chapter, the role of the *kappiya-kāraka* is found across Theravada communities, and in the wider Shan community, the *zare* or *ho lu* also acts as the intermediary in leading formal rituals with the monks. What stands out about the Zawti however is that there is no communication at all, ever, between the monks and the Zawti laity (outside of *khings* who are laymen). In the wider Shan community when the *zare* or *ho lu* acts as the intermediary between the monks and the laity, this is only in formal rituals such as requesting to take the five precepts on *uposatha* days. Outside of these rituals, lay people can communicate with the monks directly, and it is not uncommon to see lay people making offerings to monks themselves. In Shan State, I observed lay people offering cash donations in envelopes to monks themselves and in response the monk would perform a short blessing for them. The act of communicating and giving an offering directly to a monk is not possible in the Zawti tradition.

The Zawti monks have no direct communication with the laity, and it is only through the *khing*, specifically the *khing kyong*, that the laity can make offerings to the monks. The *khings* therefore play a central role in maintaining relations between the Zawti laity and monks in a way that goes beyond the norm in comparison to the wider Shan community. In examining the role of the different Zawti *khings* and their duties, we also learn more about the Zawti monks. The ultimate function of each *khing* is to protect the monks in performing duties that are not appropriate for monastics and might incur an offence. But, in having no communication with the laity (outside of the *khings*), the Zawti monks appear to understand the types of interactions that might incur an offence in a way that differs significantly from the mainstream.

6.3. Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined the different roles and hierarchies, among both the Zawti monks and lay people, that contribute to the maintenance of Paññālaṅkāra Monastery. In doing so I have highlighted some distinctive aspects of Zawti monasticism namely, how the tripartite *bhikkhu* leadership team reflects canonical descriptions of the Buddha and his principal disciples, Sariputta and Mahāmoggallāna, which is reflective of a close canonical emulation of the monastic hierarchy in place during the time of the Buddha that is no longer observed in mainstream Shan or Burmese monasticism. The Zawti abbot, right-hand monk, and left-hand monk are at the top of the monastic hierarchy, under them are the senior *bhikkhus* whose status is associated with their responsibilities which include the monk in charge of the monastery's treasury, the monk in charge of monastic education, and the monk in charge on medicine (Figure A). Next in the monastic hierarchy are the other *bhikkhus* who do not necessarily have specific responsibilities but have seniority based on their *vassa* age. The next in the monastic hierarchy are the novices, who have their own hierarchy based on responsibilities around the monastery (Figure B). The senior status of the head novices in relation to the other novices is evident in the fact that, as we learned in Chapter Five, the head novices are served their food after the *bhikkhus* and before the rest of the novices.

While some the roles of the Zawti monks and novices are perhaps more specific than I have come across in mainstream Burmese and Shan monasticism, e.g., the *khing khaep* (the rice chaff *khing*), the hierarchy ranked according to age, responsibilities, and status is the norm in mainstream Theravada. In the Zawti texts, I do not get a sense of how much interaction there is between the monks of each rank or how their authority plays out in aspects of monastic life outside of their assigned duties. Paññālaṅkāra Monastery is a relatively small monastery, and the novices outnumber the *bhikkhus* considerably. At the time of writing this thesis, in November 2022, there are approximately nineteen Zawti *bhikkhus* and seventy novices at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery. This suggests to me that the roles and responsibilities of the *bhikkhus* is centred around the care and education of the novices. Meanwhile all the novices are engaged in duties that, in addition to their education, centre on the care of the monastery and the feeding of the monks.

While the Zawti *bhikkhus* and novices are responsible for much of the maintenance of the monastery, they do not do so without the help of lay attendants. In examining the roles of the

khing tsalung ing and *nāi hoen som*, who contribute to the essential daily maintenance of the monks, it becomes clear how much the Zawti monks rely on lay people to assist them (Figure C). The need for the *nāi hoen som* is related to the prohibitive nature of Zawti monasticism, since they do not go out for alms, and they do not accept offerings directly from lay people. If it were not for the *nāi hoen som*, who prepares their food for them daily, the Zawti monks would struggle to sustain themselves. Without the *khing tsalung ing*, the Zawti monks would not be able to access basic items donated to them by the laity. The need for such roles indicates several key differences between Zawti monasticism and mainstream Shan monasticism, namely that the Zawti monks have no direct communication with the laity, the Zawti monks do not go out for alms, and that the Zawti monks do not accept any offerings themselves. This is one of the most marked differences between Zawti and other Theravada monks, and it enables two key features of Zawti monasticism: a strong emphasis on the strict maintenance of the *vinaya* through little opportunity for interaction with lay life and a rigorous commitment to study facilitated through time that might otherwise be spent seeking alms or dealing with lay people's needs being freed up to focus on study, especially on non-*uposatha* days.

The duties of the *nāi hoen som* and the *khing tsalung ing* are practical and are confined to the day-to-day running of the monastery but they are less senior than the next layer of lay roles which consists of the *khings* listed in Figure D. The duties of the *tsum khing ho wat* and the *khing kyong* is to lead the laity in religious ceremonies, they act as intermediaries between the lay people and the monks (see Chapter Six). So, while the *nāi hoen som* and *khing tsalung ing* support the monks through their work, they do not have the status or authority to act as an intermediary or lay leader. Status and authority in the lay roles explored in this chapter is also related to their proximity to the monks. The *khing tsalung ing* help with the monks' day-to-day activities and so they can communicate with them directly. In contrast, the *nāi hoen som* cook for the Zawti monks everyday but they can never communicate directly with the monks since they are women. Gender is therefore also a factor in the hierarchy of lay roles.

The overall hierarchy within the Zawti tradition is reflective of mainstream Theravada monasteries. At the top is the abbot, followed by senior *bhikkhus*, *bhikkhus*, novices. The monks are then supported by a network of lay attendants with overlapping duties and status determined by factors such as responsibility, education, and gender. What is most interesting about the Zawti hierarchy is the need for such an extensive network of lay attendants, and how this is rooted in the austere nature of Zawti monasticism which renders them unable to

communicate directly with the laity. This lack of communication, coupled with the fact that there are so few Zawti monks who all live in one location, means that most of the Zawti laity have little access to the monks. Instead, they are led by the *khing ho wat*, mentioned in this chapter, who lead them in performing religious rituals in front of Buddha images and texts housed in their local *tai wats*. It is the *khing ho wat* and the *tai wat*, of which there are many across the network of Zawti lay communities spread across Myanmar and China, that are the focus of the next chapter.

Section Three: The Zawti Laity

Chapter Seven

Administration Outside of Paññālaṅkāra Monastery

In Chapter Six I examined monastic and lay administration within the contexts of Paññālaṅkāra Monastery. Paññālaṅkāra Monastery is the hub of Zawti community, where the Zawti laity gather for special ritual occasions, as examined in Chapter Two. However, the majority of the Zawti laity do not live near the monastery and so they carry out their community rituals in their local *tai wat* (Zawti temple with no resident monks that house Buddha images and *lik long* texts). The Zawti laity are thus connected by a network of Zawti *tai wat* spread throughout Shan State in Myanmar and across the border in the Dehong region in China. Each *tai wat* is led by a *khing ho wat*, a lay ritual practitioner who oversees the *tai wat* and, in the absence of monks, leads the lay community in community rituals.

In this chapter I shall use the local Zawti *tai wat* as a starting point to examine the spread of the Zawti lay community and some of the more distinctive features of Zawti lay practice such as the Zawti attitude towards Buddha images and the role of lay ritual practitioners. In a sense, the *tai wat* is the defining feature of a Zawti village. It is a physical structure that marks the village as Zawti and the inhabitants of the village as belonging to the same community with the same religious beliefs and rituals. The structure of the Zawti village, with the inclusion of the *tai wat* and the activities that take place in the *tai wat*, marks the Zawti as distinct from the non-Zawti Shan.

7.1. The Zawti Village Structure

As we know from examining the early history of the Zawti tradition in Chapters One and Two, Zawti lay communities were established wherever the Zawti monks settled. The Zawti monks migrated extensively throughout the Shan areas that straddle the Myanmar-China border, and this has resulted in the formation of an extensive network of Zawti villages. By ‘Zawti village’ I mean that all the inhabitants of the village are from the Zawti community and follow the Zawti way of life. In the context of Myanmar, ethnic or religious affiliation is often attached to a village community, for example, in Yangon, the village next to Aung Bon Tha temple was often referred to as a ‘Shan village’ by my informants. Similarly, it is not uncommon to hear of ‘Bamar villages’ or ‘Muslim villages.’ Such designations indicate that the villages are mostly monolingual and monocultural.

The Zawti community, like the Shan community more broadly, have traditionally lived within the monocultural and monolingual village structure (Khun-Hti Laikha 2007: 1). However, factors such as modernization, urbanization, conflict, and displacement have impacted the traditional Shan village structure. Among the contemporary Zawti laity, people have moved from their home villages for a variety of reasons. As examined in Chapter Three, Zawti lay people have moved to cities and urban centres such as Yangon and Mandalay for work opportunities and have been forced to flee to Thailand to avoid forced military conscription. Similarly, communities outside of the Zawti tradition have been impacted by the same pressures and have moved into areas that were traditionally Zawti areas. In Chapter Six of this thesis, I discussed how of the five villages that surround Paññālaṅkāra Monastery in Monhyin, two of the villages are entirely Zawti while the other three are mixed with non-Zawti Shan and Burmese inhabitants. The result of these changes is that the contemporary Zawti community now communicate and live among people outside of their own community.

Monocultural Zawti villages still exist, and I was able to visit a Zawti village in southern Shan State called Nang Li Kham. Everyone in the village was Zawti and ethnically Shan and, despite being in southern Shan State, spoke with a northern Shan (Tai Nuea) intonation. This is because generations ago the community had migrated from northern Shan State to southern Shan State. The village had its own Zawti *tai wat* which housed Buddha images and *lik long* texts and they had multiple *holu* (lay leaders) who recited *lik long* and led community rituals in the *tai wat*. Nearby to the *tai wat* they had a building for women to sleep in when they practised temple

sleeping during the rainy season. The physical structure of the village, with the *tai wat* as the communal centre and a building dedicated to temple sleeping, reflected their Zawti religious identity. Since everyone is Zawti, they all share the same religious values and customs. It is this model of a Zawti community which I refer to when I used the term 'Zawti village'.

7.2. The Zawti *tai wat*

The term တံခွေ. *tai wat* literally translates to ‘Tai (Shan) temple’ but it is used by the Zawti to refer to a specific type of temple. The Zawti *tai wat* is a temple with no resident monks, that houses Buddha images and *lik long* texts and is used to carry out community rituals. The *tai wat* plays a central role in the lives of the Zawti laity for multiple reasons which I shall now explore.

E.M. Mendelson, in his brief account of the Zawti in *Sangha and State*, provides a description of a *tai wat* and the activities that take place inside the *tai wat*, writing:

In all places but the headquarters, there are many Zawti *kyaungs* [Burmese word for temple], but these do not have monks. Laymen look after the buildings and wait for rare monk visits. The head layman looks after funerals. On holy days laymen observe precepts before a pagoda while the head layman reads from a book. (1975: 232)

Mendelson uses the Burmese word *kyaung* (temple) to refer to what the Zawti themselves call a *tai wat*. Mendelson raises multiple important points here, the first being that there are many Zawti *tai wat* that have no resident monks. Why are there many Zawti *tai wat*? The reason why there are so many Zawti *tai wats* is related to the migratory nature of the early Zawti tradition. The early Zawti monastic community, as we learned in Chapter One, migrated frequently throughout the Shan areas in what is now northern Shan State in Myanmar and the Dehong region in southwestern China. Wherever the Zawti monks went, the Zawti laity followed and established their own villages, each of which had its own *tai wat*, though some very small villages share a single *tai wat* with each other. At present, there are 114 *tai wat*, which means that there are at least 114 Zawti communities spread throughout Myanmar and China (Paññālaṅkāra Booklet: 2014).

And why are there no resident monks at the *tai wat*? The Zawti monks have always kept the number of active monasteries relatively low.⁹⁵ At one point in the eighteenth century, in

⁹⁵ In the early nineteenth century Venerable Vaṇṇavatī established a Zawti monastery in Yangon which remained active until 1986. When Venerable Sawpana stepped down as abbot in the 1980s, the Mohnyin *go pa ka* (lay

addition to their main monastery, the Zawti monks had a few small satellite monasteries, but these were temporary, and the monks would always return to the main monastery (see Chapter One). The *tai wat* are therefore not monasteries and have never functioned as monasteries. The *tai wat* has no consecrated *sīmā* (monastic boundary) which means that *saṅghakamma* (monastic legal procedures) cannot be conducted in the *tai wat*. Further, more specific to the Zawti, none of the Zawti *tai wat* that I have visited are built on water or near a body of water. This means that there is no possibility of establishing the usual *udakukkhepa-sīmā* used by the Zawti monks, which as we learned in Chapter Four is a type of unconsecrated water *sīmā* established on a pavilion built over a river. The *tai wat* is not a temporary pavilion built over a body of water and therefore it is not a suitable site for the type of *udakukkhepa-sīmā* used by the Zawti. There are also no *kuṭi* or appropriate sleeping areas for monks on the grounds of the *tai wat*. Each *tai wat* has its own *tsalop* (Shan term derived from Pali *sālā* meaning ‘hall’ or ‘room), though this area is not used by monks, but by lay people who stay at the temple over night during *uposatha* days during *vassa*. The *tai wat* is therefore not spatially designed to accommodate monks.

So, what is the function of the *tai wat*? The result of the Zawti monks migrating so often and having only one monastic headquarters is that there are many Zawti lay communities who live far away from the Zawti monks. Since most of the Zawti laity have no access to the Zawti monastery or monks, they perform all their community rituals at the *tai wat* instead. In Buddhist societies across South and Southeast Asia, pious Buddhists go to the monastery on *uposatha* days to take the five precepts from a monk. Most of the Zawti laity do not live near Paññālaṅkāra Monastery so they are unable to do this. Instead, as Mendelson observed “On holy days laymen observe precepts before a pagoda while the head laymen reads from a book” (1975: 232). The “laymen” Mendelson refers to here is the *zare* or *ho lu*. Both the *zare* and *ho lu* are common to the wider Shan community but play a particularly important role in the Zawti community, which I shall examine in further detail at a later point in this chapter. In the case of the Zawti, it is the *zare* or *ho lu* who reads from a *lik long* text and lead the laity in taking the five precepts in front of the Buddha images in the *tai wat* on *uposatha* days. The Zawti laity’s use of the *tai wat* and lay ritual practitioners meant that the laity were spiritually self-sufficient. They did not need monks to administer the precepts to them on *uposatha* days and

committee) in charge of Paññālaṅkāra Monastery, decided that Paññālaṅkāra Monastery would become the sole Zawti monastic headquarters.

so they did not need to leave the confines of their village to visit monks at an outsider monastery. This aspect of self-sufficiency, and a de-centralization of monastics, helps us understand how the Zawti remained hidden in plain sight for so long. The Zawti laity lived and worked within their community and did not need to leave or communicate with outsiders.

The *tai wat* plays an especially important role for the Zawti laity since traditionally they did not keep Buddha images in their homes. If they wanted to make an offering to a Buddha image, they had to go to the *tai wat* to do so. I asked the Zawti *khings* in Laihka why this was the case. They remarked that in the past it was inappropriate to keep Buddha images in the home since traditional Shan wooden houses were built on stilts and so the ground shook when walked across. It would be disrespectful and improper to cause the Buddha images to shake in such a way. They themselves did in fact keep Buddha images in their home and said that because it was a modern building, the ground did not shake, and therefore it was appropriate to keep Buddha images there. However, they did also remark that the home is a place of mundane worldly affairs where couples have sexual intercourse, family members argue, etc, and as such, it is not appropriate to keep Buddha images in such a place. Instead, Buddha images should be kept in the monastery or *tai wat* where such activities do not take place (Interview in Laihka 06/12/19).

The reasoning that the home is the site of sexual activity and therefore an inappropriate place for a Buddha statue was also expressed by Takahiro Kojima, who conducted fieldwork with Tai communities in Ruili China in the mid 2000s. Kojima observed that every house in TL Village (pseudonym) had a shelf for Buddhist texts, flowers and paintings of the Buddha but had no Buddha statues. He was told that this was because Buddha statues should only be kept in the monastery since inappropriate deeds such as sexual intercourse are carried out in laypeople's homes (Kojima 2012:408). One key difference between the Zawti communities I have met in Myanmar and Kojima's informants in China is that the Zawti who follow the practice of having no Buddha images include both pictures and paintings in their definition of 'image'. In contrast, Kojima's informants on the China side deem paintings permissible and prohibit only three-dimensional statues.

Traditionally, rather than having a Buddha shrine in the home, the Zawti laity have *dhamma* shelves. The terms ႤႬ,ႤႬ : *kheng trā* (*kheng* 'shelf' + *trā* 'dhamma' = *dhamma* shelf) and

တိုက်တြား *toek trā* (*toek* ‘depository’, ‘box’ + *trā* ‘dhamma’ = *dhamma* depository) are used to refer to the Zawti *dhamma* altars. Visually the Zawti *dhamma* shelves look the same as typical Buddhist home altars, the only difference being that *lik long* scrolls take the place of Buddha images. The *dhamma* altar is explained in the Zawti text *Long Khoe Zawti* under the title ‘Practices at Home’:

The place where you pay respect is at the *dhamma* altar. It should not be an altar for deities or teachers and there cannot be a basin for offerings. Only books on the *dhamma*, *dhamma* scrolls or *dhamma* treatise can be kept on the *dhamma* altar, nothing else, even Buddha statues. You can keep the altar on the corner of your veranda. You should keep three pots of flowers at the front of the altar and you should change the flowers four times a month and on the *wan sin* days [*uposatha* days]. The altar should not be used for worshipping Brahma or deities or for praying for luck, or to expel danger... You should not have superstitious hangings for protection or luck (1997: 74).

It is explicitly stated here that Buddha images should not be kept on the *dhamma* altar. The detail that the altar should not be for ‘deities or teachers’ is a response to the very common tradition across Southeast Asia of keeping pictures or statues of deities and venerated monks or ascetics on the home altar, along with Buddha images. Despite not housing Buddha images, the Zawti *dhamma* shelf functions in the same way as a traditional home altar. The *lik long* scrolls kept in the *dhamma* altar are consecrated in the temple before they are taken home and are therefore empowered in the same way as a Buddha image. They are also venerated in the same ways as Buddha images since the Zawti laity pray before the *dhamma* shelf and present offerings to the *dhamma* shelf.

The *dhamma* shelf also occupies the same positioning as the Buddha shrine in the spatial arrangement of the traditional Shan home. Traditional Shan homes are arranged into three spatial divisions: (1) the *na hern* (the front part) where guests are received; (2) the *kaang hern* (the middle part) a shared space for the family where cooking and socialising takes place; and (3) the *nai hern* (the inner part) where family members sleep (Oranratmanee 2018: 111). The *keng phra* (Buddha shrine) is kept in the *kaang hern* division of the house, and faces the eastern direction associated with the direction of Buddha’s enlightenment. The *nai hern* ‘sleeping quarters’ are divided from the middle part of the house but are arranged to face east to west to align with the Buddha shrine (ibid 2018: 112). The Buddha shrine therefore plays an integral part of the construction and spatial arrangement of traditional Shan homes, which are divided into sacred-profane spatial boundaries centred around the Buddha shrine.

I visited a Zawti lay man's home in Pang Long and he kept his *dhamma* shelf in the *kaang hern*, the living room area where families socialise and host guests. He remarked that he prayed in front of the *dhamma* altar daily and presented offerings to it on specific days. In this way both the spatial arrangement and the function of the Zawti *dhamma* shelf is comparable to a typical Buddha shrine. The fact that the *dhamma* shelf is separate from the sleeping quarters indicates that the *lik long* texts in the home (which have been consecrated) are imbued with the same spiritual potency as a sacred Buddha image and should be treated in the same way as a Buddha image. In the traditional Shan spatial arrangement, the Buddha shrine is separate to the sleeping quarters since it is the site of sexual intercourse. It would be inappropriate to keep a Buddha image in an environment where sexual activity happens. The Zawti *dhamma* shelf is also kept separate from the sleeping quarters which indicates that the same type of distinction is at play. While we were at the Zawti layman's home in Pang Long, my guide who was not Zawti but whose father and entire paternal family was, remarked that Zawti women could not ever sleep in the presence of a *lik long* text or a Buddha image. This stands out as distinctive since the prohibition singles out women rather than exposure to sexual activity as the reason for keeping the texts separate from sleeping quarters. It also suggests that Zawti men can sleep in the presence of *lik long* texts or Buddha images (though, as we shall learn in this chapter, neither the Zawti men or women sleep in the presence of Buddha images during temple sleeping events, a time when, in the wider Shan tradition, men sometimes sleep in the main shrine room of a temple or monastery).

When I interviewed the *khings* in Laihka in November 2019, they were aware that the Zawti attitude treatment of Buddha images differed from that of the mainstream Shan and Burmese. Among the contemporary Zawti laity the decision to have Buddha images in the home is a personal one. One middle aged Zawti lay person I met in Kachin State remarked that her family never had Buddha images in the home, and it was not until she moved to Yangon and married a Burmese man that she decided to have a small Buddha image in her home. Another of the *khing* in Laihka remarked that he did not keep Buddha images in his home and when a non-Zawti neighbour came to visit him they asked him if he was a Christian since he had no Buddha images in his home. The lack of Buddha images in a Shan home acts as a shibboleth. Buddha images are so common in Southeast Asia, specifically in the context of Shan and Burmese homes, that to not see any is a mark of difference. The lack of Buddha images in a Zawti home therefore appears to be a marker of difference recognised by both the Zawti themselves and

non-Zawti outsiders. Among the contemporary Zawti, the decision to keep Buddha images at home is likely to be related to the location of the Zawti home. For those living in traditional small Zawti villages it is far easier to maintain a *dhamma* altar since they live near to a *tai wat*. They have immediate and easy access to the *tai wat* if they feel drawn to worship the Buddha images on any given day. In contrast, those who live in bigger towns and cities may live further away from the *tai wat* or in areas where there is no Zawti *tai wat* at all, and because access to the images is limited, they might decide to keep Buddha images in their homes.

The original purpose of the *tai wat* was to house Buddha images for the lay communities to access since it was inappropriate to keep Buddha images in the home. But now, changes in building construction and the dispersal of the Zawti lay community means that the Zawti attitude towards keeping Buddha images in the home is beginning to change.

7.3. The *Khing Ho Wat (Ho Lik, Ho Lu, Zare)*

Each *tai wat* has its own *nāyaka* committee, which is led by the *khing ho wat*, and together they manage their community's *tai wat*. The term *nāyaka* is derived from the Pali word *nāyaka* meaning 'leader'. In Burmese monasteries and Burmanised Shan monasteries, *nāyaka* refers to the monastic leadership team. The term is used differently in the Zawti context. For the Zawti, the term *nāyaka* refers to the committee of *khing ho wat* and *zare* practitioners who use *lik long* texts to lead ceremonies held at the local *tai wat*. The *nāyaka* of each *tai wat* communicate frequently with the *nāyaka* in neighbouring villages, as well as with the *khings* at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery (*Long Khoe Zawti* 1997: 48). The *nāyaka* differs from the *gopaka* (guardian or watchman) detailed in chapters one and three, the committee of trustees who oversee temple affairs and as organize events such as the *poi sang long*.

The primary role of the *khing ho wat* is to lead the laity in merit-making activities but he is also described in *Long Khoe Zawti* as being “responsible for giving advice to the laity” and “training them to avoid the bad and seek the good” (ibid 1997: 48). The *khing ho wat* is also referred to as the ၵၢ်လိၵ်ႈ ၵၢ်ဝိၵ်ႈ; *ho lik* (reader of texts) because he uses *lik long* as a liturgical text to lead ceremonies at the *tai wat*. The terms ၵၢ်လူၵ်ႈ, *ho lu* (reader of offerings, with the sense of ‘leader of offerings’), and ၵၢ်ဝိၵ်ႈ ၵၢ်ဝိၵ်ႈ; *zare* (writer, clerk) are also used to describe the *khing ho wat*. However, the terms are used differently by different people in the community. When I asked non-Zawti *ho lus* and *zares* in Shan State if there was a difference between the *ho lik*, the *ho lu*, and the *zare*, they remarked that the *ho lu* and *ho lik* recite the texts while the *zares* composes them himself. They remarked that the *zare* was thought to be more like a scholar, with the ability to compose, transcribe, and recite *lik long* texts, as well as acting as the master of the ceremony.

The usage of these terms, however, differs in the Zawti community. The older Zawti generation use the term *ho lik* and *ho lu* to describe the *khing ho wat* and *khing kyong*, and also their *zares*. The older Zawti prefer the term *ho lu* because it is a Shan term in contrast to *zare* which is derived from the Burmese ၵၢ်ဝိၵ်ႈ (clerk) and was originally used to refer to the secretary or clerk of a *saopha* ruler (Crosby and Khur-Yearn 2010: 2). The Zawti in the very northern areas of Shan State and Dehong in China speak the Tai Nuea dialect, which has fewer Burmanized

loan words than the southern Shan dialect, Tai Long. The Zawti community is more closely associated with the Tai Nuea, and so for the older community, the Burmanized term *zare* was obscure to them. In recent decades the term *zare* has become far more common among the younger generations who use the term *zare*. While there are many terms, some of which are disputed, in the case of the Zawti, all these labels essentially refer to practitioners who can read *lik long* and lead the laity in performing religious ceremonies. Any one of these practitioners — the *khing ho wat*, *ho lik*, *ho lu*, and *zare* — can fill this function.

The role of the *zare* is common to the wider Shan Buddhist community, not just the Zawti tradition. Across the Shan community, the *zare* is associated with an ability to recite, transcribe, and compose *lik long* literature. In the mainstream Shan context, *zares* recite *lik long* at events such as housewarmings, weddings, and funerals rites performed at the home before the burial. They might also be asked to compose a *lik long* recitation for someone's birthday or for a new shop opening. These are all activities associated with family life/lay life rather than the monastic domain. In these events, the *zares* are invited to the home of the sponsor who has requested their services. In mainstream Shan Buddhism monks can enter lay people's homes, (as discussed in Chapter Five), but there are limits on how long is considered appropriate for them to remain there.

For example, non-Zawti *zares* from southern Shan State commented that both a monk and a *zare* would be invited to a housewarming but they would be invited to arrive at different times. The monk would be invited to come early in the morning, at around 5-6 a.m. and the family would offer breakfast to the monk. The monk would return to the monastery in time to have his lunch before 12 noon. Once the monk had returned to the monastery, the *zare* would then take over and recite *lik long* texts associated with housewarmings late into the night (Interview 31/08/19, Taunggyi, Shan State).

7.4. Activities at the *Tai Wat*

In Chapter Six we learned about the role of the *khing kyong* in leading the laity in performing offerings to the Zawti monks. We shall now examine the type of offering ceremony that is more common among the Zawti laity, most of whom do not live near to Paññālaṅkāra Monastery, which takes place in the *tai wat* and is led by the *khing ho wat* (*ho lik/ ho lu, zare*). The account of the custom of making an offering at the *tai wat* is detailed in *Long Khoe Zawti* as follows:

- 1) The *khing ho wat* takes the lead in lifting the tray of flowers to praise the triple gem. They request to wash away any offences, to release from sin those who have committed offences in mind or mouth. They offer food, water, and fruit. They praise all the good qualities [of the Buddha] in Shan, they accept the precepts and *kantaw*. They pray for the attainment of *nibbāna*. They pray for the liberation from eleven kinds of fire [*Āditta Sutta* S.I.31].⁹⁶
- 2) They *kantaw* together and accept the precepts and praise the qualities of the Buddha.
- 3) The water pouring ceremony is given in လင်္ကာလှေ့ *langkā long* (Shan *lik long* poetry).
- 4) They request to do the duty of clearing out the flowers and disposing of the food.
- 5) They offer flowers. When they have hung up the banners, they erect them upright on a pole. Once this is done the food offered cannot be kept, it must be thrown away in the *thāng som*, food pit (*Long Khoe Zawti* 1997: 99).

The routine for making offerings at the *wat* is very similar to the routine that takes place at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery on *uposatha* days. The key difference is that, in this case, Buddha images and *lik long* texts are the subject of the offering, rather than the monks. When we compare this *tai wat* offering ceremony with the ceremony held at the monastery described in Chapter Six, the *khing ho wat* functions as both the *khing kyong* and in place of the monks. He fills the role of the *khing kyong* as the master of ceremonies by accepting the tray of offerings and acts as the leader of the laity within the *wat*. He also performs the role of the monk by being the one to administer the precepts, lead the chanting, and lead the water pouring rite.

⁹⁶ The ‘eleven fires’ are described in the *Āditta Sutta* as *ragagginā* (the fire of lust), *dosagginā* (the fire of anger), *mohagginā* (the fire of delusion), *jātiyā* (birth), *jarāya* (aging), *marañena* (death), *sokehi* (grief), *paridevehi* (lamentation), *dukkhehi* (pain), *domanassahi* (sorrow), and *upāyasehi* (despair). In the *Āditta Sutta*, the Buddha is described as feeling pity for living beings who are all burnt and consumed by the eleven fires. Moved by pity, he delivers his teachings to the laity, guiding them to follow the eightfold path, and to have compassion for others who are all suffering (U Min Swe’s translation of Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw’s *Brahmavihāra Dhamma* 1985: 159).

It is the *khing ho wat* who recites *lik long* literature to the laity and guides them in merit making ritual activities at the *tai wat*. For the Zawti laity it is the Buddha images and *lik long* texts housed in the *tai wat* that are the object of their merit making rituals rather than monks, in contrast to mainstream Shan and Burmese Buddhism where it is the Buddha image and, primarily, the monks. Takahiro Kojima and Nathan Badenoch, in their paper *From Tea to Temples and Texts: Transformation of the Interfaces of Upland-Lowland Interaction on the China-Myanmar Border*, examine how the absence of monks and novices in temples in Ruili (a city in Dehong China with a large Tai [Shan] population) impacts the accumulation of merit within the local community. They note that Southeast Asian Theravada Buddhists have a direct relationship of exchange offerings and merit between the lay community and the ordained clergy since they have ready access to monks. But, in Ruili, since there are so few novices and monks, the offering-merit transaction is mediated by lay ritual specialists who interact with symbols of the Buddha such as stupas, Buddha images, and Buddhist texts (2013: 111). Here in the Zawti *tai wat*, the same type of merit transaction described by Kojima and Badenoch is enacted, with the transference of merit between the laity and Buddha images being mediated by the *khing ho wat*.

7.4.1. Zawti Temple Sleeping

The *tai wat* and the *khing ho wat* (*ho lu, ho lik, zare*) are also central to the Zawti temple sleeping tradition. In the wider Shan community when elder male and female lay people decide to become temple-sleepers, they make a commitment to adhere to the eight precepts and spend the night at the monastery on *uposatha* days during *vassa* (Eberhardt 2006: 158). In the evenings, a *zare* reads *lik long* literature on a range of religious topics to the temple sleepers. The Zawti also practise temple sleeping. However, unlike in the mainstream Shan tradition, the Zawti do not associate temple-sleeping with old age or seniority. My Zawti informants in Laihka told me that Zawti lay people begin temple-sleeping whenever they feel ready or interested and it was not uncommon for people as young as twenty to begin temple sleeping.

In the wider Shan community becoming a temple sleeper is considered a mark of progression to the next stage in life because temple sleepers make a commitment to alter their behaviour. For example, once an individual becomes a temple sleeper they must avoid hunting, fishing, and raising animals to be sold for slaughter and they should distance

themselves from mundane concerns relating to money and material gain (Eberhardt 2006: 158). In other words, they must commit to the five precepts and follow them closely. As we shall learn in Chapter Eight, the Zawti laity always avoid hunting, fishing, and selling animals for slaughter, and have strict rules about what types of trade are permissible. In the wider Shan community people become temple-sleepers when they get older because it becomes easier for them to avoid such activities since they are more likely to have stopped working. For the Zawti laity, who never engage in such activities, the commitment to upholding the eight precepts during *wan sin* and committing to the five precepts in daily life is perhaps more accessible at a young age.

Another key difference between the Zawti and mainstream Shan temple sleeping practices is that in the mainstream Shan tradition temple sleeping tradition the temple sleepers stay overnight at the monastery. In contrast, the Zawti stay overnight in the *tai wat* where the *zare/ ho lu* leads the temple-sleepers in accepting the eight precepts, performs all the associated rituals, and recites the *lik long* literature. I visited Nang Li Kham, the ‘Zawti village’ mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, in southern Shan State on a *wan sin* day in August 2019 and I was able to observe some of their temple sleeping activities at their *tai wat*.



(Figure 21 and Figure 22: Zawti temple sleepers chanting in Nang Li Kham Village in Southern Shan State. 15/09/19).

In Image 21 on the left, you can see three *ho lu* at the front of the temple who took turns to recite *lik long* texts and lead the laity in chanting. One of the *ho lu* at Nang Li Kham village remarked that none of them were *zare* because they did not compose the texts themselves and only recited them. In the image on the left, you can see that men and women sit on different sides of the temple. There were more female temple sleepers than male temple sleepers present which is reflective of temple sleeping activities in the wider Shan community.

In both images you can see the laity using the *mak nap* rosaries which consist of 108 beads (Khur Yearn 2018: 11). The *mak nap* are usually counted during *buddhamussati* (recollection of the Buddha) and *tilakkhāṇa* (reflection on the three characteristics of the true nature of the world) meditation practices. A temple sleeper might choose to meditate on one of the qualities of the Buddha using the rosary to count the number of repetitions until the final 108th bead is reached. They then repeat the process to recollect the quality of the Buddha over a thousand times by completing ten cycles of the *mak nap* rosary (Khur-Yearn 2018: 11). This type of meditation is thought to accumulate merit and therefore at the end of the meditation the temple sleepers will share the merit they have gained with others (Khur-Yearn 2018: 11).

Figure 20 and Figure 21, presented below, show the separate *tsalop* (sleeping quarters) for the male and female temple sleepers. Men and women sleep in separate quarters and sleep in areas that are separate to the *tai wat* itself. This contrasts from mainstream Shan temple sleeping practises since in the Shan village setting it is common for women to sleep in a specially designated *tsalop* while the men sleep in the main shrine room of a temple or monastery. The separate sleeping quarters for the men in Nang Li Kham is likely to be related to the Zawti aversion to sleeping in the presence of Buddha images, as discussed previously in this chapter.

The fact that the Zawti engage in temple-sleeping indicates a cultural and religious similarity with the wider Shan community. The centrality of the *zare* in the Zawti temple sleeping tradition is reflective of the Zawti communities' reliance on *zares* in the absence of Zawti monks and the importance of the *tai wat* as a site of religious activity and merit-making for the Zawti laity. Given that the Zawti laity engage in temple-sleeping practices within their own Zawti villages, it is unlikely that non-Zawti Shan Buddhists are aware of how the Zawti engage in temple sleeping, although they are aware of their shared use of *lik long*.



(Figure 23 and Figure 24: The image on the left is of the women's *tsalop* (sleeping quarters) and on the right is the men's *tsalop* in Nang Li Kham Village, Southern Shan State, 15 August 2019)

Given the Zawti laity's lack of access to Paññālaṅkāra Monastery and the Zawti monks, the *tai wat* and the Zawti *zare* practitioners fill a role that goes beyond the role of the *zare* in mainstream Shan Theravada. Takahiro Kojima makes a similar observation among the Tai Theravada Buddhist communities in Dehong, where most of the monasteries are uninhabited and so lay ritual practitioners, rather than monks, play the key role in Buddhist ritual practices. According to his survey from 2009, of the 118 religious buildings in Ruili, a border city on the China side of the Myanmar-China border, 89 were uninhabited, and only 29 were inhabited by monks (Kojima 2012: 403).

Kojima cites the impact of policies implemented by the Chinese government like the Great Leap Forward in 1958, the Cultural Revolution in 1966, the one-child policy in 1979, and the compulsory education law in 1986, as major factors that have resulted in the paucity of monks ordained in Dehong, and consequently the high number of uninhabited religious buildings.⁹⁷ Kojima writes that because most of the religious buildings are without monks, most Buddhist rituals performed in Dehong are “performed by virtue of the direct relationship between the lay community and their Buddhist texts, Buddha images, and pagodas” and it is *ho lu* practitioners,

⁹⁷ Kojima's article is about Tai Buddhist practice in Dehong and covers four different Buddhist traditions: the Pōitsōn, Tsoti (Zawti), Tole, and Yon.

and *xin lai* (this is a different transliteration of *khing* and *nai*), who play important roles as mediators in this relationship (Kojima 2012: 403).

In Dehong, if the services of a monk are required, they invite monks from other villages, or even from Myanmar, to perform rituals in their religious building which is usually uninhabited. I am not aware if it is common practice among the wider Zawti lay community to invite non-Zawti monks to their *tai wat*. But, when I visited Nang Li Kham village, the Zawti village where I observed some Zawti temple sleeping practices examined earlier in this chapter, they did invite a non-Zawti monk from a nearby monastery to enter the *tai wat* and give a blessing. In fact, the reason why this happened was because I originally visited a non-Zawti monastery to attend a *lik long* recitation but when I arrived, they told me there was nobody able to recite *lik long* so they took me to Nang Li Kham village. Only on arrival (and after a few hours) did I learn that it was a Zawti village. It was the first Zawti community I visited. On this occasion, the monk left soon after he gave the blessing and returned to his monastery. The *holu* at Nang Li Kham then took over and recited *lik long* to the congregation who would be temple-sleeping in their Zawti *tsalop*, not at the nearby monastery. In both the case of Dehong, and this specific instance in Shan State, while a monk might be called for a special occasion, for the most part, it is the *ho lu/ zare/ khing ho wat* who leads the laity in religious rituals in these locations.

The reasons why the religious buildings in Dehong and the Zawti *tai wats* are uninhabited are different. In the case of Dehong it is because of the impact of the numerous Chinese government policies and for the Zawti it is because there is only one Zawti monastery and the monks do not live or travel elsewhere. Despite these differences, the result is the same, which is that lay ritual practitioners take on a role that is outside of what is considered mainstream in Shan or Burmese Theravada. The lack of monks, and the reliance on lay ritual practitioners to perform religious rites for the Zawti laity in all Zawti communities beyond Mohnyin also helps us understand why *lik long* training is so central to Zawti monastic education. The training in *lik long* equips them with the ability to recite *lik long* texts, and become a *zare*, who can lead rituals for Zawti lay committees in the absence of monks.

7.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I stepped outside of Paññālaṅkāra Monastery and began to explore what Zawti lay practice looks like for the majority of the Zawti laity. Since most of the Zawti laity have no access to the Zawti monks, who all reside at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery, far away from the majority of the Zawti lay communities, most of their religious activity takes place in the *tai wat* and is led by lay ritual practitioners.

In examining the *tai wat*, the rituals that take place at the *tai wat*, and the practitioners who lead these rituals, I drew out several similarities and differences between the Zawti tradition and mainstream Shan Theravada. The first significant difference is that the original need for *tai wats* is related to the Zawti laity's lack of access to the monks. In exploring this issue, I drew on the work on Kojima Takahiro, who has examined the impact of abandoned temples in Ruili on Tai religious practice. Both the Zawti, and the Tai communities described by Kojima, rely on lay ritual practitioners to perform the function of monks in performing community rituals. Lay ritual practitioners lead the laity in taking the precepts in front of Buddha images which means that the Buddha images become the object of merit-making, in contrast to mainstream Theravada where the worship of the Buddha image is a preliminary to the worship of, and receipt of ritual services from, monks.

The effect, then, of the very strict observance of *vinaya* and *dhamma* by Zawti monks is that they are inaccessible to most Zawti laity. The gap in provision of ritual and religious leadership is provided for by lay specialists, most of whom have acquired their skills as novices at the Paññālaṅkāra monastic headquarters. This means that, while Zawti novice ordination may lead to ordination as a *bhikkhu*, it more often serves the broader functions of training religious lay specialists, who act as intermediaries for the monks, preserve Zawti and Shan culture, particularly the distinctive *lik long* literature, and, as we have seen in this chapter, act as officiants of Zawti religious activities. Meanwhile the strict observation of the five precepts by Zawti lay people means that, in contrast to Shan culture more broadly where such services are mainly taken up by the elderly, the Zawti lay specialists provide these services for the entire community.

Another key function of the *tai wat* is related to the Zawti laity's history of not keeping Buddha images in their homes. Since they did not keep Buddha images in their homes, they housed

them in the village *tai wat* where they could easily access them for worship and ritual activity. This stands in contrast to the mainstream Shan Theravada tradition in which lay people do keep Buddha images inside their homes.

In this chapter I also explored some of the activities that take place at the *tai wat*, namely an overview of an offering ceremony and of the Zawti temple sleeping practices, activities that in the mainstream Shan tradition would take place inside the monastery setting in the presence of monks. The Zawti share the temple sleeping tradition with the broader Shan community but, as we learned in this chapter, the Zawti tradition differs from the mainstream in two important ways. The first is that the Zawti do not wait for old age to begin temple sleeping and second, they stay over-night at the *tai wat* rather than the monastery. These distinctive features reflect the Zawti's indiscriminate commitment to the five precepts which shall be examined in the next chapter.

Chapter Eight

Zawti Lay Morality and Discipline: The *Upadesa* and *Atsen Ane* Rules

In the preceding chapter, I looked at lay ritual and religious specialists and the role they play in leading Zawti lay people, particularly in communities that do not have access to Paññālaṅkāra Monastery, the monastic headquarters in Mohnyin, Kachin State. In this chapter, I look at Zawti lay people more closely, examining how one ‘becomes’ a Zawti lay person either through birth or through initiation. I then examine what it means to be a Zawti lay person. I do this through an exploration of Zawti lay morality and discipline. The Zawti laity, like all observant Theravada Buddhists, are bound to the basic Theravada Buddhist tenets laid out in the Pali Canon, usually formalised through the taking of the five precepts.

The Zawti laity, however, specify what this means in far greater detail by following an additional set of rules called ကုပတေ,သတၢ်,ဂူခင်းဂိုၤခင် *upadesa hun hoen* (instructions for householders) and ဖိုၣ်ခင်းထုၣ်တၢ်မိး *phing thung tām* (the customs and traditions). The term *upadesa*, means ‘instruction’, and the term *hun hoen* ‘householder’ refers to lay people. Like the Zawti monastic *upadesa* rules examined in Chapter Five, the lay *upadesa* include a combination of basic Buddhist tenets followed by all Theravada Buddhists and some additional rules that are specific to the Zawti. The term *phing thung tām* literally translates to ‘the customs and traditions’ and is an alternative Shan term for the Burmese term *atsen ane*, which translates roughly to ‘what is permitted and not permitted’. These specify how to maintain the *upadesa* rules within specific contexts common in everyday life, in ways that reject several types of protective, religious, medical, trade and farming practices that are the norm in mainstream Shan Theravada. The Zawti *upadesa* and *phing thung tām* rules are taken together as the basis for Zawti lay morality and discipline, covering a range of rules regarding behaviour, comportment, and ritual.

Finally, I compare the Zawti reform to other types of reform literature in Theravada, motivated by the desire to maintain the Buddhist *sāsana* (teaching/religion) from decline. Throughout this chapter I both observe what the Zawti share with mainstream Theravada and identify those aspects of their religion and practice that stand out as distinctive.

8.1. How does one become Zawti?

The term Zawti applies to both monks and lay people. The fact that one can state that a layperson is a ‘Zawti’ is distinctive. Theravada monks are affiliated to a monastic lineage, a *nikāya* or a *gaing*, and this affiliation determines matters such as their monastic dress, interpretation of certain minor rules, and with which other monks they can conduct ecclesiastical procedures (P. *saṅghakamma*). In contrast, most Theravada Buddhist lay people are not identified by an associated monastic lineage and attend whichever monastery or monk they choose. There are exceptions to this general rule. For example, lay followers of the Dhammakaya tradition, founded in Thailand in the second half of the twentieth century, might explicitly describe themselves as Dhammakaya adherents. Meanwhile, in the Burmese context, most lay people generally do not affiliate with one of the nine official monastic *gaing* (see Chapter One). An exception is the Hngettwin Gaing, which has an accompanying lay association because Hngettwin specific religious practices also affect the ritual practice of the laity (Bechert 1989: 315).⁹⁸

Gaing affiliation is therefore a matter primarily for the monks and does not usually affect the status or identity of any lay people who support them. A Burmese individual might attend a Thudhamma monastery for ritual events, but they might also be a patron of a Shwegyin monastery. They would not identify *themselves* as Thudhamma or Shwegyin and there are no lay practices that are specific to Thudhamma or Shwegyin followers. In contrast, the Zawti lay community self-identify as Tai Zawti, until recently only honoured Zawti monks, and have their own distinct lay practices and traditions.

According to the Zawti, if someone is born into the Zawti community and follows the Zawti practices, then they are a Zawti. However, it is also possible to become Zawti even if you were not born into a Zawti family. In *Long Khoe Zawti*, it is stated that anyone can become Zawti if they accept the Zawti way of lay life, and they are officially initiated into the tradition (*Long Khoe Zawti* 1997: 74). Initiation into a lay tradition is not the norm in contemporary mainstream Theravada Buddhism, which has no formal conversion ritual or lay initiation ceremony. Barend J. Terwiel notes that the lack of formal initiation was key to the initial spread of Buddhism in Asia since “any layman [could] take part without having to repudiate other

⁹⁸ I am not able to find any information about the contemporary Hngettwin lay community or if it still exists.

beliefs. There is no examination of intentions, no formal conversion ritual, no initiation ceremony” (2012: 17-18).⁹⁹

In contrast, the Zawti have their own specific initiation process for non-Zawti people wishing to join the Zawti tradition. According to *Long Khoe Zawti*, if a non-Zawti person decides that they want to practise the Zawti way of life, then they must take a tray of flowers and rice to the *khing ho wat* (the male elder in charge of the village *tai wat*) and inform him that they want to join the Zawti tradition. The *khing ho wat* explains “the practice of a good man” to the potential initiate, along with the caveat that “the practice of a good man is difficult” (1997: 74). If the individual accepts the rules and they live near to Paññālaṅkāra Monastery, then the *khing ho wat* takes them to the monastery to take refuge in the Triple Gem and accept the five precepts (*pañcasīla*) from the monks. If they live far away, they will be taken to the village *tai wat*, where they will be met with a group of four to five *khings*, who will lead them in taking refuge in the Triple Gem and accepting the five precepts in front of Buddha images.

After accepting the five precepts, the individual is taken to the temple sleeping hall where the *khing ho wat* reads them the *atsen ane* rules. The *atsen ane* are an additional set of sixty rules that are couched in terms of committing offences to the Triple Gem or breaking the five precepts that govern Zawti lay morality and behaviour. During the initiation the *khing ho wat* explains that if you either absentmindedly or intentionally break one of the *atsen ane* rules, then you must tell the *khing*, and you should not hide any misgivings from the *khing* (*Long Khoe Zawti* 1997: 75). If you commit an offence, then you must ဝခဲ,ဝေဝါး, *kantaw* (‘treat reverently’, ‘pay homage’) three times to the *khing* and ask for forgiveness. Mendelson records something similar in his brief account of the Zawti, “any sinner is threatened with boycott and has to entreat the monk with 3 *kadaw pwe* [*kantaw*] offerings to the head of the sect, then 5,7, even 14 until satisfaction is obtained. Otherwise, it is possible for the head to throw out a member of the sect” (1970: 231). Mendelson’s description refers to Zawti lay people who lived close to the monastic quarters and had access to the Zawti monks. At the time of Mendelson’s fieldwork, the Zawti monastic headquarters was Paññālaṅkāra Monastery in Mohnyin

⁹⁹ While Terwiel states that there is no formal initiation into the Buddhist tradition he later postulates that the five precepts were likely to have originally been intended to be given to a layman to initiate him into the Buddhist faith, but the initiation aspect has become less important, especially in a country like Thailand, where historically most inhabitants are born Buddhist (Terwiel 2012: 188). The same is true of the Shan communities in Myanmar in which it is generally accepted that to be Shan is to be Buddhist, and it is something one is born into, rather than initiated into.

(Mendelson conducted fieldwork in the 1950s and the Zawti settled in Mohnyin in 1953). The account from *Long Khoe Zawti*, in contrast, is more applicable to the contemporary Zawti laity, most of whom live far away from the main monastery. The *tai wat* and the *khing ho wat* therefore act in the place of the monastery and the monks in Mendelson's account.

The initiation account in *Long Khoe Zawti* ends with the comment that 'the Zawti way of observing the precepts is different from others' (*Long Khoe Zawti* 1997: 74-75). Here the Zawti make it explicit that they have their own interpretation of the five precepts, which I shall examine in detail in this chapter. The centrality of the five precepts in the Zawti initiation procedure perhaps reflects the original use of the precepts detailed in the Buddhist canonical texts, which describe accepting the precepts as the foundation to any higher development upon accepting the teaching of the Buddha (Terwiel 2012: 178).

For an outsider to the Zawti tradition, it is not enough to be born a Buddhist and grow up practising Buddhism. One must *become* Zawti through initiation. This process of transferring from one group to another more orthodox group is reminiscent of the monastic *dalhī-kamma*, strengthening ritual, touched on in Chapter One. When monks from a less prestigious lineage wish to stay in a temple or join the lineage of a more orthodox lineage, such as the Shwegyin, they are re-ordained through a *dalhī-kamma* ritual, which allows them to move from one *nikāya* to another without losing their monastic *vassa* age and status (Crosby 2013: 212). While lay people do not have a *vassa* age, or status based on the years spent in the Sangha, the process becoming a Zawti lay person through accepting the Zawti interpretation of the precepts and the *upadesa* and *atsen ane* rules, indicates that the Zawti acknowledge their status as being *more* orthodox than other traditions. It also highlights the influence of monastic ideals on Zawti lay discipline. As we shall explore in this chapter, this is not the only way in which Zawti lay practice appears to be influenced by monastic ideals.

Every Zawti lay person I have met has been born into the tradition, so I do not know if this process as it is described in the Zawti authored texts is strictly observed by the contemporary Zawti laity. Whether the initiation process is enforced or not, the fact that the Zawti are open to people born outside of the community becoming part of the community indicates that the Zawti tradition is not ethnoreligious group despite its close affiliation with the Shan ethnic group. Being born into the community is not an essential element to of Zawti identity and one can make the decision to become part of the community if they accept the Zawti way of life.

So, while the Zawti themselves, through the act of initiation into the tradition, acknowledge that their code of ethics and morality is different to the mainstream, the question of whether this is also acknowledged by the wider non-Zawti Shan community is more complex. For the most part, very little is known about the Zawti tradition by the wider Shan community. For example, when I visited the first Zawti village, Nang Li Kham village in southern Shan State, the visit that set this research in motion, I visited with my interpreter and her friend who lived in the neighbouring village and decided to join us. My interpreter realised that it was a Zawti village because her father was born into the Zawti tradition and her family are from northern Shan State. She therefore instantly recognised that the accent spoken by the villagers was distinctively northern and that it was a Zawti *tai wat*. Her friend, who was born and raised in the neighbouring village that was about a three-minute drive away, had no idea that it was a Zawti village and had never heard of the Zawti. She of course knew about the village but had always thought that it was just a Shan village, like all the other villages in the area.

In this instance, there was no concept of the Zawti community being recognised by outsiders for their distinctive Zawti identity, because the outsiders did not know that they were Zawti and had never heard of the Zawti. In this way, we see how shared Shan ethnic identity allows the Zawti to exist within the broader Shan community, to the point of obscurity. Since the majority of the Zawti community are Shan and therefore look Shan and speak Shan, they do not stand out to the wider non-Zawti Shan community. It is unlikely that this would be the case if the Zawti were ethnically Bamar or from a non-Tai speaking ethnic group since ethnic divisions are more apparent in Myanmar than religion. The case of Nang Li Kham village demonstrates how the Zawti remain hidden in plain sight among the wider Shan community. The obscurity of the Zawti within the broader Shan community would suggest that the Zawti are even more invisible to broader Bamar Burmese society whose members would be even less aware of the nuances of Shan religion and culture than the Shan themselves.

8.2. The Zawti *Upadesa* and *Atsen Ane* Rules

In *Kyong Loi Zawti* the foundation of Zawti lay morality and discipline is described as follows:

If a person grows up in the Zawti tradition, they know the good from the bad, they must take refuge [in the triple gem], and observe the five precepts [*pañcasīla*], which means that they have faith in and take refuge in the Buddha, *dhamma* and Sangha. They observe the five precepts on precept days [*uposatha*], avoid the ten *duccarita* [the ten wrong actions] and avoid the five prohibited trades [တၢ်ငံးဂၢၢ်ဂၢၢ်ပံင်].

The practice of these two things is a mix of *upadesa* and *atsen ane*. They are not separated from one another. (1) *upadesa* is about the rules for all Buddhists to follow and practise (2) *phing thung tām* [*atsen ane* rules] is for people who follow the Zawti [tradition]. *Upadesa* is like the triple gem – one must accept it strictly. (*Kyong Loi Zawti* 2003: 143)

Zawti lay morality is, then, formulated as a combination *upadesa* rules and *atsen ane* rules. The Zawti *upadesa* rules are a combination of general rules and extended readings of basic Buddhist tenets found in the Pali Canon such as: taking refuge in the triple gem and accepting the five precepts, avoiding the *dasa akusala kamma* (ten unwholesome deeds), and avoiding the five prohibited trades; and also rules that are more specific to the Zawti such as a rejection of *phī*, *loka*, and *veda* (spirits, superstitions, and pre-/non-Buddhist rituals).

While the crux of the Zawti *upadesa* rules are concepts universal to Theravada belief, the *phing thung tām* or *atsen ane* rules are more specific and relate to behaviour, rituals, and customs that are distinctive to the Zawti laity. The Shan term ပံင်; ဝုင်; တၢ်မံး *phing thung tām* (the customs and traditions) is used to describe this set of rules in *Kyong Loi Zawti* (2003) while the alternative term တၢ်မံး, တၢ်မံး *atsen ane* is used in the text *Long Khoe Zawti* (1997). This term looks like it is derived from the Burmese အဝုင်အမံး but its meaning is not clear. When I asked the Zawti *zares* in Laihka about the term, they told me it had the sense of ‘what is prohibited’

or ‘the do’s and don’t’s’ for the Zawti laity. In *Kyong Loi Zawti* the term *phing thung tām* is defined as:

[*phing thung tām*] are the customs considered as minor offences against the *tisaraṇa* [the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha]. These are what is considered bad behaviour. *Phing thung tām* are related to the precepts, the triple gem, and behaviour. It has been practised since the old days and followed for generations. If you summarise it, it is two types of action—things one should do and things one should not do. What one ought not to do is called ဖိတ်: *phit*, a mistake or sin. The types of sin are (1) *phit kung*, (2) *phit sin*, (3) *phit atsāra*. If you break the triple gem of religious observances, if you sin against the rules, you must *kantaw* to the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha three times and listen attentively to the words of the *bhu khing* (head *zare*). This is the tradition. (*Kyong Loi Zawti* 2003: 146)

The definition of *atsen ane* provided in *Long Khoe Zawti* is identical except that the term *atsen ane* is inserted in place of *phing thung tām*. Presumably then, the two terms have the same meaning are used to describe the same set of rules which are split into three categories of ဖိတ်: *phit* (mistake or sin): (1) *phit kung*, (2) *phit sin*, (3) *phit atsāra*.

In this chapter, I shall couple a textual analysis of the Zawti *upadesa* and *atsen ane* rules listed in *Kyong Loi Zawti* (2003) with ethnographic observations, interviews conducted with Zawti lay people, and further textual accounts from Zawti-authored to texts, to provide a more comprehensive overview of Zawti lay morality and ethics. I shall structure this chapter by focusing on each of the *upadesa* rules and then draw on the corresponding *atsen ane* rules to further elucidate the Zawti lay attitude towards morality and ethics, which manifests in distinctive and culturally specific ways.

8.2.1. The Five Precepts (*pañcasīla*)

Homage to the Buddha and the triple gem (Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha) and the five precepts are the first in the list of Zawti *upadesa* rules recorded in the chapter titled ‘The *Upadesa* Rules for Householders’ (ကုပတေ,သတၢ်ဂူၤခိၣ်:ဂီၢ်ခိၣ်) in *Kyong Loi Zawti*. In mainstream Theravada the homage and commitment are usually undertaken in a ritual context in the presence of a monk (Crosby 2013: 116). First, one pays homage to the Buddha, then takes the three refuges, the Buddhist statement of faith, which is repeated three times: “I go to the Buddhas as my refuge,

to the Dhamma as my refuge, to the Sangha as my refuge.” Then the *pañcasīla* (the five precepts), the fundamental framework for lay Buddhist morality and ethics, is recited, in which a layperson ritually commits to: 1) abstain from killing living beings; 2) abstain from stealing; 3) abstain from sexual misconduct; 4) abstain from false speech; and 5) abstain from intoxicants. As we learned in Chapter Seven, since the majority of the Zawti laity live far away from the Zawti monks at Paññālankāra Monastery, the five precepts are usually taken in front of a Buddha image in a *tai wat* and the recitation is led by a *zare* (lay ritual practitioner).

How strictly one follows the five precepts and when one follows them depends on the individual and the cultural context. In wider Theravada society, some lay people always follow the five precepts while others might only take them on precept days. In Thai Theravada, some people might refrain from taking them at all if they know that they will break them (Crosby 2013: 116). In *Kyong Loi Zawti* the Zawti laity are described as observing the five precepts on *uposatha* days (2003: 143). *Uposatha* days follow the phases of the moon: new moon, full moon and the two quarter moons in between. They are days of heightened religious observance, when both monks and lay people intensify their religious practice by visiting the temple, giving offerings and meditating.

Some lay people might take the eight precepts, an extended set of precepts on specific occasions. For example, as examined in Chapter Seven, in the Zawti tradition and the wider Shan tradition, temple sleepers take the eight precepts on *wan sin* days, the *uposatha* days during *vassa*. The first five of the eight precepts are similar to the five precepts, except for the third precept, which is a vow of chastity rather than just the avoidance of sexual misconduct as it is in the five precepts (Crosby 2013: 117). In addition to this, one must abstain from eating at the wrong time (after noon), from spectating singing, dancing, music, or wearing garlands, perfume, make-up, adornments, and from high or luxurious beds and seats (Crosby 2013: 118). The eight precepts are very similar to the ten precepts for novice monks. The difference between the two sets of rules is that novice monks follow an additional rule, to abstain from handling gold or silver, and in the set of eight precepts, two rules (spectating shows and wearing adornments) are combined into one rule (Crosby 2013: 117).

The homage to the Buddha and the triple gem litany and the five precepts are printed in both Shan and Pali in the ‘The *Upadesa* Rules for Householders’ chapter in *Kyong Loi Zawti* (2003).

Both litanies are consistent with the standard Theravada litany of the five precepts (the *pañca sīlā/ sikkhāpadāni*).

8.2.2. The Zawti Interpretation of the Five Precepts

In mainstream lay Theravada each of the five precepts for lay people are ‘training precepts’, *sikkhāpada*, a term also applied to items of the monastic code. The difference between the ‘training precepts’ for lay people and monastics, however, is that the monastic code examines each rule for monks and nuns in detail, while the lay precepts are left general and non-specific. Since they are so general, it is left to later commentators, and the advice of the Sangha in each cultural context, to make them more specific (Harvey 2000: 68).¹⁰⁰ In contrast, the Zawti provide a more specific explanation of the five precepts. This explanation is listed in *Kyong Loi Zawti* under a subheading ‘the five precepts in detail’ which I have listed in Table 6 below.

ပိုတ်,လွင်းသိမ်ဂုးသိမ်တီးဂုး The Five Precepts in Detail	
<p>ပိုင်ဖျင် ဟု,ဆု,တိဟတ်; ဂုးယိုင်;</p> <p>(1) သတ်းတဝါ,ဂေးဂုးလိုဝ်းဒတ. ပိုင်ဆိုင်;</p> <p>(2) မခင်းပီခင် သတ်းတဝါ,ဂေး ဂုးယု,ဒတ.ပိုင်ဆိုင်;</p> <p>(3) လိုခွဲကပ်တံဂေး မိမးဒတ. ပိုင်ဆိုင်;</p> <p>(4) သမ်.လံးခတ်းလုံဂုးမခင်းတံဒတ.ပိုင်ဆိုင်;</p> <p>(5) ဂွပ်းကခင်းဂုးခတ်းလုံဆခင်း သမ်.တံဂုး,ဒတ. ပိုင်ဆိုင်; ။</p>	<p><i>Pāṇātipāta</i> – Five Kinds of Killing</p> <p>(1) A living creature.</p> <p>(2) You know that it is a living creature.</p> <p>(3) You have the desire to kill it.</p> <p>(4) You make physical effort to kill it.</p> <p>(5) The being you try to kill is really dead.</p>
<p>ပိုင်ဖျင် ကတိခင်,ဆု,တခင်,ဂုးယိုင်;</p> <p>(1) ဂုးပီခင်ခွပ်းခွင် ကခင်ပိုင်ခင်းသိမ်းပံ.</p> <p>(2) လွင်းပီခင် ခွပ်းခွင်ပိုင်ခင်း သိမ်းပံ.ခင်. ဂုးမီး ခိုင်မံမခင်း</p> <p>(3) လိုခွဲလမ်းကပ်ဂေးမီး</p> <p>(4) တင်းခတ်းလုံ ဂုးလမ်းဂေးမီး</p>	<p><i>Adinnādanā</i> – Five Kinds of Stealing</p> <p>(1) Taking the property of others.</p> <p>(2) There is a mark/ label on the property.</p> <p>(3) You have the intention to steal.</p> <p>(4) You make an effort to steal.</p>

¹⁰⁰ The Mahayana *Upāsakaśīla Sutra* examines the five precepts, which are also referred to as the ‘*upāsaka precepts*’ (lay devotee) is more detailed and more specific than the Theravada canonical material.

<p>(5) ကပ်တင်းခတ်းလုံ ကဆ်ဆဆ်.သေ လဂ်. ငတ.ဂေး ဂုံးပီဆ်</p> <p>ပိုင်ဖုာင် ဂျ,မေ,သု မိလ်.သျ,တျ,လြသီ,ယိုင်;</p> <p>(1) ဝတ်.ထုမဆ်း ပီဆ် တီးကဆ်ကမ်,လီဂျ, ဂေး လုံးငတ. ပိုင်ဆိုင်;</p> <p>(2) လုံခုံးဂွမ်းသွင်ဂေး မီးငတ. ပိုင်ဆိုင်;</p> <p>(3) ဆင်,ဂိုဝ် တဂ်းလုံးဂွမ်းသွင်ဆဆ်.ခတ်းလုံ ငတ. ပိုင်ဆိုင်;</p> <p>ပိုင်ဖုာင် မုသျ,တျ,တ သီ,ယိုင်;</p> <p>(1) ဝတ်.ထု ကဆ်ကမ်,လုံး ကမ်,လိုင်;ဂေး ဂုံးပီဆ်</p> <p>(2) မီးလုံခုံးဂုံးပိုင်;ဆဆ်. ဂေး ဂုံးပီဆ်</p> <p>(3) ဆင်,ဂျ; လုံကဆ်ခုံးဂုံးပိုင်;ဆဆ်. တာင်း ခတ်းလုံလွမ်းဂေးဂုံးပီဆ်</p> <p>(4) ဆင်,ဂျ; ဂျမ်းပီတ်.လီဆ်ဆဆ်. သမ်.ဂုံး ဂေး.ထွမ်, ဂျူ.တီးပွင်,မဆ်း ၊</p> <p>ပိုင်ဖုာင် သလြျ,မေ,လြယ သီ,ယိုင်;</p> <p>(1) သူ,လြျ,ဂျ;လိုင်. မေ,လြယဂျ;လိုင်. သေ လိုင်. လိုင်.ဂေးဂုံးပီဆ်</p> <p>(2) လုံခုံးသူတ်.ခုံးဂိဆ်ဂေး မီးဝံ.ငတ.</p> <p>(3) ခတ်းလုံဂုံးလုံးဂိဆ်ဂေး ဂုံးပီဆ်</p> <p>(4) ဂိဆ်ပူဆ်.ရှင်ခေးဂျ,ဂေး ဂုံးပီဆ်</p>	<p>(5) You make a physical effort to steal, and you really steal it.</p> <p><i>Kāmesu micchācāra</i> – The Kinds of Sexual Misconduct</p> <p>(1) You go to the place where you should not go.</p> <p>(2) You have the intention to have sexual intercourse.</p> <p>(3) You make an effort to have sexual intercourse.</p> <p><i>Musāvāda</i> – The Four Kinds of False Speech</p> <p>(1) You say something that is not true, and you know it is not true.</p> <p>(2) You have the intention of saying something that is not true.</p> <p>(3) You make an effort to say something untrue.</p> <p>(4) You actually tell a lie.</p> <p>The Four Kinds of <i>Surāmeraya</i>- Intoxicants</p> <p>(1) There are four kinds of <i>surā</i> (intoxicating liquor) and five types of <i>meraya</i> (fermented liquor)</p> <p>(2) Having the intention to consume intoxicants.</p> <p>(3) Making an effort to consume intoxicants</p> <p>(4) You really drink it down your throat.</p>
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(Table 6: The ‘five precepts in detail’ as listed in the Zawti *upadesa* rules presented in *Kyong Loi Zawti* 2003: 143-146).

Each of the five precepts is explained using a formula which mirrors that used to analyse the *pārājikas* in the *Pāṭimokkha Sutta* in the *Suttavibhaṅga* of the *Vinaya Piṭaka* in the Pali

Canon. The *pārājikas* are the four offences that, if committed, lead to immediate and lifelong expulsion from the monastic order. They prohibit monks from sexual intercourse, stealing, killing, and lying. The fundamental difference between the five precepts and the *pārājikas* is that they are aimed at two different audiences who are bound to two very different codes of discipline. Monks are bound by the 227 rules of the *Pāṭimokkha* while lay people are governed by the five precepts (or eight precepts in certain instances as described previously). For a lay person, the five precepts are a guide to ethical behaviour but are acted upon or ignored as is expedient (Terwiel 2012: 187). In contrast, monks are bound to the *Pāṭimokkha* rules and if they commit a *pārājika* offence, then they should be instantly and permanently removed from the Sangha. The consequences of breaking a *pārājika* are therefore far graver than a transgression of a precept by a lay person, making it particularly striking that the Zawti apply the same formula to explain the five precepts.

Below I demonstrate this parallel analysis by presenting the Zawti explanation of the first precept (to abstain from killing) next to the third *pārājika* (to abstain from killing). The Zawti explanation of the first precept follows the same explanation of ‘object, intention, perception, effort, and result’, used to explain what constitutes committing an offence against the third *pārājika*.

Zawti Explanation of the First Precept for the Zawti Laity

***Pāṇātipāta* (The Five Kinds of Killing)**

- (1) A living creature.
- (2) You know that it’s a living creature.
- (3) You have the desire to kill it.

Explanation of the third *pārājika* offence in the *Suttavibhaṅga*

Pārājika 3

- (1) *Object*: a human being, which according to the *Vibhaṅga* includes human fetuses as well, counting from the time consciousness first arises in the womb immediately after conception up to the time of death.
- (2) *Intention*: knowingly, consciously, deliberately, and purposefully wanting to cause that person's death. "Knowingly" also includes the factor of --
- (3) *Perception*: perceiving the person as a living being.

(4) You make physical effort to kill it.	(4) <i>Effort</i> : whatever one does with the purpose of causing that person to die.
(5) The being you try to kill is really dead.	(5) <i>Result</i> : The person dies as the result of one's act. ¹⁰¹

The Zawti interpretation of the five precepts follows the same *pārājika* formula but the actual interpretation and enforcement of the rule differs. For example, the third precept for lay people prohibits lay people from committing sexual misconduct. The corresponding *pārājika* for monks is the first *pārājika*, which prohibits monks from engaging any form of sexual activity. The rule is more general for the laity and more specific for the monks since the broader set of rules the two audiences are bound to are fundamentally different. Similarly, the fourth precept prohibits *musāvāda* (false speech), which for lay people is a general term for lying. The corresponding *pārājika* for monks is the fourth *pārājika* which prohibits monks from lying but specifically refers to lying about the attainment of a superior human state. Although the Zawti have employed the same formula, the rule for the laity is still fundamentally more general than it is for monks.

The fifth precept for lay people, to abstain from using intoxicating substances, has no parallel *pārājika* rule. But the Zawti employ the same formula of object, perception, intention, and effort used to explain each of the other precepts which do have corresponding *pārājikas*, to explain the fifth precept. Consuming alcohol is not a *pārājika* offence, but a *pācittiya* offence (a minor violation). A *pācittiya* offence requires confession but does not result in expulsion from the Sangha. *Pācittiya* 51 states *surāmerayapāne pācittiyanti* ‘drinking intoxicating liquor or fermented liquor should be confessed’. In the Zawti explanation of the fifth precept the ‘object’ is *surāmeraya*, the same term used in the basic iteration of the fifth precept, and it is additionally coupled with the explanation that “there are four kinds of *surā* (intoxicating liquor) and five types of *meraya* (fermented liquor)” (2003: 146). This encompasses most alcoholic substances. To apply the *pārājika* style of analysis to lay precepts, as the Zawti have done with the first four precepts, is unusual, but to apply the *pārājika* style of analysis to a lay precept that has no *pārājika* parallel is even more striking.

¹⁰¹ <https://www.nku.edu/~kenneyr/Buddhism/lib/modern/bmc/ch4.html>

The Zawti explanation of the lay precepts in the style of the *pārājikas* is not just employed as a stylistic device, it translates through into Zawti lay morality, ethics, and behaviour. The Zawti laity are committed to the fifth precept and really do abstain from the “four kinds of *surā* (intoxicating liquor) and five types of *meraya* (fermented liquor)” (ibid: 146), which is reflected in their zero-tolerance attitude towards alcohol. One informant in Yangon remarked that his grandfather, who was Zawti, was so strict about abstaining from consuming alcohol that he followed a specific recipe for pickling mustard greens, a common food dish among the Shan, to ensure that the mustard greens did not reach a level of fermentation that produced alcohol (Interview in 9 Mile Temple in Yangon September 2019).

I briefly touched on the contemporary Zawti attitude towards alcohol in Chapter Three in my analysis of the *poi sang long* where I did not observe any alcohol being sold or consumed. I did, however, see raw tobacco being sold, and smoking and chewing betel was common among Zawti lay men. The Zawti’s strict rejection of alcohol differs from observers of mainstream Shan Buddhism, where lay people, or at least men, openly consume alcohol, and alcohol consumption might even be part of a ritual that is considered Buddhist. For example, drinking and gambling are the norm at Tai-Lao funerals (Eberhardt 2006: 53).

The adoption of the *pārājika* style of interpreting the precepts, and how this is enacted in day-to-day life, represents an emulation of the monastic model, and the same analysis is applied to check intention and actual follow-through of that intention. While the Zawti approach of interpreting lay morality through the lens of monastic *pārājikas* is distinctive, it is not unique. There is long a history of lay people emulating monastic ideals, which can be observed in post-canonical Theravada texts dedicated to lay practice such as the *Upsāsakamanussavinaya* “a code of conduct (*vinaya*) for people (*manussa*) who are lay Buddhist practitioners (*upāsaka*)” (Crosby 2006: 177). In the *Upsāsakamanussavinaya* the term *pārājika* is used in a lay context and includes a list of offences that result in punishment in hell. One such offence is “behaving inappropriately in temple precincts or near a Buddha image, e.g., by wearing a hat, spitting, urinating, or defecating’ (ibid: 183).

In addition to the *Upsāsakamanussavinaya*,¹⁰² other examples of post-canonical texts dedicated to lay conduct include the Sinhala *Pratipattisaṅgha* dated to the tenth century, possibly earlier than the *Upsāsakamanussavinaya*, which is also known as the *Gihivinaya*. Crosby writes that the difference between *upāsakas* and monastics is that only the behaviour of monastics is circumscribed by the Vinaya of the *pātimokkha* rules, and so the term Vinaya, in the title *Upsāsakamanussavinaya*, refers to a general code of conduct rather than a set of specific regulations (2006: 181). The title *Gihivinaya* ‘*vinaya*/ training for householders’ is used as a generic term for lay Buddhist practice and is used to reference several texts, including the *Siṅgālovāda Sutta*. Similarly, the title ‘*upadesa*’ (instruction) is used by the Zawti as a generic title to describe a general code of the conduct for both the Zawti monks and laity. The Burmese term *upade*, an abridged version of *upadesa*, is commonly used to refer to law, rules, and codes of conduct for both monks and lay people (see Chapter Five for discussion of Zawti and Shwegyin monastic *upadesa* rules).

The title *Gihivinaya* reemerged in the modern period during the “revival” of Buddhism, brought about in response to the colonial condition in South and Southeast Asia. In Cambodia, modernist monks critiqued the moral degeneration of society and put forward an “authentic” Buddhist vision of how to live a purified life amidst the temptations and confusions of the modern world (Hansen 2007: 148). This was done through the production of vernacular texts which outlined a rationalist Khmer Buddhist approach to modernity. The most popular of these texts was the *gihivinaya-saṅkhep*. The modernist Khmer monk Chuon Nath translated, critically edited, and composed the *gihivinaya-saṅkhep* “from the Pali version of a number of scriptures, including the *Maṅgaladīpanī-aṭṭhakathā*, *Maṅgala-sutta*, and other texts” in the early 1920s (Hansen 2007: 155). The *gihivinaya-saṅkhep* was written specifically to provide a reference on Buddhist comportment for traders and contained a list of right and wrong behaviours, as well as descriptions and translations of ritual procedures for lay people (Hansen 2007: 155).

One such procedure described in the *gihivinaya-saṅkhep* is guidance on how to seek forgiveness from the triple gem “by speaking clearly ‘toward the direction of the face of the Braḥ Buddha image..., toward the stupa, the *cediya* that holds the relics of the Buddha...,

¹⁰² Alternative titles for this text include *Upāsakajanālaṃkāra* and *Upāsakamanussavinayavaṇṇanā*. (Crosby 2006: 179).

toward the face of an individual who is a *bhikkhu*.’ Having begged pardon in this manner, the petitioner ‘must demonstrate with clearly annunciated [enunciated] speech... that he or she has taken refuge as a lay adherent in the *sāsana* of the Lord and Buddha, and must profess commitment to continual observance of the precepts” (Hansen 2007: 155). As we learned earlier in this chapter, when one wants to join the Zawti tradition, they are told that if they offend the triple gem in any way, they must *kantaw* and ask for forgiveness from the triple gem, from their parents and listen to the advice of the *bhukhing* (head *zare*) (*Long Khoe Zawti* 1997: 56). So, rather than prescribing specific negative consequences, as described in the *Upsāsakamanussavinaya*, both the *gihivinaya-saṅkhep* and the Zawti code of lay ethics proscribe how to ask for forgiveness if a rule is broken.

Similar discussions of correct moral behaviour channelled through texts and other *Vinaya* related literature for lay people arose in Sri Lanka. The *Bauddha Ādahilla*, a small handbook of instructions for young Buddhists written in Sinhalese, was distributed widely in a range of different versions of varying lengths and formats (Anderson 2003: 171). The text, designed specifically for lay use, was a compilation of canonical, non-canonical, and commentarial sources on how one should practice as a Buddhist. Carol S. Anderson examines the *Bauddha Ādahilla* within the context of the emergence of Buddhist lay practice in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Sri Lanka, which came to be known as ‘Protestant Buddhism’ (see below).

The *Bauddha Ādahilla* opens with homage to the Buddha, the three refuges, and the five precepts, as do the Zawti *upadesa* rules in *Kyong Loi Zawti*. The *Bauddha Ādahilla* then goes on to explain descriptions of the eight precepts, instructions on why it is important to take *sil* (the precepts), how to approach a monk to ask for *sil*, etc (Anderson 2003: 174). The *Bauddha Ādahilla* is therefore far more detailed and utilises different types of literature, including stories from the canon, to explain lay morality, than Zawti *upadesa* and *atsen ane* rules detailed in the *Kyong Loi Zawti* text, which is more of a prescriptive list of what is moral and immoral.

The *Bauddha Ādahilla* and the Zawti *Kyong Loi Zawti* text are not necessarily the same types of text. In *Kyong Loi Zawti*, the *upadesa* and *atsen ane* rules that govern Zawti lay morality and ethics are just chapters within a text that covers the history, organization, rituals, and various other aspects of the Zawti tradition. *Kyong Loi Zawti* text is a general and brief text, it is not a handbook *per se*, though I did see copies of the text in a Zawti *tai wat* in Laihka and

when I interviewed the Zawti *zares* in Laihka they brought the book with them. But, like the *gihivinaya-saṅkhep* and the *Bauddha Ādahilla*, it is written in the vernacular language of the community in which it is circulated, which makes it more accessible than a Pali text. The Zawti *upadesa* and *atsen ane* section in *Kyong Loi Zawti*, like the *Bauddha Ādahilla*, begins with the refuges and the precepts. Anderson writes that in introducing the *Bauddha Ādahilla* text by paying homage to the Buddha, the Buddha is framed as the protector and guardian of the entire text that follows. The Buddha becomes the overseer of the rules that follow, even if they are not canonical (2003: 175). As a stylistic device, the same analysis can be applied to the Zawti text. The Buddha is invoked at the beginning of the rules for the laity which establishes the Buddha as the overseer of the rulers and creates a direct relationship between the Buddha and the laity. The rules for the laity are legitimised through their proximity of the Buddha both conceptually and visually on the page.

In exploring how other texts such as the *Bauddha Ādahilla* and *gihivinaya-saṅkhep* advocate lay morality through the lens of monastic ethical ideals, both in the nature of the rules and the presentation of the rules, I have attempted to situate the Zawti *upadesa* and *atsen ane* rules within the context of broader Theravada attitudes to moral discipline.

8.3. The Ten *Duccarita*

Returning to the description of the foundations of Zawti lay morality in *Kyong Loi Zawti*, in addition to the triple gem and the five precepts, the Zawti laity are told to “avoid the ten wrong actions,” ၵုၵ်းၵ်းၵ်းၵ်း *tutsaroeksippoeng*. The term ၵုၵ်းၵ်းၵ်းၵ်း is Shan version of the Pali term *duccarita* meaning ‘bad conduct’ or ‘wrong action’ and သိဝ်းဝိဝ်း means ‘ten things’ in Shan (*Kyong Loi Zawti* 2003: 143). *Duccarita* refers to the *dasa akusala dhamma*, the ten unwholesome deeds, which should be avoided to live a moral life in Theravada lay ethics and morality. The *dasa akusala kamma* are listed in the *Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta* as: (1) *pāṇātipātī* (killing), (2) *adinnādanā* (stealing), (3) *kāmesu micchācāra* (sexual misconduct), (4) *musāvāda* (false speech); (5) *pisuṇāvācā* (malicious speech); (6) *pharusāvācā* (rough speech), (7) *samphappalāpā* (frivolous talk), (8) *abhijja* (greed), (9) *vyāpāda* (ill-will), and (10) *micchādiṭṭhi* (wrong view). These are divided into three categories: (1) *kāyakamma* (bodily action) which includes actions 1-3; (2) *vacīkamma* (verbal action) which includes actions 4-7; and (3) *manokamma* (mental action), which includes rules 7-10 (M.I. 46).

The ten unwholesome deeds are actions that arise out of greed, hatred, or delusion, and lead to immediate suffering to oneself and others. Such actions result in further karmic suffering for oneself in the future and contribute to more wrong actions states arising which therefore hinders the attainment of liberation (*nibbāna*, the ultimate Buddhist goal). The ten unwholesome deeds stand in contrast to the ten wholesome deeds, the *dasa kusala kamma*, which summarize the positive conduct that a Theravada Buddhist should aim to embody. They cover the range of activities lay people should engage in to “make merit” and build up good *kamma* (Crosby 2013: 118). They are generosity (*dāna*), moral conduct (*sīla*), meditation (*bhāvanā*), transferring merit, rejoicing in merit, rendering service to others, honouring others, preaching, listening to *dhamma*, and having correct views (Crosby 2013: 119). These essential rules of ideal conduct are recorded in the Pali Canon and observed across the Theravada world albeit with differences of interpretation across different cultural contexts.

While the Shan version of the Pali term *duccarita* is explicitly used in the introduction to the *Zawti upadesa* rules, the term is not used in the actual list of *upadesa* rules. The first seven of the ten standard *dasa akusala kamma* are listed under two headings that correspond with the subheadings *kāyakamma* and *vacīkamma*. The final three of the *dasa akusala dhamma* actions

that are categorized as *manokamma* in the *Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta* are not included in the *Zawti upadesa* rules. Table 7 represents how the actions are presented in the *Kyong Loi Zawti text*:

၅၂,ယ၅၅,သ၅၅ပိုင် (တူဝ်ဂီၢ်တံးဃိတ်း) Three Kinds of Prohibited Bodily Actions	
(1) ကဝ်ပိုင်တံး (2) လၢၢ်.ကဝ်ခွၢ်ခွၢ်ပိုင် (3) ဃိတ်းလုၢ်လၢၤခၢၢ်မးထဝ်းဃုဝ်	(1) Taking the life of another. (2) Stealing property. (3) Not being loyal to your family.
ဝလီၤဂၢ်,သီပိုင် (သုပ်းလၢတ်းဃိတ်း) Four Types of Wrong Verbal Action	
(1) လၢတ်းဂၢ်ဂုတ်းဂုတ်းဂုတ်းဂုတ်း.လၢလင် (2) လၢတ်းဂၢ်ခၢၢ်ခၢၢ်ပိုင်ဃိတ်းထဝ်းဂၢ် (3) လၢတ်းဂၢ်ပုၤဂၢ်ဃၢၢ် ကၢ်,မိးတၢၢ်လီၤပၢၢ်ခိၣ် ပၢၢ်ခိၣ် [(4) <i>pharusāvācā veramaṇī</i>]	(1) False speech [lying]. (2) Slandering others. (3) Talking Nonsense. [(4) Harsh Speech]*

(Table 7: The three kinds of prohibited bodily actions and the four types of wrong verbal action as listed in the *Zawti upadesa* rules in *Kyong Loi Zawti* 2003: 144)

The first list is titled: ၅၂,ယ၅၅,သ၅၅ပိုင် (တူဝ်ဂီၢ်တံးဃိတ်း). The first part of this heading ‘၅၂,ယ၅၅,သ၅၅ပိုင်’ is a Shan Pali term which transliterated reads: *kāyakam sām poeng*. *Kāyakam* corresponds to the Pali *kāyakamma* ‘bodily action’ and *sām poeng* means ‘three things’ in Shan. Together this means ‘the three bodily actions’. In brackets it reads တူဝ်ဂီၢ်တံးဃိတ်း which is a Shan term meaning ‘to make a transgression’. Together, this means ‘the three kinds of prohibited bodily actions’. This corresponds directly with the three actions listed under the *kāyakamma* (bodily action) category of the *dasa kusala kamma* listed above. There is, however, one distinction. The canonical *kāyakamma* category of the *dasa akusala kamma* includes: (1) *pāṇātipātī* (killing), (2) *adinnādanā* (stealing), (3) *kāmesu micchācāra* (sexual misconduct). The first two of the three actions listed in the *Zawti* ‘prohibited bodily actions’ list are consistent with the *kāyakamma* category of the *dasa akusala kamma*, but the third prohibited bodily action in the *Zawti* list is “not being loyal to your family” rather than *kāmesu micchācāra* (sexual misconduct).

While the canonical description of the term generally refers to sexual misconduct, in Shan Buddhism, *kāmesu micchācāra* is can be interpreted as general misconduct or mistreatment of the family, while it most commonly refers to adultery (Personal Communication with J. Khur-Yearn 2022). Therefore, while the Zawti interpretation of *kāmesu micchācāra* in this context might diverge from the canonical description of the term, it is consistent with the wider Shan Buddhist interpretation.

The second list is titled: ဝဇီ,ဂမ်,သီ,ပိုင် (သွပ်းလၢတံး;ဃိတံး) (the four types of wrong verbal action).

The first part of this heading ‘ဝဇီ,ဂမ်,သီ,ပိုင်’ is a Shan Pali term which transliterated reads: *vatsīkam sī poeng*. *Vatsīkam* corresponds to the Pali *vacīkamma* ‘verbal action’ and *sī poeng* means ‘four things’ in Shan. Together this means ‘the four verbal actions’. In brackets it reads သွပ်းလၢတံး;ဃိတံး, which in Shan means သွပ်း (mouth) + လၢတံး;ဃိတံး (verbal transgression), so ‘verbal transgressions of the mouth’. This corresponds directly with the *vacīkamma* (verbal action) category of the *dasa akusala kamma* listed above. The list of the four kinds of wrong verbal actions listed in the Zawti *upadesa* rules is consistent with the four *vacīkamma* verbal actions listed in the *Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta*. The only difference is that the final unwholesome verbal action *samphappalāpā* (frivolous talk) is not included in the Zawti list. I understand that this is a typing or formatting error since the title of the list clearly states ‘four’ even though only three are listed (2003: 144). Below, I present the *Kyong Loi Zawti* list next to the list in the *Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta* to highlight the consistency between the two.

<i>Vacīkamma</i> actions listed in the <i>Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta</i>	The four kinds of wrong verbal actions listed in the Zawti <i>upadesa</i> rules
(1) <i>Musāvāda</i> ‘false speech’	(1) False speech lying.
(2) <i>Pisuṇāvācā</i> ‘malicious speech’	(2) Slandering others.
(3) <i>Pharusāvācā</i> ‘harsh speech’	(3) [Harsh speech]
(4) <i>Samphappalāpā</i> ‘frivolous talk’	(4) Talking Nonsense.

Here again, the code of Zawti lay discipline is consistent with canonical descriptions of fundamental Theravada concepts, followed by all Theravada Buddhists. Even where the Zawti interpretation differs slightly, such as how being disloyal to your family takes the place of sexual misconduct in the *kāyakamma* category, the fact that this interpretation is common among the Shan indicates that the Zawti are consistent with mainstream attitudes in their immediate social and cultural context. It is a little unusual, however, that the last three of the

ten wrong actions deeds: *abhijjhā* (covetousness or greed), *byāpāda* (malevolence), and *micchādiṭṭhi* (wrong view), are not included in the Zawti *upadesa* rules, as we would expect them to be part of the standard set of *dasa akusala kamma*.

8.4. The Five Prohibited Trades

Also included in the Zawti lay *upadesa* rules are the ‘five prohibited trades.’ In *Kyong Loi Zawti* the heading of this section is the Burmese Pali word ပဉ္စဝါဏိစ္စ [sic],¹⁰³ which corresponds to the Pali *pañca* (five) + *vārita* (prohibited) meaning ‘the five prohibited [things]’. Drawing on the ‘five prohibited trades’, several ဖိတ်းသိခိ *phit sin* (offences against the precepts) offences included in the *atsen ane* rules elucidate specific livelihoods and types of trade that the Zawti laity should avoid. The list of five prohibited trades listed in *Kyong Loi Zawti* are presented here in Table 8:

ပဉ္စဝါဏိစ္စ (တင်းဂျ.ဖိတ်း ဂျးယိုင်း) The Five Prohibited Trades	
(1) ဂျးဂူခိး (သိုဝ်းခိုဂူခိး) (2) ဂျးခိုင်းခါတဝ်လုံပိုခိး (3) ဂျးခိုဝ်. (ခိုဝ်.လိပ်း ပါလိပ်း) (4) ဂျးဂွင်. ငူခိး. သာခိးမိုဝ်, (5) ဂျးယာင်ယမ်မင်းမိင်း လင်း; ယျး ဖိုခိး, [sic ယျးဖိခိး,] ¹⁰⁴	(1) Trading people (buy or sell human beings). (2) Trading weapons that torture/ hurt others. (3) Trading flesh (live or raw). (4) Trading poison. (5) Trading intoxicating substances such as alcohol and opium.

(Table 8: Table of ‘The Five Prohibited Trades’ in *Kyong Loi Zawti* 2003: 144)

The list of five prohibited trades (*pañcavārita*) presented in the Zawti *upadesa* rules is consistent with the list of five prohibited trades listed in the *Vañijjā Sutta* of the *Āṅguttara Nikāya*, which recounts that a lay person should not engage in the trade of weapons (*sattha*), humans (*satta*), meat (*maṃsa*), intoxicants (*majja*), and poison (*visa*) (A.iii.208). The trade of these five things is the standard basis for what are considered *micchā ājīvo* (wrong livelihood) among Buddhists in Southeast Asia.

¹⁰³ In Burmese script *pañcavārita* is written as ပဉ္စဝါရိတ.

¹⁰⁴ This word is listed as ယျး ဖိုခိး, ‘*yā feun*’ in *Kyong Loi Zawti* which is either a spelling variation or error, it has the same meaning as ယျးဖိခိး, ‘*yā phin*’ which means opium.

In the *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta*, the Buddha preaches that wrong livelihood (*micchā ājīvo*) includes scheming, talking, hinting, belittling, pursuing gain with gain (*kuhanā, lapanā, nemittikatā, nippesikatā, lābhena lābham nijigīsanatā*) (PTS 3.71-3.78). Wrong livelihood stands in contrast to *sammā ājīva* (right livelihood), one of the elements of the eightfold path, the fundamental set of eight practices that defines correct Buddhist thought and conduct taught in the canon: right view, right resolve, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right *samādhi* (*sammādiṭṭhi, sammāsaṅkappa, sammāvācā, sammākammanta, sammājīva, sammāvāyāma, sammāsaṭi, sammāsamādhi*).

The eightfold path plays a fundamental role in the contemporary Theravada Buddhist conception of lay morality and ethics. The eightfold path is a summary of the practices that lead to the cessation of *dukkha* (suffering). There are two levels of the eightfold path; the first is the ordinary (*lokiya*) which leads to favourable rebirths, and the second is the ‘noble’ (*ariya*) or ‘transcendent’ (*lokuttara*), which goes beyond rebirths, to *nibbāna* (freedom from craving, and so freedom from the round of rebirth, *saṃsāra*, the ultimate Buddhist goal). Most lay Buddhists seek to follow the ordinary kind of the eightfold path. Only those who have perfected the ordinary kind of path, i.e., those who are approaching the lead up to ‘stream-entry’ (the first stage of liberation), progress to the latter kind of the eightfold path (Harvey 2000: 37-38).

The ‘five prohibited trades’ as they are listed in the Zawti *upadesa* rules are therefore consistent with the prohibited trades listed in the *Vañijjā Sutta* and the concept of *micchā ājīvo* depicted in the canonical sources. However, the way in which the Zawti interpret these basic tenets, particularly the third prohibited trade (flesh) and the fifth prohibited trade (intoxicating substances), differs from mainstream Theravada attitudes and results in prohibitions on trades that go beyond standard Theravada attitudes. This is because the Zawti interpretation of the *pañcavārita* is informed by an additional set of considerations, summarised in *Kyong Loi Zawti* as: “In addition to this [the five prohibited trades], follow the teaching of ၵၢ်တၢ်အိၣ်သး (ahimsā ‘nonviolence’), avoid cruelty towards animals, never castrate ox, buffalo, or horses. Loaning rice or money and receiving interest is not considered a means for living” (2003: 145). Many of the Zawti prohibitions against certain types of trade, which appear to go beyond mainstream Theravada attitudes, echo the types of prohibitions listed in the *Mahāsīla* (‘The Great Precepts’) found in the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, the first sutta of the *Dīgha Nikāya*.

The *Brahmajāla Sutta* discusses the net (*jāla*) of Brahma, meaning the net that catches *micchādiṭṭhi* (*micchā* ‘wrong’ + *diṭṭhi* ‘view’), which stands in opposition to *sammādiṭṭhi* (right view). The *Brahmajāla* discusses three different categories of *sīla* (precepts): the *Cūḷasīla* (*cūḷa* ‘root’ + *sīla* ‘precept’ = the root of *sīla*), the *Majjhimasīla* (*majjhima* ‘middle’ + *sīla* ‘precepts’ = the middle precepts), and the *Mahāsīla* (*mahā* ‘great’ + *sīla* ‘precepts’ = the great precepts). In each section the Buddha discusses the precepts that caused lay people to praise him and the Sangha.

The *Cūḷasīla* is an extended reading of the ten precepts followed by monks with some additional abstentions including: “He refrains from receiving gold and money, raw grains, raw meat, women and girls, male and female bondservants, goats and sheep, chickens and pigs, elephants, cows, horses, mares, and fields and land” (DN 1: *Brahmajālasutta*). The reference to monks being praised for not receiving raw meat, humans (‘women and girls, male and female bondservants’), and many types of animals (goats, sheep, chickens, elephants, cows, horses, mares), and land, echoes the types of trade prohibited by the Zawti laity which shall be explored in the remainder of section 8.4 of this thesis. It is therefore possible that the Zawti interpretation of ‘right livelihood’ is informed by a strict reading of the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, particularly the *Cūḷasīla* set of rules.

I shall now examine how the Zawti interpretation of the *pañcavārita*, coupled with their additional prohibitions against animal cruelty and money lending, impact Zawti livelihoods in ways that are distinct from the mainstream.

8.4.1. Trading Flesh

The third prohibited trade listed in the *Vañijjā Sutta* is *mamsavañijjā* (the trade of flesh). The Pali word *mamsa* means flesh but there is no further explanation that specifies whether this means live animals or butchered meat. In the Zawti list of prohibited trades, the Zawti specify that both live and raw flesh is prohibited. In mainstream Theravada *mamsavañijjā* (the business of flesh) is taken to mean making a living from being a butcher, hunter, or fisherman, which are all considered *micchājīva* ‘wrong livelihoods’ since the killing of animals is a clear violation of the first precept. In Buddhist societies in Southeast Asia such occupations are avoided, and butchers and meat salesman are usually non-Buddhists, and often Muslims (Spiro, 1971: 45).

In the Zawti list of prohibited trades, the Zawti specify that both live and raw flesh is prohibited. This means that for the Zawti it is not just the trade of butchered meat that is prohibited, but also livestock, since the trade of ‘live’ flesh is prohibited. The *phit sin* category of *atsen ane* rules prohibit specific trades associated with the transportation of live animals, raw meat, and raw fish (see Appendix D). Rule 3 states ‘If you earn money from carrying/being a porter of raw meat or raw fish (anything uncooked), [then you are then you have destroyed the honour [of the triple gem]]’. Rule 5 prohibits being a broker for a butcher buying or selling cows, buffalos, pigs, and chicken. For the Zawti, it is not only immoral to make a living from being a butcher, hunter, or fisherman, but also to do business with butchers through acting as a broker. Brokers hand the animals to the butchers and therefore they too are complicit in the breaking of the first precept, to abstain from killing. The Zawti attitude towards the trade of animals is reflective of what is laid out in the *Cūlasīla*, which describes how monks were praised for not receiving raw meat and also many types of animals such as goats, sheep, chickens, cows, etc. The Zawti appear to have interpreted this as a blanket prohibition on the trade of animals.

This attitude is distinctive because although Buddhists in Southeast Asia generally avoid making their livelihood from being butchers, hunters, or fisherman, being a trader of livestock is a common livelihood among Buddhists living in agricultural settings. Almost 70% of Myanmar’s 54 million population live in rural areas and rely on crop production and fisheries or livestock for their livelihoods and incomes (ACIAR Annual Operational Plan 2021-22 Myanmar). Trading livestock for use in agricultural production e.g., to till the land or transport goods, or raising cattle for dairy production is common in agricultural communities in Myanmar.

While the Zawti abstain from trading livestock, they presumably still rear livestock for some farming and cultivation purposes. Zawti lay people that do work with livestock must follow specific rules laid out in the *upadesa* and *atsen ane* rules to ensure that their conduct is ethical. The Zawti *upadesa* rules specify that the Zawti should “never castrate ox, buffalo, or horses” and rules 8, 9, and 10 of the *phit sin* category of the *atsen ane* rules relate directly to animal welfare and farming practices. The Zawti laity are prohibited from castrating farm animals, including shared ownership farming animals, and the use of liquor or opium to make medicine

to give to horses, cattle, or buffalo.¹⁰⁵ The term for medicine here is vague and could also refer to performance-enhancing drugs given to animals to maximise farming production.

Such prohibitions are unusual since cattle castration is a common farming practice as bullocks (castrated cattle) are far easier and safer to handle than bulls (NADIS 2022).¹⁰⁶ Rules relating to ethical farming practices are important given that agricultural production has historically been central to Shan livelihood and still makes up 65% of employment in Shan State (FSP: 2019). In the past decade there has been a significant increase in the use of machinery in agriculture cultivation and the use of animals has declined substantially (Lambrecht and Belton 2019: iv). However, bullocks are still used by farmers in Shan State and as such cattle castration is a common. The Zawti prohibition against castration therefore stands out as distinctive.

In addition to never purchasing live animals at the market for consumption, the Zawti laity also refrain from rearing or keeping animals in their villages. Mendelson observed this when he visited a Zawti village in Kyaukme during fieldwork in the 1950s:

Some of the people are traders, some gardeners, some cultivators; Zawti, though eating meat, do not keep animals or fowl and have no fishermen or butchers (1975: 232).

This is still the case in all the Zawti villages that I visited in Shan State and Kachin State. This stands out as distinctive from the wider Shan Theravada community in which it is common to keep chickens and pigs in the village setting. I asked Jotika Khur-Year, who grew up in Shan State, about the mainstream Shan attitude towards keeping livestock in the village. He remarked that in his childhood people in his village would have chickens in the village but would avoid killing them themselves. They would instead take them to a butcher but now, attitudes have changed, and some people do raise and slaughter chickens themselves in the village (Personal Communication with Khur-Year 23/05/22). In the Thai village setting, Terwiel observed that farmers did not usually slaughter animals bigger than chickens, such as pigs and buffalos, themselves, but instead sent them to professional butchers (2012: 186). It is possible that the Zawti prohibition on keeping animals in the village is an example of the type

¹⁰⁵ The shared use of animals is common in the Shan community for example, water buffalo are used in rice cultivation but not every Shan farmer has their own water buffalo. Instead, they access water buffalo by renting them (Tannenbaum 1982: 110-111).

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.nadis.org.uk/disease-a-z/cattle/castration-of-calves/>

of hyper-textual interpretation, in this case of the *Cūlasīla*, and reflects a type of protective anxiety that is characteristic of the Zawti tradition.¹⁰⁷

While the Zawti prohibit the trade of animals, they do eat meat (meat was served at the *poi sang long* I attended). However, multiple Zawti lay people I spoke to remarked that a Zawti lay person would never buy a live fish (or any other type of animal for eating) from the market, which is common practice in the non-Zawti Shan community and in Southeast Asia more broadly. One informant from Mohnyin said that her grandfather, who was a Zawti *zare* (lay ritual practitioner) refrained from eating eggs because he worried that they might be fertilized, but, she remarked, this was not the norm among the Zawti lay community more generally. This comment, in addition to the comment about previous Zawti generations fermenting pickled mustard greens in such a way to avoid alcohol consumption, signifies that Zawti attitudes towards consuming alcohol and meat were stricter in the past and have since changed.

8.4.2. Trading Intoxicating Substances

In the *Vaṇijjā Sutta* the fifth prohibited trade is *majjavāṇijjā*, the trade of intoxicating substances. The Pali term *majja* is a general term meaning ‘intoxicant’. In the Zawti list of prohibited trades, the fifth trade is listed as “the trade of intoxicating substances such as alcohol and opium” which is more specific than the Pali term *majja*. The Zawti specifically use the terms လဝ်း; *law* (alcohol) and ဝါးပိဏ်း, [sic ဝါးပိဏ်း,] *yā phin* (opium). The abstention from trading alcohol is related to the fifth precept, to abstain from intoxicating substances. As I have examined previously in this chapter, in the Zawti have a zero-tolerance attitude towards the consumption of alcohol and so trading in alcohol is naturally also prohibited.

It is the specific mention of opium that stands out because the trade of opium is pertinent to the geographic, social, and political contexts in which the lay Zawti communities are situated. Here the Zawti are distancing themselves from any involvement in drug production and trade which is pervasive in Shan State and Kachin State, where the majority of the Zawti lay community live. Myanmar is the world’s second largest producer of illicit opium and over 90 per cent of

¹⁰⁷ I am not currently aware whether or not the Brahmajāla Sutta is a text that features prominently among the Zawti laity. This could be an avenue for future research. A good starting point for investigating this would be to find out if the text features in Zawti *lik long*, if it is recited to the laity, and, if so, at what types of ritual and social occasions.

Southeast Asia's opium is grown in Shan State (Meehan 2011: 377). As of 2019, opium poppy is cultivated in almost one quarter of all villages in Shan State (22%) and about half of the households in opium-poppy villages are directly involved in cultivation which is the equivalent of 1 in 9 households in Shan State (UNODC Report 2019: 3). The UNODC Myanmar Opium Survey recorded that 84% of opium poppy was cultivated in Shan State, 14% in Kachin State and 4% in Chin State and Kayah State (UNODC Report 2020: 8). Drugs are cultivated and produced in Shan State and then smuggled across the borders into China and Southeast Asia.

The *Vaṇijjā Sutta* prohibits the trade of intoxicants but, in a region engulfed in opium production and trade, it is difficult for many Buddhists in this area to adhere to this moral ideal. Drugs are cultivated and produced in Shan State and then smuggled across the borders into China and Southeast Asia. In addition to opium, Shan State is also one of the largest global centres for the production and trafficking of crystal methamphetamine (“ice”) (International Crisis Group Report 299 2019). Drug production in Shan State benefits from high-level corruption and safe havens controlled by army-backed militia which allow industrial scale drug production and trafficking (ibid). The methamphetamine business is so big in Shan State that it dwarfs the formal economy and is the centre of the political economy (ibid). Individuals can earn money by smuggling and trafficking drugs.

Rule 4 of the *phit sin atsen ane* rules explicitly prohibits working as a porter of drugs, a vocation that is not uncommon in Shan State and Kachin State, where the majority of the Zawti laity live. Rule 11 is also related to drugs and alcohol. It states, “If you use liquor or opium to aid ill people, [then you have destroyed the honour [of the triple gem]” (see Appendix D). Rather than being about work or trade, this is a more general rule about breaking the fifth precept. This rule reflects the Zawti's zero tolerance attitude towards opium and alcohol even to alleviate pain and treat diseases, a practice prevalent in the region (Maule 2002: 204).

The specific inclusion of opium in the Zawti list indicates that the Zawti lay *upadesa* rules are constructed to cater to contemporary Zawti lay society. It shows that the Zawti are conscious of the conditions that impact their community and work to adapt to the contemporary pressures that might hinder a Zawti lay person's commitment to the path. More broadly, it also situates the Zawti lay community within the wider Shan community, demonstrating that the Zawti laity do not live in isolation from the rest of society.

8.4.3. Receiving Interest as a Livelihood

The most distinctive aspect of the Zawti prohibited trades, referred to in the additional set of considerations, is the Zawti attitude that “loaning rice or money and receiving interest is not considered a means for living” (*Kyong Loi Zawti* 2003: 145). This rule is reiterated in the Rule 1 of the *phit sin atsen ane* rules which states ‘If you make money through corruption, bribery, fining others – then you are then you have destroyed the honour [of the triple gem].’ The Zawti perspective on charging interest, or through fines, is likely a conservative reading of the second precept, to abstain from stealing. In mainstream Buddhism any mode of livelihood based on trickery and/or greed which leads to a breaking of the second precept through stealing, directly or by deception is considered wrong livelihood (M. III. 75, Harvey 2000:188). Peter Harvey summarises: “To be able to see how to increase one’s wealth is fine, but to be blind to moral considerations, so as to do so ‘with tricks, fraud and lies: worldly, purse-proud’, is to be ‘one-eyed’ (A. 1.129-30)” (2000: 188).

Bhikkhu Bodhi translates the phrase *lābhena lābham* ‘gain with gain’, one of the eight wrong livelihoods listed in the *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta*, previously mentioned, as ‘usury’.¹⁰⁸ Usury is the practice of making immoral monetary loans at unreasonably high rates of interest that unfairly benefit the lender. The relationship between the lender and the recipient of the loan is inherently unequal since once the lender has loaned money, the recipient is indebted to the lender. The lender usually stands to lose nothing and makes a profit by capitalizing on the unfortunate circumstances of those he loans money to. From a Buddhist perspective, one could argue that usury loans entail an excessive, unfair way of making a living that promotes greed on behalf of the lender and suffering on behalf of the recipient and are therefore incompatible with the notion of Buddhist right livelihood, which is noble, taintless, and supramundane (*sammāājīvo ariyo anāsavo lokuttaro*).¹⁰⁹

The *upadesa* rules explicitly state that the Zawti do not consider the interest on loans of rice or money to be a moral means for living. This sentiment is reaffirmed in the Rule 5 of the *ton*

¹⁰⁸ <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/waytoend.html#ch4>

¹⁰⁹ <https://suttacentral.net/mn117/pli/ms?layout=sidebyside&reference=none¬es=asterisk&highlight=false&script=latin>. See Kyaw’s *Burmese Buddhists and Business Ethics* (2017) for a detailed discussion of right livelihood in Burmese Buddhist Ethics

atsāra lu (the chapter on destroyed conduct) category of *atsen ane* rules which states “If you charge interest, you should be punished” (See Appendix D). The prohibition against lending protects the Zawti community from developing a class of moneylenders who might profit from those within their community who need loans. While charging interest on loans is perceived as morally wrong, there are no rules that prohibit borrowing. It is therefore not clear if the Zawti laity are able to borrow rice, money, or other assets from those outside of their community or do so within their community but without interest.

While charging interest on usury loans is likely to be inconsistent with what many Buddhists would consider right livelihood, there is no blanket rule on prohibiting making money from interest in the canonical texts. Charging interest is a fundamental part of business and the modern market economy and so the Zawti attitude that money made from charging interest is not a means for living sets them apart from mainstream Buddhist attitudes in Southeast Asia.

8.4.5. Inappropriate exchanges

Several *ton atsāra lu* rules included in the *atsen ane* set of rules include prohibitions on when trade can take place and other types of inappropriate exchanges outside of business exchanges (see Appendix D for full list). *Ton atsāra lu* Rule 21 reads ‘When observing the precepts, it is not appropriate to trade’. This is likely to refer to *uposatha* days, days when the laity intensify their religious practices and commit to taking the five precepts. To prohibit all trade on all four days each month is disruptive and unusual. It signifies a retreat from everyday secular society in which trade is fact of life. In the past, Zawti communities lived in monocultural Zawti villages, in which it might have been possible to halt trading on each of the *uposatha* days if everyone else in the community was committed to the same ideal.

This prohibition indicates that the Zawti do not consider trading to be compatible with the observance of the precepts. This is likely because trade is inherently linked with offences against the second precept. This stance is particularly strict since in the broader Theravada world there is an awareness that no matter how pious a Buddhist businessman may be, or how committed they are in engaging in ethical business practices, mild forms of deceit are commonplace whenever goods are sold or traded, and some kind of deceit is unavoidable in order to make a profit (Terwiel 2012: 185, Kyaw 2017: 313). However, this does not mean that lay Buddhists do not trade, even when observing the precepts.

Outside of direct business exchanges, prohibitions against certain types of trade covered in the *atsen ane ton atsāra lu* rules include giving someone something and asking for it back (Rule 12), taking something that someone has left behind despite knowing that they are coming back from it (Rule 15), not buying things that have been stolen (Rule 20). These rules provide precise prohibitions on mundane everyday situations. The specificity of these rules means that there is no doubt about whether an action is moral or immoral, and so the Zawti laity know how they should handle the daily dilemmas of lay life.

Further, Rule 11 which states “If others come and ask about your young unmarried daughter, it is not good to say a price”. The Zawti prohibit the act of speculating a dowry price for their daughters, something which is common in the wider Shan community (Personal Communication with Jotika Khur-Yearn 2022). Once a price is put on a daughter she becomes a commodity, her price can be negotiated, and she is essentially bought and sold. It is a trade like any other trade and is therefore susceptible to all the moral short fallings described in relation to regular business trade. It might also be perceived as an offence against one of the five prohibited trades, the trade of humans. I do not know enough about the Zawti courting and marriage system to comment on what alternative the Zawti might have to a dowry price or if marriages within the Zawti communities include a dowry at all. Dowries are however a feature of mainstream Shan cultural practise and so this rule is a rejection of traditional Shan customs.

8.5. “The *Upadesa* Rules for Householders in More Detail”: *Phī*, *Loka* and *Veda*

The remaining *upadesa* rules laid out in *Kyong Loi Zawti* are listed under the title ကုပတေ,သတၢ,ဂူဆိးဂိုုဆိးတီးဂူၤ; meaning “the *upadesa* rules for householders in more detail”.

This set of rules consists of three broad rules that essentially prohibit the belief, worship, or practise of anything outside of ‘orthodox’ Theravada Buddhism, specifically pre-Buddhist Shan beliefs.

The “*upadesa* rules for householders in more detail” reads:

Honour the *Tisarana* [*tisaranaṃ* ‘the three refuges] and take refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha.

- (1) Avoid relying on or having faith in any type of *phī* [spirit].
- (2) Avoid relying on or having faith in *loka* [cosmology/ the world of auspicious omens and superstitions].
- (3) Avoid relying on or having faith in the practise of *veda* [astrology, palm reading, anything rooted in the Brahmanical tradition].

In brief, it’s about ဂမ်,မာ်.သဂတ *kammasakkata* [*kamma* ‘action’ + *sakkata* ‘honoured’, ‘duly attended’ = honouring *kamma*] သမ်,မၢ,တိတ်.တိ *sammādiṭṭhi* [right view, one of the elements of the noble eightfold path] (ကမ္မသက္ကတ သမ္မာဒိဋ္ဌိ), belief in cause and effect and (ကမ္မၢ ကမ္မဖလ) [*kamma* ‘action’ *kammaphala* ‘the fruit or result of action’] the cause and consequence of actions (*Kyong Loi Zawti* 2003: 145).

The remaining set of rules are the most distinctive of all the *Zawti upadesa* rules, since the rules are responses to beliefs and traditions associated with traditional Shan religion and customs, and do not at first glance appear to be rooted in prohibitions found in the canon. This set of rules corresponds directly with the ဖိတ်းဂူၤ, *phit kung* (offending the triple gem) category of *atsen ane* rules.

Many of the *Zawti* ဖိတ်းဂူၤ, *phit kung* (offending the triple gem) category of *atsen ane* rules appear to be very specific to Shan customs. However, prohibitions of this nature are not out of the ordinary and are consistent with prohibitions listed in the Canon. The *Mahāsīla* of the *Brahmajāla Sutta* discussed earlier in this chapter lists a range of livelihoods that are considered *micchājīva* ‘wrong livelihood’, and many of these livelihoods are associated with activities that fall under the category of what the *Zawti* label as *phī*, *loka*, and *veda*. *Phī*, *loka*

and *veda* are all features of traditional Tai magico-animistic beliefs or archaic-Tai beliefs practised by the Shan before Buddhism was introduced into their system of belief (Terwiel 2012: 19).

Terwiel hypothesizes that when Buddhism spread to the rural Shan communities from the urban centres in the first centuries of the second millennium, the Shan adopted Buddhist practices not because they wanted to escape rebirth (*samsāra*) but because they wanted to acquire magical power (2012: 17). They considered the ritual behaviour of the Sangha to be efficacious in bringing about increased changes of prosperity and used Pali texts as spells to ward off danger and illness (ibid: 17). Terwiel writes that when Buddhism was introduced it became subservient to magico-animism and over the course of centuries the role of Buddhism gradually became more prominent in village religion (ibid: 20). What was once rural magico-animism eventually became magico-animistic Buddhism (ibid: 20). The Zawti outright reject many of the *phī*, *loka*, and *veda* rituals and superstitions that are rooted in magico-animistic beliefs, and in doing so, they set themselves apart from mainstream Shan lay Buddhists who do engage in such traditions.

8.5.1. *Phī*

The first rule states that Zawti laity should “avoid relying on or having faith in any type of *phī*”. The Shan term *ၵၵ phī* is a general term for spirits. There are various types of *phī* such as the *phī* of ancestors, guardian *phī* who protect the village, and malevolent *phī* which possess humans. Outside each (non-Zawti) Shan village there is usually a small pagoda for the guardian *phī* of the village and each home has one or more altar for ancestors and the guardian of the hearth (Terwiel 2012:19).¹¹⁰ Shamans communicate with the *phī* to cure sickness, interpret dreams and ensure a successful harvest (Terwiel 2012:19).¹¹¹

Multiple *phit kung atsen ane* rules explicitly prohibit rituals and superstitions related to *phī* (see Appendix D). For example, Rule 2 states: “If you ask for help from spirits, make requests from spirits, seek the blessing of spirits, give offerings to spirits— then you are then you have

¹¹⁰ Ethnic Groups of Northern Southeast Asia, Cultural Report Series No.2, Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1950.

¹¹¹ Ethnic Groups of Northern Southeast Asia, Cultural Report Series No.2, Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1950.

destroyed the honour [of the triple gem]”. The Zawti do not deny the existence of *phī*, but rather oppose the worship and appeasement of *phī*.

In the Pali Canon spirits and other non-human and heavenly beings, such as *petas* (ghosts) and *devas* (heavenly beings, deities), are part of Buddhist cosmology but they are not considered worthy of worship, as seen with reference to the *Singālovādasutta* above. The depiction of non-human entities in the canonical texts are often negative. The *Petavatthu*, a selection of stories in the Sutta *Piṭaka*, is dedicated to describing how bad actions lead to rebirth in the *peta* (ghost) realm. In the *Petavatthu*, *peta* are described as disturbing figures with thin frames and ribs that stick out onto protruding stomachs, condemned to such suffering because of negative *kamma* accumulated through demeritorious behaviour (Pv. 1-51). *Devas* (heavenly beings), despite having divine status are not depicted as particularly knowledgeable or spiritually advanced in the canonical texts (Thānissaro Bhikkhu SN 1:20). *Devas* are depicted as ignorant and pompous, and they too must learn from the Buddha to attain *nibbāna*. The Zawti appear to approach *phī* in a similar way to the way in which spirits and non-human and heavenly beings are treated in the canonical texts. This stands in contrast to the mainstream Shan attitude towards *phī*.

Rule 14 more specifically instructs “If you are not well and can’t eat and go for divination to call back your spirit to your body [then you are then you have destroyed the honour [of the triple gem].” This rule relates to the traditional Shan belief that the body has thirty-two souls called *khwan*. An individual falls ill when a *khwan* flees the body and a malevolent *phī* takes its place. To get better, the individual must call a spirit medium to call back the *khwan* to the body and exorcise the *phī* (Eberhardt 2006: 33). Such spirit-calling ceremonies are practised among the Tai, Tai-Lao and in Cambodia where nineteen spirits are connected with the body and well-being (Harris 2005: 59). Non-Buddhist communities also follow the same practice which suggests that it is a pre-Buddhist tradition (Crosby 2013: 133). By denying the relevance of the thirty-two *khwan* to health and stating that by participating in a *khwan* rite, one commits an offence against the triple gem, the Zawti make it clear that these notions are not part of their belief system.

In distancing themselves from the belief and worship of *phī*, which are central to Shan cosmology, the Zawti distance themselves from the broader Shan Theravada community, and inadvertently align themselves with a ‘purer’ understanding of Theravada grounded in

canonical texts that we might otherwise associate with modernist approaches, as I shall discuss later.

8.5.2. *Loka*

The Zawti are also instructed to avoid having faith in *loka*. The term *loka* derives from the Pali *lokiya* meaning ‘belonging to this world’ and is contrasted with *lokuttara* meaning the supramundane or sublime. In Pali usage, *lokiya* refers to things in this world, beings stuck in the cycle of *saṃsāra* (constant birth, mundane existence, and death). *Lokuttara* refers to the path to salvation, following the Noble Eightfold Path, breaking free from *saṃsāra* and attaining *nibbāna*. In the Tai context, *loka* refers the world of auspicious omens and superstitions associated with this-worldly affairs (Personal Communication with Jotika Khur-Yearn 2020). Many aspects of mainstream Shan Buddhist religious practice are rooted in supernatural beliefs that precede the Shan adoption of Buddhism. The Zawti reject many of these beliefs through explicit *atsen ane* rules.

Rule 6 in the *phit kung* category of the *atsen ane* rules states “If you choose the time by listening to the sound of the birds and follow it and have faith in it, [then you are then you have destroyed the honour [of the triple gem].” This rule denounces the belief in omens, specifically omens conveyed through birds. The “lore of the bird” is part of the traditional Shan belief system. In mainstream Shan beliefs animals often appear as omens, especially birds. The appearance of vultures or crows on the roof of a house is thought to indicate bad luck for the occupants of the house (Santasombat 2008: 127). During his time as a monk in Shan State, Jotika Khur-Yearn recalled that the appearance of a crow at a certain time of day indicated to the monks that a death had occurred, which was confirmed when they later learned that someone had died in the village (Personal Communication with Jotika Khur-Yearn 2020). The fact that this omen was observed by Shan monks indicates that omens of this nature are pervasive not only among lay people but also among monks. Crows also feature in traditional Shan building construction. Before the roof of a house is thatched, an offering is made to the spirits and each upright post is crowned by a bunch of bananas, flowers, and bananas leaves. If a crow alights at this time on the centre post, then it is considered an omen of good fortune but at most other times, crows and owls are thought to bring bad luck (Milne 1910: 102).

The rejection of omens associated with birds is found in the canonical material. In the *Mahāsīla* (in the *Brahmajāla Sutta*), “the lore of the scorpion, the rat, the bird, and the crow” is described as *micchājīva* (wrong livelihood) and the Buddha is praised for rejecting such beliefs (DN 1 Bhikkhu Sujato). The belief in omens more broadly is addressed in the *Mahā Maṅgala Sutta*, a *deva* (deity) addresses the Buddha with the statement that *devas* and human beings seek out *maṅgala* (P. ‘auspicious’, ‘lucky’) signs, or omens, of well-being for protection. The Buddha replies that rather than ‘consorting with fools’, one should pay homage to the those worthy of homage, which is the highest protection. So, rather than seeking out omens as a sign of good luck or protection, one should instead live according to the *dhamma*, which is the highest protection (Sn 258-269).¹¹²

Rule 11 is also related to the prohibition of superstitious beliefs. The Zawti laity are told “If you write the words of the *kammavācā* to protect your household or village from danger– [then you are then you have destroyed the honour [of the triple gem]].” *Kammavācā* refers to liturgical texts used to perform religious ceremonies such as ordination. Ordination *kammavācā* ritually transform lay people into monks, imbuing them with a new-found purity and creating good merit for all those involved. In Burmese Buddhism, monks use *kammavācā* texts in land purification ceremonies and house blessings. The belief in Burma is that the *kammavācā* texts can make lingering spirits leave a property. The reason for the Zawti prohibition against this custom is likely related to their attitude towards *phī* and the reasoning given in the *Mahā Maṅgala Sutta*: rather than believing in the superstition that a *kammavācā* can protect one from danger, one should instead live according to the *dhamma* (Sn 258-269).

8.5.3. *Veda*

The third factor listed in the “*upadesa* rules for householders in more detail” is the practice of *veda*. The term *veda* in the Tai context refers to the practices associated with the Brahmanical tradition which includes astrology and palm reading. The Buddhist rejection of Brahmanical rituals and superstitions is rooted in the Pali Canon. The *Brahmajāla Sutta* is framed within a discussion of *samaṇabrāhmaṇā* (*samaṇa* ‘ascetics’ + *brāhmaṇa* ‘brahmins’), meaning non-Buddhist renunciators and brahminical practitioners who earn a living through engaging in practices that are considered *micchājīva* (wrong livelihood). The Buddha describes how in

¹¹² <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/snp/snp.2.04.than.html>

rejecting these practices, he and his Sangha are praised by the laity. Such activities include limb-reading, omenology, divining celestial portents, interpreting dreams, divining bodily marks, divining holes in cloth gnawed by mice, fire offerings, ladle offerings, offerings of husks, rice powder, ghee, or oil; offerings from the mouth, blood sacrifices, palmistry; geomancy for building sites, fields, and cemeteries; exorcisms, earth magic, snake charming, poisons; the lore of the scorpion, the rat, the bird, and the crow; prophesying life span, chanting for protection, and divining omens from wild animals. (DN 1: See Appendix E for a complete list of *micchājīva* trades listed in *Mahāsīla* of the *Brahmajāla Sutta*).

Many of the Tai rituals and superstitions prohibited by the Zawti and described as ‘*phī*’, ‘*loka*’ and, ‘*veda*’ are associated with the Brahminical tradition. The influence of the Brahmanism on Tai and Thai Buddhism can be traced back to the fourteenth century when Ayutthaya was a major Thai city. The Ayutthaya Thai were greatly influenced by their Khmer neighbours who practised a form of court Brahmanism which had its roots in the Hindu tradition. The Thai adopted the Khmer style of court Brahmanism, where brahmins specialised in royal life-cycle rituals, astronomy and astrology (Terwiel 2012: 14-15). Astrology plays a fundamental role in traditional Tai society, so much so that “without access to the day, month, year of birth and actual moment of delivery used in determining his horoscope, a Tai barely has anything left to cope with his life, whether it concerns giving a name, choosing a life partner or even simple things, such as having a haircut or trimming nails” (Santasombat 2008: 127). Astrology is used to calculate the auspicious moment for all such manner of life events. Several *atsen ane* rules are a reaction to Shan traditions and beliefs associated with ‘*veda*’.

An example is Rule 3 of the *phit kung* category of *atsen ane* rules. It reads “If you take the sand from a sand pagoda and cast a charm by blowing on it and scattering it in the village – [then you are then you have destroyed the honour [of the triple gem]]. In the wider Shan community when someone falls ill, they build a sand pagoda to “support” the earth element (Durrenberger 1983: 67). The building of sand pagodas is thus related to superstitions (*loka*) and spirits (when you fall ill your *khwan* has been replaced by a *phī* spirit). By rejecting the tradition of casting charms made from the sand of sand pagodas, the Zawti are rejecting traditional Shan practises and reaffirming that such traditions are not part of the Zawti religious tradition or world view.

Rule 4 states “If you take water and flowers from the jar on the *dhamma* shrine and mix it as part of medicine, [then you are then you have destroyed the honour [of the triple gem]].” Zawti

lay people traditionally did not keep Buddha images in their homes and instead kept *lik long* texts on their home altar, creating a *dhamma* shrine, which functions in the same way as a regular home altar. The tradition of consuming items that have been offered on a shrine proscribed here is common in mainstream Shan Buddhist practice. In the wider Shan tradition, when a *sara* (traditional doctors/ healers) prepares to teach someone to read Shan, he prepares an offering to the prepubescent deity *Sarasati*, the Shan version of the Hindu goddess of wisdom, who is associated with learning, specifically with learning to read and memorization of *katha* [P. *gāthā* ‘verse’, ‘stanza’, ‘poetry’] (Spiro 1967: 152; see also Wolters 1982: 86-87). He also makes a special *katha* water, *naam* (water) *moon* (glory) using *katha* associated with *Sarasati* and gives it to his pupils to drink (Cushing 1914: 494). Shan parents may also request this water from the *sara* to give their children so that their school performance will improve” (Tannenbaum 1986: 697). This tradition is associated with *Sarasati*, a Hindu goddess, and therefore it is what the Zawti consider *veda*.

Rule 13 makes clear that the Zawti reject astrology, stating “If you go to a palm reader or astrologer and you keep his company, [then you have destroyed the honour [of the triple gem].” Palmistry, the art of prophesying through reading someone’s palm, is described as *micchājīva* in the *Mahāsīla*, yet astrology plays a fundamental role in traditional Tai society which informs both day-to-day decisions and important life events. The Zawti reject the belief in auspicious dates which is reflected in their attitude towards funerals. The Zawti believe that a funeral can be held on any day and the body can be buried on any day (*Long Khoe Zawti* 1996: 76).¹¹³

In rejecting the belief in *phī*, *loka* and *veda*, which are all features of mainstream Shan Buddhism, the Zawti distance themselves from practices which can be interpreted as pre-Buddhist, non-Buddhist, or corrupt in any way, or perhaps simply associated with a preoccupation with mundane rather than spiritual matters. The Zawti are told to live life according to ကမ်မသ်သဂ္ဂတ *kammasakkata* (*kammic* deeds and their results) သမ်မုတိဝိဝိဝိ *sammādiṭṭhi* (right view). *Kammasakkata sammādiṭṭhi* is an aspect of the eightfold path which, as previously mentioned, is the fundamental set of eight practices that defines correct Buddhist thought and conduct. Instead of pursuing magico-animistic beliefs, the Zawti are told to believe in ကမ္မာ ကမ္မဖလ *kamma* (action) and *kammaphala* (the fruit of action), meaning, cause and effect,

¹¹³ The Shan usually bury their dead rather than cremate so the Zawti tradition of burial is not distinctive in itself.

rather than practices that seek to circumvent this fundamental Buddhist principle. In this way, Zawti lay morality is perceived as being cultivated through *sīla* and a dedication to the eightfold path.

The Zawti's rejection of spirits, superstitions, and beliefs outside of Buddhist cosmology echoes the message of the *Siṅgālovāda Sutta*, the *sutta* considered the *locus classicus* on lay practice (D 31). In the *Siṅgālovāda Sutta*, the householder Siṅgāla is told to refrain from prostrating to the six directions in worship (a Brahmanical ritual), because such behaviour is not *ariyavinaya* (the correct practice of the noble). The Buddha teaches Siṅgāla how noble householders should worship the six directions. He first states that they should strive to eradicate the fourteen evils. The fourteen evils are split into three categories: (1) the four defilements of action: taking life (*pāṇātipātā*), stealing (*adinnādānā*), sexual misconduct (*kāmesu micchācārā*), and lying (*musāvādā*); (2) the four causes of evil action which include: sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*), hate (*dosa*), ignorance (*moha*), fear (*bhaya*); (3) the six ways of dissipating wealth: indulging in intoxicants, sauntering in the streets at unseemly hours, attending theatrical shows, gambling, association with evil companions, the habit of idleness (Narada Thera 1996).¹¹⁴ The Buddha then preaches the importance of having good friends and how one should avoid fake friends. He then states that rather than worshipping the six physical directions, a noble householder should instead think of the four-compass direction as parents (east), teachers (south), spouse (west), friends (north), ascetics (zenith), servants (nadir), all of which are relationships that should be nurtured, and each group of these relationships should follow certain duties towards one another to sustain and nurture them. These set of duties are included in the school curricular for children at primary level in Myanmar.

In this *sutta* the path to a noble life is explained through the rejection of a pre-Buddhist Brahmanical belief which is replaced with the teaching of the Buddha and practices based on ethical conduct. The Zawti rejection of *phī*, *loka*, and *veda*, and Shan beliefs and rituals rooted in the same cosmology follows the same logic (see Chapter Eight). Anne Hansen, in her exploration of Buddhist modernist revival in Cambodia draws on the same parallel, highlighting how the tone and content of the *Siṅgālovāda Sutta* resonated with modernist

114 Sigalovada Sutta: The Discourse to Sigala" (DN 31), translated from the Pali by Narada Thera. Access to Insight (BCBS Edition), 30 November 2013, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.31.0.nara.html> .

investigations of authentic codes of conduct and the effort to reverse the perceived degeneration of Buddhist ritual practice inherited from previous generations (2007: 157-8).

The Zawti rejection of practices associated with *phī*, *loka*, and *veda* is reflective of not only a conservative reading of the *Siṅgālovāda Sutta* but also the *Mahāsīla Sutta* section of the *Brahmajāla*. A key difference between the two *suttas* is the intended audience of the *suttas*. The *Siṅgālovāda Sutta*, the locus classicus on lay morality and commonly cited among contemporary Theravada Buddhists, is addressed to *upāsakānaṃ upāsikānaṃ* (male lay devotees and female lay devotees). The term *upāsaka* generally refers to devout lay followers who commit to the five precepts and might take the eight precepts on *uposatha* days. The point here is that *upāsaka* is an accepted lay category and therefore it is clear that the *Siṅgālovāda Sutta* is intended for a lay audience. In contrast, the intended audience of the *Brahmajāla Sutta* is less clear. As we have learned in this chapter, the contents of the *sutta* are framed in a discussion of trades associated with *samaṇabrāhmaṇā* (*samaṇa* ‘ascetics’ + *brāhmaṇa* ‘brahmins’) that the Buddha avoids. We might then assume that the intended audience is monastic. However, it is included in the *Dīgha Nikaya*, the first of five *nikāyas* in the *Sutta Piṭaka*. The *Brahmajāla* is the first *sutta* in the *Dīgha Nikaya*, which is the first of the five *nikāyas* in the *Sutta Piṭaka* and it can be interpreted as laying the foundation for all the *suttas* that follow.

So, while the *Brahmajāla* might be thought of as a moral ideal for Buddhists, the ambiguous or, depending on your perspective, multivalent applicability of rules, could have resulted in its erasure in mainstream lay Buddhist morality and ethics. The Zawti, in contrast to the mainstream Theravada laity, tend to analyse lay precepts through a monastic lens, as discussed in their interpretation of the five precepts through the formula of the monastic *pārājikas* discussed in this chapter. The lines of distinction between the first five precepts (other than that for celibacy) as applied to monastic and the lay is therefore less clearcut for the Zawti who are committed to a level of textual orthodoxy that goes beyond the mainstream. Perhaps, the Zawti have interpreted the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, and in particular the *Mahāsīla*, as a set of livelihoods and beliefs that apply to pious lay people and should thus be avoided. If this is the case, the

Zawti may be the only Southeast Asian religious group to attempt to live according to the *Mahāsīla*.¹¹⁵

In making specific reference to fundamental Buddhist principles that they *do* follow and rejecting magico-animistic beliefs associated with mainstream Shan Theravada, the Zawti distance themselves from the wider mainstream Shan community. This distancing, which stems from a commitment to textual orthodoxy, helps us understand why the Zawti are understood as ‘extreme’ or ‘unorthodox’ by the non-Zawti Shan community. The ‘extreme’ nature of the Zawti is rooted in a textual orthodoxy that goes beyond what is considered the norm in contemporary Shan Theravada. To an extent, this perception is self-imposed since the Zawti “*upadesa* rules for householders in more detail” illustrate how the Zawti themselves distinguish their beliefs from mainstream Shan Theravada.

The Zawti’s rejection of Shan religious customs is not a rejection of Shan culture and identity, but of specific rituals and customs that are not compatible with Zawti religious ideology. For the Zawti themselves, rejecting some aspects of mainstream Shan Theravada is not incompatible with their Shan ethnic identity, to which most of the Zawti lay community belong. However, religious rituals and beliefs play such a prominent role in the Shan worldview that for the mainstream Shan community, the rejection of such customs could be interpreted as a dismissal of Shan ethnic affiliation. I do not think that the Zawti themselves see it this way. From speaking with many Zawti lay people, their Zawti religious identity is totally compatible with their Shan ethnic identity, which are not seen as two separate things but just as who they are and who their ancestors were. Further, from speaking with non-Zawti Shan monks, the Zawti were never described as not being Shan but as having a different understanding of Buddhism.

¹¹⁵ I thank my examiner B.J. Terwiel for his suggestion to consider the *Mahāsīla* as the textual basis for Zawti morality and ethics.

8.7. Monastic Rules for Lay People?

In Burma, the fear of *sāsana* decline has driven reform for centuries. In Chapter One, we learned of the robe controversy that plagued the Burmese Sangha for the entire eighteenth century. At the root of the controversy was the fear that a loss of correct monastic conduct would accelerate the decline of the *sāsana*. In the modern period, in the absence of a king to keep the Sangha and teachings pure, the focus shifted from the monks to the lay people who came to be seen as the protectors of the *sāsana*. The period of Buddhist Modernism or Buddhist Revival in South and Southeast Asia in the nineteenth occurred in response to the rapid and shocking degeneration of moral behaviour in Buddhist societies, which were perceived by older generations to be the result of the colonial conditions.

Alicia Turner describes how the Burmese Buddhist community worried that the challenges and changes of the colonial condition had undermined the moral fibre of Buddhists and Burma, and there was an urgent need to reform behaviour and manners (2014: 85). Fearing the decline of the *sāsana*, Burmese Buddhists turned their gaze inward and critiqued that the perceived lax behaviour of Buddhist lay people was a serious threat to the *sāsana* (ibid: 85). Lay Buddhist associations took matters into their own hands, organizing letters, sermons, pamphlets, articles, and meetings to encourage lay people to reflect on their behaviour and follow a program of moral self-regulation (ibid: 88). The concept of *sīla* (virtue or morality) was centred as the focus of moral lay Buddhist practice and was framed as the most important of the traditional triumvirate of *dāna* (generosity), *sīla* (virtue), and *bhāvanā* (mental cultivation).

Lay people changed their behaviours to affirm their commitment to *sīla*, sometimes changing behaviours that had long been thought of as morally acceptable in Burmese society, such as meat eating. Traditionally on feast days the markets were full of meat which was bought by lay people to offer to the monks. But influential Abhidhamma scholar monk Ledi Sayadaw encouraged lay people to refrain from eating meat (specifically beef and chicken) on feast days so that meat sellers did not have to sacrifice the lives of so many animals and birds on such days. As a result, beef was no longer sold on feast days (Turner 2014: 92).

During this period of Buddhist revival in Burma, it was lay people who became the barometer of the status of the *sāsana* and the protectors of its preservation. Lay people had to reform their behaviour to save Buddhism (ibid: 95). This represented a shift in attitude from the eighteenth

and nineteenth centuries when monastic discipline was taken as the indicator of the status of the *sāsana*, and as such, resulted in various monastic reforms sparked by differences of interpretation in the *Vinaya* (see Chapter One).

In Sri Lanka the transformation of Buddhism through rationalist, textually based and lay-orientated religious practices was termed Protestant Buddhism by scholars such as Gananath Obeyeskere and Richard Gombrich. In *Buddhism Transformed*, Gombrich and Obeyeskere define Protestant Buddhism in terms of three characteristics: fundamentalism, despising tradition, and claiming that Buddhism is scientific, rational, and not a religion (1988: 195). Gombrich and Obeyeskere proposed that the Protestant Buddhist worldview in which the lay man permeates his life with religion and with the personal attainment of *nirvāna/nibbāna* as the ultimate goal, is influenced directly from Protestant Christian ideals brought to Sri Lanka by missionaries. In this understanding of Buddhism, the role of the monk is devalued, and each individual is responsible for their own salvation. The arena for enlightenment shifts from the monastery to the everyday world (ibid 1988: 195). The architect of this movement was the Sri Lankan lay man Anagārika Dharmapāla, who revived Buddhism in Sri Lanka by infusing it with the puritan values of Protestantism. Anagārika Dharmapāla created a new model of Sri Lankan Buddhism which reimagined religious etiquette and also daily comportment such as how to dress, how to behaviour, and what type of attitude to have (ibid: 172)

Carol Anderson has noted that scholarship has tended to cast the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as the period within which unprecedented change resulting from British colonial rule transformed indigenous notions of culture, community, and identity across South Asia (ibid: 171). The Protestant Buddhism model specifically interpreted colonialism as a break in what was thought of as a static Buddhist tradition. Anne M. Blackburn has critiqued such approaches in scholarship, arguing that tropes of decline and revival see these such changes as straightforward descriptions of trends in Buddhist societies rather than conventions used to promote specific kinds of change. As such, these approaches are unable to account for the dynamic continuities and changes at work in the broader Theravada context (Blackburn 2001: 8). Blackburn's critique is helpful here since such a model fails to account for a tradition like the Zawti. Colonialism did not pose the same type of threat to Zawti beliefs and customs as it did to the mainstream Buddhist communities referenced in this discourse because the Zawti predate colonialism and were already outside of the mainstream when colonialism arrived. In this discussion of the Buddhist revival period, lay people are described as coming together to

adopt a stricter code of lay morality and ethics to counteract the fear of decline brought about by authority, in this case, new colonial powers. This new imagining of Buddhist lay morality resembled the Zawti approach to ethics which had resulted in their ostracization from mainstream Burmese Buddhist society a century earlier, in the eighteenth century.

How, then, might we situate the Zawti among lay reform movements in contemporary society? If lay reforms in mainstream Theravada during the eighteenth and nineteenth century are the product of colonialism, then contemporary lay revival movements are framed as a response to the disillusionment of modern capitalist society. Groups such as Dhammakaya and Santi Asoke in Thailand emphasize a ‘purified Buddhism’ needed to improve and strengthen Buddhism in Thailand. The Santi Asoke movement was founded in the 1970s by Samana Bodhirak, who criticised the Thai Sangha for its moral laxity and disconnection from society (Essen 2004: 6). The Asoke movement reject consumerist Thai society and live communally, promoting a modest way of life and devoting time to working for the community without pay (Kaewthep 2007: 226). The Santi Asoke lay members follow the five precepts strictly and if they break a precept or a community rule then they face trial in either a meeting of monks or a community of committee members (Kaethep 2007: 226). This is similar to the Zawti practice of consulting the *khing* and asking for forgiveness from the triple gem if a lay person breaks a precept or *atsen ane* rule.

Contemporary revival movements emerged in response to what they perceived as a decline in morality in current society, just as the movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did. But the Zawti have always had this fear. This is most starkly apparent in how the early Zawti tradition perceived non-Zawti monks. As examined in Chapters Three and Six, the Zawti monks did not mix with non-Zawti monks and the Zawti laity did not pay respects to non-Zawti monks on the basis that non-Zawti monks did not uphold the same monastic standards as Zawti monks. The Zawti laity follow the precepts very closely which affects numerous aspects of their day-to-day lives, from what they can buy at the market, to what they can drink, and what type of job they can do. The centrality of *sīla* in a Zawti lay person’s daily life is an expression of their faith in the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, and their commitment to upholding the *sāsana*.

8.8. Conclusion

In this chapter we learn how one ‘becomes’ Zawti, through a distinctive initiation process for lay people. Part of this initiation includes accepting the Zawti interpretation of the five precepts and the Zawti *upadesa* and *atsen ane* rules, which the Zawti themselves described as being “different from others” (*Long Khoe Zawti* 1997: 74-75).

In this exploration of Zawti lay morality and ethics, I have demonstrated how the *upadesa* and *atsen ane* rules are in general, rooted in canonical tenets, and are broadly interpreted in a way that is consistent with mainstream Theravada attitudes. I have also highlighted the ways in which the Zawti attitude diverges from the mainstream, including through their adoption of a monastic *pārājika* style of interpretation of lay precepts and a closer interpretation of their implications within their own society. I explored how the Zawti *upadesa* and *atsen ane* rules reject several beliefs and behaviours associated with *phī*, *loka*, and *veda* and how such an approach echoes what is propounded in the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, and therefore suggests a textual justification for the Zawti approach. In rejecting these beliefs and rituals, through specific prohibitions relating to protection, medicine, trade, and farming, the Zawti reject a fundamental aspect of mainstream Shan cosmology, which is mainstream among Shan Buddhists. This has resulted in lay people emulating monastic ethical ideals in their day-to-day lives, through their zero-tolerance attitude towards alcohol and drugs, how they treat animals, how they conduct business, etc. The result of this is that Zawti lay morality appears to diverge from the mainstream because it is stricter and dismisses *lokiya* practices.

In this chapter I framed the austerity of the Zawti lay approach to morality and ethics within a discussion of several other Buddhist lay reform movements, namely the reforms during the ‘Buddhist revival’ period, which emerged within the backdrop of colonialism, and current contemporary reform movements such as Santi Asoke. In each case lay reforms emerged because of what has been perceived as a decline in morality observed in the lax behaviour of Buddhist lay people and monks. First, in response to the colonial condition, and second, in response to modern capitalism, both rooted in a fear of *sāsana* decline. In each case, the laity took it upon themselves to become the protectors of the *sāsana*.

The Zawti approach to lay morality and ethics predates both reform movements but is rooted in the same fear of *sāsana* decline. The Zawti monks and laity uphold the *sāsana* through their

moral purity, which they enact through living as closely as possibly in accordance with the fundamental codes of ethics laid out in the canonical texts. For the monks this is the rules laid out in the *Vinaya*, specifically the *Pāṭimokkha* rules, and for the laity this is the five precepts (*pañcasīla*). The Zawti fear of decline is also intertwined with the preservation of their monastic tradition which, as examined in Chapter Five, faces the threat and pressure of assimilation through the potential implementation standardized monastic education.

Conclusion

Before I undertook the research that I have presented in this thesis, the Zawti tradition was virtually unknown to outsiders, especially to scholars, but even to a large extent to non-Zawti members of the Shan ethnic group to which most Zawti belong. This situation had begun to change slightly over the past decade or so, as scholars began to pay attention to the distinctive vernacular literature of Shan Buddhism, a form of complex poetry called *lik long*, preserved mainly by lay scholars (*zare*). The Zawti also preserve their teachings as *lik long* and their *zare* had attended some of the emerging conferences on the subject held in Myanmar.

Initially, it was the role of *zare* as community religious leaders, potential ‘laymen extraordinaire’ (Swearer 1976) and not the Zawti, that was my intended subject of research. I was interested in such figures because they challenge the standard portrayal of Theravada communities as consisting of monks as religious virtuosi serving lay supporters. I had observed that Theravada ethnographies tended to perpetuate a dichotomy among practitioners based on the types of texts and knowledge utilized, this being educated monks who use canonical texts on one side, and illiterate lay ritual practitioners such as traditional healers and astrologers, who do not. With studies of monasticism centred on Pali learning dominating scholarship of the past century, and that of nuns becoming increasingly popular in the past few decades, interest in the study of lay practice and vernacular literature is just beginning, and the laymen extraordinaire and their literature have received scant attention.

I had no expectation of coming across the Zawti among my laymen extraordinaire, yet it was during my very first outing to plan my fieldwork, when I was hoping to hear a *lik long* performance, that I was unwittingly taken to what turned out to be a small Zawti village. It was my interpreter, whose father was Zawti, who spotted this fact. On entering the temple, the *tai wat*, distinctive – as I would later learn – for not housing any monks, she observed that something was unusual, that this was no ordinary *lik long* performance. When she began to photograph the chanting book of the temple sleepers, my curiosity was piqued, and I asked her what made it of interest. I was extremely surprised by her answer, for I had come across Zawti in only two contexts. The first was as a ‘*paramat*’ group subject to royal purge as heretics under the 19th-century reform of Burmese King Bodawhpaya, mentioned in just a few paragraphs by E.M. Mendelson (1975) and earlier observers of Burmese religion. The second was as experts in *lik long* mentioned in passing by Jotika Khur-Yearn in his PhD thesis and article on

traditional and modern meditation practices in Shan Buddhist communities (2012, 2018). At the time, I had not reconciled these two pieces of information, but realising the scarcity of the encounter, I immediately spent several hours asking questions.

I was based at Shan State Buddhist University (SSBU) at the time. On my return there, I was directed to a single book on the subject of Zawti in the university library. This would later be one of my four key sources books on Zawti history and beliefs (see Introduction). I immediately set about reading it with the help of Ven. K, a Shan monk at SSBU. As a Shan monk, Ven K could quickly identify distinctive and puzzling features of the practices described in the book and became intrigued himself. He put me in touch with a friend in his hometown of Laihka, who knew of Zawti *zares* there. Another monk at SSBU, Ven. D, put me in touch with Dr Sai San Aik in Yangon, who is a lay temple committee member of Aung Bon Tha Monastery in Yangon, and who – I would later learn – had a Zawti grandfather. Aung Bon Tha was previously a Zawti monastery, despite being far removed from the Shan highlands where I had heard the Zawti lived. I travelled first to Laihka, then to Yangon.

As I was returning to London from this initial foray, Dr Sai San Aik informed me that a *poi sang long*, a novice ordination ceremony, would be taking place at the Zawti headquarters in Kachin State two months later. While novice ordination is a regular affair among Shan and Burmese Buddhists, and reasonably well documented, I was told that for the Zawti it took place only once every three years, so that this would be my only opportunity to see it given the usual duration of doctoral research. I rearranged my obligations at home and, disregarding the standard timeline for preparation and fieldwork, returned to witness an event that, as it turned out, brought together the entire Zawti community. The Zawti laity travelled from each of the 114 Zawti villages dotted hundreds of miles apart, from Yangon in the south, throughout Shan and Kachin States, and across the border in Zhefang, China, to attend to the *poi sang long* celebrations.

Within the space of a few months, then, an obscure heretical group alluded to with tantalising brevity in less than half a dozen studies of Burmese and Shan Buddhism, had emerged before me. In so doing, it presented further mysteries and paradoxes. The community is far-flung yet closely knit. At its centre is a highly esteemed, rigorous monastic community, with few monks yet many novices, yet these were all housed at a single centre, with most temples monkless and most practitioners dependent on the laymen extraordinaire, the *zare*, even for administering the

refuges and precepts. Despite its reputation for heresy, Zawti practice would over the next three years reveal itself as so committed to a true interpretation of the Pali scriptures that even its lay practices would throw me into the study of the *vinaya* texts of my undergraduate studies that I had eschewed in favour of the anthropological study of Buddhism on the ground. This orthodoxy, usually characteristic of reform movements of the centre from the 18th and 19th centuries onwards, challenged other preconceptions, since the Zawti were located mainly in the Shan highlands that J.C. Scott theorised as the ungoverned refuge of the heterodox. Further, while such reform is a distinctive feature of responses to colonialism, the Zawti, contrary to their reputed 19th-century origin (Sangermano 1833; J.G. Scott 1910; E.M. Mendelson 1975) date back to the 17th century, prior to the European attempts to take over the governance of the region. This also means that the Zawti are a rare instance of a named monastic lineage that can be traced back to a time before the 18th-century Thudhamma reform that shaped modern Burmese Buddhism, let alone the factions into which the Sangha splintered under colonialism.

Other aspects of their origins offered further surprises: now primarily found among the Shan, their origins were among the Bamar (Burmese majority) at Sagaing. Those boys who ordain as novices spend most of their noviciate training in the reading, copying and composition of Shan *lik long* literature. The vast majority disrobe, and it is from their number that emerge the next generations of *zare*, the foremost experts in Shan literature, and other lay attendants and specialists who lead the community and mediate between the laity and the rigorously observant monks, who number less than twenty at a time. The Zawti community previously transcribed *lik long* in the Tai Nuea script, but at some point transitioned to the ‘original’ Shan script used by the Tai Long Shan sub-group (see Introduction). For centuries on the move at the peripheries of Shan, Burmese, and Chinese territories, in order to avoid catastrophes, persecution and government control, and only cautiously joining the Thudhamma *gaining* out of the legal necessity of Ne Win’s reforms in the 1980s, they had once enjoyed significant royal patronage.

Over the past few years, then, it has been my privilege to uncover and document the history, practices, and beliefs that make sense of the Tai Zawti, whose identity is a bricolage of religious, ethnic, and national affiliations. To guide me, at the start of this thesis, I posed two questions, the answers to which permeate each chapter: who are the Zawti and why is so little known about them? My findings not only address the questions themselves, but also demonstrate how revealing the previously hidden history and nature of the Zawti tradition contributes to our understanding of Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia.

I first approached these questions, in Section One (The History of the Zawti) of this thesis, through a historical overview of the Zawti tradition (Chapters One and Two). Learning Shan language from scratch to literary competence during my period of doctoral research, I used the Zawti's own vernacular sources to piece together a vernacular history of the Zawti that is reflective of how the Zawti themselves conceive of their history and existence. In doing so, I have begun to examine how the Zawti write about their own history as a means of legitimating their origins and existence in the context of various monastic reforms and at the hands of numerous royal courts and governments, each with their own competing narratives. While I have written in this thesis that these texts are not handbooks for the Zawti laity *per se*, I saw these texts at various different Zawti *tai wat* locations, and the laity often told me to consult these texts if they were not sure how to answer a questions I posed them. These texts, then, were not only crucial to me in terms of piecing together a historical overview of the Zawti tradition, but also in terms of understanding how the Zawti understand themselves and wish to be presented. A benefit of being written out of the mainstream narratives is the opportunity to construct ones' own.

I learned from such texts that while the Zawti enjoyed royal patronage and prestigious associations at the start of their history, during the rule of King Tanninganway Min (r. 1714-1733) in the early eighteenth century, fallings from grace, reforms, warfare, atrocities, and calamities, from the rule of King Mahadhammaraza Dipadi (r. 1733-1752) onwards, have shaped much of their subsequent existence. While having their origins in Sagaing, Burma, their history in the following centuries is characterised by frequent migration throughout the Shan principalities, in what is now northern Shan State in Myanmar, and Dehong Dai and Jingpho Autonomous Prefecture in southwestern China. Somehow along the way, the Zawti became Shan but how and when exactly this happened, and what it means given that they reject so many aspects of Shan traditional culture and religion, is still beyond my understanding, and I hope it will be the subject of future research. By tracing how the Zawti travelled inside and outside of areas on the peripheries of national centres over the centuries, I have examined how they adapted to the social, cultural, and political contexts in which they found themselves, and how, through migration, and periods of voluntary and involuntary isolation, they have been able to preserve their monastic and lay traditions. The elusive nature of the Zawti, then, begins with this history of regrouping after marginalization and evading danger in search for a safe base for their monastic community and distinctive practice.

Through constructing the first historical timeline of the Zawti tradition, cross-referencing their own sources with broader historical developments and the occasional mention of them by others in the region, I have documented who the Zawti are from their origins up to the present. In so doing, I have overturned several inaccuracies perpetuated in scholarship that mention the Zawti since the nineteenth century. I have, for example, identified that Varajoti founded the tradition in the late seventeenth century, over a century earlier than claimed in previous scholarship by Sangermano, J. G. Scott, and Mendelson. This means that the early Zawti tradition emerged within an entirely different historical, social, and political context than previously thought, a fact that has repercussions not just for our understanding of them, but also of how we evaluate the Theravada reform movements of later centuries that shaped the Buddhism that we see in the region today. Another amendment I have made in relation to this limited body of scholarship is identifying the incorrect conflation between the Zawti and the Paramats first made by Father Sangermano and perpetuated in the subsequent scholarship of J.G Scott, E. M. Mendelson, and J.C. Scott (Sangermano 1833; J.G. Scott 1910; E.M. Mendelson 1975; J.C. Scott 2009). I demonstrate how and why this conflation was made and how it perpetuated a false narrative that the Zawti were ‘heretical’.

As the thesis shifts into Section Two (Zawti Monasticism), I demonstrate how Zawti monasticism is in fact wholly consistent with Theravada canonical and commentarial literature. I interrogate how and why the Zawti have been considered heretical, not just in scholarship, but among the wider Burmese and Shan community. In picking out distinctive aspects of Zawti monasticism, such as their water *sīmā*, which retains a textual orthodoxy that bypassed key Burmese reforms in the 19th and 20th centuries (Chapter Four), and their monastic structure (Chapter Six), I demonstrate how these aspects of Zawti monasticism are reflective of a commitment to textual orthopraxy that has been lost in mainstream Burmese Buddhism through various Sangha reforms.

The most distinctive features of Zawti monasticism that have been preserved is the Zawti monks’ strict interpretation of the Vinaya which pervades every aspect of monastic behaviour and comportment, the paucity of Zawti monks, and the fact that all the monks are ordained, trained, and reside in just one location (Chapter Five). In examining the daily routine of the Zawti monks I highlighted similarities between the Zawti and the Shwegyin. In the broader Burmese Buddhist community, the Shwegyin are considered orthodox on account of their

monastic austerity, close interpretation of the *Vinaya*, and monastic training. Zawti monastic training is comparable to Shwegyin monastic training, both groups placing a strong emphasis on monastic education and textual rigour. The key difference, however, is that the Zawti monks have retained their traditional monastic curriculum, which privileges Shan literacy and training in *lik long* traditional literature, a defining feature of Zawti monastic training and monastic life, as well as lay practice, over state approved monastic syllabi. The Zawti's commitment to Shan language and literature is particularly distinctive considering the pressures put on monasteries in Myanmar to take part in standardized monastic examinations as a marker of status and legitimacy (Chapter Five). While Zawti monastic behaviour is rooted in a close adherence to the canonical texts, the Zawti's preference for *lik long* over standard canonical and commentarial texts, could be interpreted as unorthodox from the perspective of the mainstream Burmese Sangha.

The Zawti's emphasis on *lik long* training at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery is reflective not only of the Zawti's commitment to traditional Shan cultural practices, but also of the Zawti's need to train novices and monks in *lik long* so that the most proficient among them can become *zares* when they disrobe and return to lay life. The Zawti's need for *zares*, a type of lay ritual practitioner, or layman extraordinaire, common to the wider non-Zawti Shan community, is greater than it is in that wider Shan community since the Zawti monks have no direct contact with lay people and live far away from the majority of the Zawti laity. This is in marked contrast to most Theravada monks who spend considerable amounts of their time performing rituals and blessings and providing sermons for lay people. In the absence of monks, it is the *zare/khing ho wat* who leads the Zawti laity in religious community rituals in front of Buddhist images housed in the local *tai wat* (Chapter Seven). The *tai wat* plays a central role in the lives of the Zawti laity who traditionally never kept Buddha images in their homes and visit their local village *tai wat* to perform offerings to the Buddha. The Zawti laity's lack of access to monks, and even Buddha images, is striking in comparison to mainstream Theravada attitudes in which lay people typically communicate with monks directly and keep Buddha images in their homes.

In Section Three (The Zawti Laity), I begin by examining how one *becomes* Zawti. While the vast majority of Zawti lay people enter the tradition by birth, there is an initiation process for those wishing to enter the tradition, which is distinctive given that in the Theravada context initiation is usually associated with monks rather than lay people. The initiation process

indicates that the Zawti way of life differs from mainstream Theravada, and that the Zawti themselves acknowledge this distinction. In this chapter, I demonstrate how Zawti lay morality and discipline, which is characteristically strict compared to that of most Theravada lay people, is reflective of the Zawti monastic tradition in that their approach is also rooted in a close observation of the basic Theravada Buddhist tenets laid out in the Pali Canon. The Zawti laity's commitment to their *upadesa* and *atsen ane* rules (Chapter Eight) impacts every aspect of Zawti lay life from the type of jobs they can do to the rituals they perform. It has the effect of demarcating Zawti lay attitudes from the mainstream, of shaping their villages differently from Shan norms. While anthropological studies of Theravada on the ground, particularly among ethnic minorities or in marginalised communities, often centre on practices unfamiliar from the Pali Canon, and which embrace a diverse pantheon and broader range of apotropaic practices, the Zawti do just the opposite: canonical orthodoxy is embraced not only by the monks but by the laity, who eschew the engagement with spirits, astrology, healing, and protection that are everyday among their Shan neighbours. The Zawti's rejection of such practices makes them stand out among the wider Shan community but in fact reflects a textual orthopraxy that may well be rooted in the Pali canon, in the rules outlined in the *Brahmajāla Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*. In the case of the Zawti laity, by and large, they do what they say they do, the austere lay rules listed in the *upadesa* and *atsen ane* rules are enacted in real life, through their zero-tolerance attitude towards alcohol (Chapter Three), their prohibition against keeping animals in their villages (Chapter Eight), and the young age of Zawti temple sleepers (Chapter Seven).

Despite the differences between Zawti lay practice and mainstream Shan lay practice, and the Zawti acknowledgement of their distinctiveness, the question of how apparent such distinctions are and to whom remains complicated. The Zawti laity historically lived in monocultural villages and had little communication with outsiders, and so I assume for the majority of Zawti lay people, their practices and traditions were passed on to them by their fathers and grandfathers, it was what they were born into and what they knew. They were simply facts of life. The extent to which the Zawti laity were aware of their own uniqueness, or their comparative austerity is still not clear to me, nor is the question of whether the Zawti themselves believed their austerity to be a more authentic interpretation of Theravada morality and ethics than that of others.

How are such distinctions understood by outsiders? In this thesis I have explored how the Zawti, despite their distinctive practices, have remained invisible to their Shan neighbours

through their shared ethnic affiliation. This indicates to me that the wider Shan population are unaware of the Zawti tradition and that the Zawti are happy with this situation. Among the broader Burmese population, the Zawti are even more obscure on account of their Shan ethnic affiliation. But I am not sure if the Zawti are so unknown in the areas of northern Shan State where there are numerous and sizeable Zawti lay communities. It is possible that there is greater Zawti visibility in such areas since the concentration of Zawti *zares*, who might perform for non-Zawti communities, is greater. It is also possible that since there are more Zawti communities in that area, there is less of a need to be so cautious about standing out there. I hope to explore such questions through future fieldwork and research.

In Chapter Eight I explored the ways in which the lay Zawti hyper-orthodox approach to morality and ethics diverges from the mainstream. In doing so, I compared the Zawti laity with the modern reform movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that emerged throughout South and Southeast Asia out of the fear of *sāsana* decline brought on by the colonial condition. The ‘Buddhist revival’ movements of the modern period were fuelled by an anxiety brought about by the perceived deterioration of monastic discipline. In response, lay people took it upon themselves to be the protectors of the *sāsana*, and post-canonical texts dedicated to lay morality and conduct became increasingly popular. Such texts advocated a strict adherence to lay conduct and comportment in ways that resembled the type of discipline that is engrained in the Zawti lay codes of conduct (*upadesa* and *atsen ane* rules), which predate reform. The Zawti emphasis on *sīla* as the crux of lay morality and ethics is rooted in the same fear of *sāsana* decline, but is further intertwined with the preservation of the Zawti monastic tradition and their way of life more broadly.

Through observing the Zawti’s religious practices, interviewing Zawti lay people, and translating Zawti texts, I have been able to begin to answer the question of ‘who are the Zawti’. My approach to this question has been shaped by the sources available to me, namely the Zawti-authored texts and the limited fieldwork I was able to conduct with different Zawti communities throughout Myanmar. This thesis therefore answers the question of ‘who are the Zawti’ from the perspective of the Zawti themselves, through their own means of identity construction and self-identification. The second question I posed at the beginning of this thesis, why so little is known, has been harder to decipher. This is because the reasons are multifaceted and relate to an interconnected web of historical circumstance, geography, the preference of the Zawti, and trends in scholarship. It is the result of the periods of imposed and self-imposed

isolation throughout the history of the Zawti tradition. The result of this isolation is that non-Zawti Shan neighbours and the broader Burmese community have either never heard of the Zawti or their understanding of the Zawti is limited to misconceptions and rumours. The historic isolation of the Zawti has meant that there is little evidence that situates the Zawti in specific places or at specific times, which means that the Zawti are seldom mentioned in any textual sources, either locally or in academic literature. Over the past half century, while anthropological studies have elucidated the practices, lives and identities of other Theravada communities, access to the Shan regions in both Myanmar and China, where most Zawti communities live, has been hindered by the lack of road access and travel restrictions implemented through military governments because of internal conflict and war. This has also contributed to the omission of the Zawti tradition in scholarship.

However, times are changing and the Zawti have opened their doors to outsiders, including non-Zawti lay people, non-Zawti monks, as well as to foreign researchers such as me and, in the early 2000s, Takahiro Kojima. By inviting local government officials and neighbouring monks to their three-yearly *poi sang long* ceremonies, the Zawti maintain the acceptance of Burmese officials and of the monks of the *Thudhamma gaing* to which they have belonged since the 1980s when Ne Win's reforms legally required the registration of both monks and monastic lineages. The Zawti now utilize social media, initiating communication and contact among all those who are interested in the Zawti tradition. The Zawti are beginning to integrate themselves into contemporary monastic and scholarly circles, especially through their passion for *lik long* literature, which is shared with the wider Shan community. This new wave of reintegration signals an opportunity for outsiders in the wider Shan and Burmese local community and for researchers to learn more about the nature of Zawti monasticism and the Zawti lay community, who have an unbroken lineage and history that spans over three hundred years.

In this thesis I have attempted to produce the first comprehensive overview of the Zawti tradition, its history, its values, and its practices, as understood by the contemporary Zawti community themselves. In providing the first dedicated study of the Zawti, I have corrected misconceptions in existing literature and overcome the silence of the past, helped by chance, circumstance, and a short-lived window of opportunity as well as by the Zawti themselves and their neighbours. Even if I have captured just a glimpse of the richness of the Zawti tradition, I have demonstrated that while the Zawti may have been hidden, they have maintained their

own uniquely cohesive religious and cultural community, just beyond the gaze of the outsiders, in plain sight.

Appendix A: Table of the Zawti abbots as recorded in *Pi Kon Kham* (2016: 44-45)

Table of Zawti Abbots									
Number	Name of Abbot	Birth		Age	Vassa	Years of service	Death		Place
		Sāsana calendar	Burmes e calendar				Sāsana calendar	Burmese calendar	
1	Varajoti	2198 (1654)	978	90	70		2288 (1744)	1068	Three door cave (Sagaing)
2	Nandamāla	2228 (1684)	1008	80	60	20	2308 (1764)	1088	Homalin
3	Sutsāka	2228 (1684)	1008	96	76	16	2324 (1780)	1104	Pwela
4	Nanda Talāpha	2250 (1706)	1068	51	31	15	2301 (1757)	1119	Pwela
5	Pañnakitti	2256 (1712)	1074	53	33	8	2309 (1765)	1127	Ho-pok, Lashio
6	Nanda Myitza	2261 (1717)	1079	60	40	12	2321 (1777)	1139	Mong Kwan
7	Tatmok Dhammapañña	2289 (1745)	1117	50	30	18	2339 (1795)	1167	Loi Lek, Ze Fang
8	Indapabhāvātī	2301 (1737)	1119	57	37	19	2358 (1814)	1176	Loi Lek, Dehong
9	Vāradhamma	2309 (1765)	1127	71	51	22	2380 (1836)	1198	Loi Lek, Dehong
10	Yasodhamma	2318 (1774)	1136	85	65	23	2403 (1859)	1221	Loi Lek, Dehong
11	Kitisāra	2337 (1792)	1155	70	50	4	2407 (1863)	1225	Kham Ten, Mong Mao
12	Indivāra	2372 (1829)	1191	60	40	26	2433 (1889)	1251	Kong Mao, Namkham
13	Nandapañña	2387 (1843)	1205	58	38	12	2445 (1901)	1263	Nong Yang, Mong Khur
14	Paṇḍita	2389 (1845)	1207	65	45	9	2454 (1910)	1272	Kong Mao, Namkham
15	Zayanda	2403 (1860)	1221	60	40	9	2463 (1919)	1281	Kong, Kala, Namkham
16	Kittinanda	2411 (186)	1229	55	35	3	2466 (1922)	1284	Kong Kala, Namkham
17	Govinda	2416 (1872)	1234	60	40	10	2476 (1932)	1294	Kong Kala, Namkham
18	Sundanda	2420 (1876)	1238	65	45	9	2485 (1941)	1303	Loi Khaw
19	Yasodhamma (Nā Khing)	2425 (1881)	1243	70	50	10	2495 (1951)	1313	Mong Mit
20	Kitidhamma	2436 (1892)	1254	74	54	15	2510 (1966)	1328	Nong Pha, Mong Yang
21	Paññāsāra	2474 (1930)	1292	67	41	30	2541 (1997)	1359	Nong Pha, Mong Yang
22	Vaṇṇapañña	2474 (1930)	1292			21	2561 (2019)	1381	Mong Yang

(As mentioned in the Introduction of this thesis, I had trouble attempting to transliterate many of the Zawti abbot names. Shan monks often shorten their Pali monastic names and so it is difficult to work out what the original Pali name is. I have attempted to transliterate the abbot names as they sound in spoken Shan.)

Appendix B: The Shwegyin Nikāya *Updaesa* as recorded in Than Tun's *History of Shwegyin Nikaya in Burma* (2019:68-74).

Shwegyin Nikāya *Upadesa*

1. Monks of the Shwegyin Nikāya should meet often. This is *aparihāniya*- the way with which we could stop degeneration. Monks who are living within a mile or two should go and meet twice a month at a *sīma*- Ordination Hall, near which the eldest monk among them lives. The meeting is for *uposatha* and one of the elders should read and explain this *uposatha* so that monks would be frequently reminded that they are to live in accordance with it.

2. No monk should allow himself to be severely alone. He must be summoned to attend conventions at the beginning or end of the Buddhist lent where Leaders are elected and instructions given by senior members to all juniors. When lay devotees want a monk as Head of monastery they have newly built, the assembly of monks with five qualifications:

- a) Completed ten years as an ordained monk.
- b) Mastered the first two parts of the Vinaya.
- c) Mastered the methods of Ordination Service.
- d) Mastered the method of Ablution.
- e) Mastered the art of preaching.

A monk could stay alone, i.e. not attached to his *upajjhāya* religious preceptor, if he has seven qualifications:

- a) Completed five years as an ordained monk.
- b) Mastered the first two parts of the Vinaya.
- c) Mastered four Suttanta.
- d) Mastered *Ambatthatu Suttanta*.
- e) Mastered the art of preaching on at least four topics.
- f) Mastered some methods of meditation.
- g) Mastered the methods of ablution and ordination services. If lay devotees want a monk to become head of a monastery they had built and if the monk they prefer has only the qualifications to stay alone, they must have the special permission from local leaders.

3. A monk of another group could be accepted in the Shwegyin Nikāya if he could satisfy the following points:

- a) That he had committed no sin as a monk.
- b) That though he had once been accused of being sinful as a monk, he could produce a judgement made by a judge expert in the Vinaya that he was found not guilty.
- c) That he is of good mind and good heart.
- d) That one monk of the Shwegyin Nikāya stands guarantor on his behalf.

The local leader would then accept him and give him a place to live at one of the monasteries under him. He would then become a new member of the Shwegyin Nikāya.

4. A member monk of the Shwegyin Nikāya must go often and see a local leader who is residing nearest to him and he must also report what learning and/or practicing that he is doing to the local registration office at the beginning of the Buddhist Lent.

5. Whenever and wherever there is a meeting of monks, a monk of the Shwegyin Nikāya must attend it and as he goes there he should take care that he (a) covers both shoulders with the robes, (b) talks softly, (c) makes no embarrassing noise to spit and (d) he would not sit ungainly with one knee up and thighs spread, nor lies with his legs and limbs spread wide (f) nor nods his head in drowsiness. He must also have the samana sārappa behaviour.
6. When monks meet at a feast offered at a funeral, etc, never talk about food. That is tiracchānakathā-way opposite to nirvana. Or do not talk jokes and enjoy the laughing. If possible talk on dhamma or keep quiet.
7. When a junior or a boy needs correction, do not shout or use coarse words of abuse or do not give him severe thrashing, etc. Talk with kindness to make him realise his mistake and let him carry water or sweep the compound or stay him longer in the classroom doing lessons while others play.
8. Never waste time by playing with pet dogs or cats or boys.
9. Never go shopping or if one has to do it for elders, go to the shop and place the order with as little word as possible.
10. Without being sick, never ride on coaches nor use umbr[a]jella. As one passes through a town or village, do not use any footwear. Never smoke nor eat betel after noon. Do not sell petty things that one has received as gifts and hoard up the cash. Do not give loans of money. Do not play host to lay men. Do not allow lay man take on loan carpets, mats, curtains, etc, of the monastery. Among lay men it is civil to talk in modesty. Between a monk and a lay man, the monk is neither humble nor haughty. There are eight things that a monk should not do in his dealings with a lay man (kuladūsaka). Or there are twenty one kind of services (anesana) that a monk should not do to please a lay man. If there is a monk doing such things, no other monk should ignore it. He must take it his responsibility to report it to Elders and Elders should use kind words at least for three times to stop that monk.
11. When the monk who is bad could not be stopped from his misbehaviour by kind words of Elders, do not go to the other extreme of denouncing him in public. Just avoid living, eating and attending classes with him. But if there is an occasion to talk with him, talk with sympathy.
12. Head of the monastery should use as his manual a book entitled Vinaya Kosalla and he should have a thorough knowledge of Khudda Sikkhā.
13. For an ordinary monk who is just a member of the monastery, he has to study only the Bh[i]jukkū mātikā.
14. At the morning or evening bell for prayer, take charge of the boys of the monastery so that their recitations are good and clear and after the morning prayer, do not let the boys go back into bed room to get some sleep.
15. Do not let much time lost through doing trifles like taking too much care about the boys of the monastery. Take one hour or two for Rukkhamūladhutanga or pātihāriya kammattāna.

16. Boys of the monastery must keep sabbath four times in a month a monk should do Ekāsanikadhutanga four times a month.
17. Care should be taken not to have a bad boy as a kappiya kārika when a monk has to go to a public function.
18. When the boy who accompanies a monk to a public function turns bad, both boy and monk should be punished because the monk is also responsible for the behaviour of the boy. The punishment is to carry fifteen pots of water each for the Buddha.
19. Never let a young novice go on behalf of the monk to a public function because the monk is lazy to move about.
20. Preach a sermon whenever possible to lay devotees who come to the monastery.
21. Teach the lay devotee how to offer properly light, flower and food at the shrines and to recite well the paritta.
22. While travelling, a monk should never stop at places belonging to monks of other groups. He must not sleep in an empty house or on a carriage left by the side of the road. When passing through a village a monk must have his vision restricted and he must not use slippers.
23. Never have women (including nuns) to serve as cooks or stewardesses at the monastery. Do not give religious lessons to these females.
24. Encourage students to learn religious lessons up to the highest stage and help them sit for various religious examinations.
25. When there are disputes between members of the Shwegyin Nikāya, let Vinaya experts of the Shwegyin Nikāya settle them as quickly and as peacefully as possible. Monks of a locality should take care that they have elected [a] competent judges among them.
26. Monks should go to Elders for advice and instructions as frequently as possible.
27. After the death of the Most Supreme Leader Shwegyin Sayadaw the[r]e was no king to name who was to be the next Most Supreme Leader. Then the monks of the Shwegyin Nikāya met together and selected their own Most Supreme Leader. As a popularly elected leader, the present Most Supreme Leader should receive respect no less than that was accorded to his predecessor who was selected by the king.
28. Recently there was a riot where about twenty-five monks were wounded. The riot occurred at a puppet show staged at the funeral of a monk. Learn a lesson from this episode. Monks of the Shwegyin Nikāya should never allow show at the funeral of monk or monk's parent. It should be a quiet occasion.
29. If there appears a monk who ignores all these regulations, persuade him to conform.
30. The monk who has been corrected by Elders should make a request to Elders that such an admonishing be made as frequently as possible.

Boys of the Monastery have ten rules (*sāmaṇera*)

- i. Carry a load for thirty times for the for the first offence of stealing fruit or food.
- ii. For the second sixty and for the third expulsion for good.
- iii. Expulsion too even for the first offence of thieving valuables.
- iv. And the same for fighting with a knife causing griev[i]ous injuries.
- v. Wasting all time playing deserves expulsion too.
- vi. Therefore sit quietly telling the beads of the rosary and no smoking, mind you.
- vii. Be present at the Prayer Hall both in the morning and evening.
- viii. And recitation of lessons in the daily routine.
- ix. Keep sabbath four times a month regularly.
- x. And become a novice after having learnt rues of Samanura [*sāmaṇera*] fully.

Appendix C: The Shwegyin Daily Routine as recorded in E.M. Mendelson's *Sangha and State* (1975:149-150).

4:00 Monks rise and mediate until dawn.

5:00 Bell rings. Breakfast in dining hall. Sometimes cooked in the monastery out of the *sayadaw's* "writings' fund"; sometimes brought by lay supporters.

5:45 Wooden log is struck. Assembly in Lecture Hall. Sayadaw gives instructions for the day. "This lasts until letters are visible in the books." Punishments are meted out on the spot. Novices are dismissed and lectures begin. After first set of lectures, all monks go out with bowls while *sayadaw* writes, for about an hour. Bowls left in dining hall. Monks bathe. Assistant *sayadaws* (*dhammacariyas*) lecture in two shifts.

11:30 Midday meal.

13:00 Sayadaw's lecture, follow by assistants'.

16:00 Cleaning and sweeping of halls, rooms, yards, paths, etc. Tasks allotted individually. Follow by ginger juice plus jaggery made by lay servants or visitors and shared out by monks.

18:00 *Paya-shiko* (honour to the Buddha).

18:30 Recitation of the day's lectures; in the case of examination candidates as late as 24:00. Some monks attend lectures in the dark with no lights and no books. Recitation in normal voice; no shouting aloud.

20:30 Log is struck. Meditation.

21:00 Sleep permitted for those not otherwise engaged.

Appendix D: The *Atsen Ane* Rules

ဖိတ်းဂုင်, <i>Phit Kung</i> ‘Offending the Triple Gem’		
	Shan	English
1.	တူခင်းယားယာ သင်ဝါးလိးဂါဝ်,ဝါခင်း တိုင်းခါ ကပ်ငိုခင်းတွင်း ခပ်းပန်းမွှ်,ယား လမ်း,လျှင်,လိင်းပိုင်း,တင်,တမ်းဝိ- ဂုင်,လူ့ယပ်.	If before taking medicine you take an oath, make a wish, or take money; or if you ask for a favour when offering food, flowers, or red or white <i>tsak tsā</i> flags, then you have destroyed the honour [of the triple gem, the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha].
2.	ဂါဝ်,ပီ ဝါခင်းပီ ခါပီတင်,ပီတမ်းပီ- ဂုင်,လူ့ယပ်.	If you ask for help from spirits (<i>phī</i>), make requests from spirits, seek the blessing of spirits, give offerings to spirits, then you have destroyed the honour [of the triple gem, the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha].
3.	တီးတီခင်းတီးကင်း ဂါခင်းတီခင်းဂါခင်း ကပ်ကင်း ဖင်လွမ်း.တီးယူ,တမ်းသပ်းဂုင်	If you take the sand from a sand pagoda and cast a charm by blowing on it and scattering it in the village.
4.	ကပ်သီးလျှင်,တီ, မုခင်းဖါဝ်,မါခင်းသုခင်းဂိုခင်းယေး	If you take water and flowers from the jar on the Buddha shrine/ shrine to the <i>dhamma</i> (<i>lik long</i>) and mix it as part of medicine.
5.	ကပ်ခမ်.ကပ်မွှ်, ခင်းတပ်းမွှ်,တီးခိုင်, တြး ပွင်မွှ်;မုခင်းခင်းကုင်းမိုင်းဂုခင်း, လမ်း;တြးကပ်ပွင်းယားယာ	If you take the dust/ ash from the palm of a Buddha statue and make it into medicine.
6.	လှိုင်းမိုင်း;လှိုင်းဝခင်း ထွမ်း,သိုင်ဆူကပ်ဂိုတီးကတိမ်းခမ်;ယုမ် ထွမ်း	If you choose the time by listening to the sound of the birds and follow it and have faith in it.
7.	သွခင်းခိခင်း.သွခင်းလမ်းတင်,ပီခင်းခါပီခင်း	If you study <i>khaen</i> (traditional Shan martial arts) and you give offerings to the spirit of <i>khaen</i> .
8.	ခုခင်းမိုင်း ကမ်း,လှ်.ကမ်,တိုင်းဂုင်းလမ်းဂျး,ခုပ်.ဂျးဝိ; ရဂါခင်းကမ်,မီးသီ,လသိမ်းခါ,	If you are not asked by a ruler/ authority but you still go to visit a monk who is not rich in <i>sila</i> or the religious duties of a monk.
9.	ဂုခင်း,ဂုခင်းတြးပီခင်းလမ်းလှ်တြးပီတဂါတ်းလှ် ဂုင်းလေး,ဂုင်းဂိုတ်း;ဂုင်းသိုဝ်.ဂုင်းဂူသေ ကင်း;ယွင်းဂုင်,ပီ,တမ်းယွင်းကပ်ခါခိခင်း	If you have made a Buddha image or <i>Tipitaka</i> and have not consecrated, it and you sell it.

10.	ဂျပုန်း,ဂျာင်း,တြေးပီခ်လင်းလှ်တြေးပိတဂတ်းလှ် ဂှ်းလော့,သွခ်းဂှ်းဂပ်း မးယဝ်.ကမ်,ထုဂ်,လှ်သမ်.ခါခိုခ်း ကမ်,ခခ်းခိုခ်းခါပိတ်း	If you buy or make a copy of a Buddha image or <i>Tipitaka</i> which you do not pour upon with care and you are not pleased with it and you sell it again.
11.	ကပ်တူဂ်လိဂ်းဂမ်,မဝု,တိမ်;သေ ဧဂု.ဧဂဂျုခ်းယေးမခ်းသုခ်	If you write the words of the <i>kammavācā</i> to protect your household or village from danger.
12.	ပိုခ်းဂှ်းပင်လိင်.လမ်;တမ်းဗီလေ; ဂျု,ယိမ်;ဂျု,တူဂ်းဂျု,ဂိခ်းခပ်;ဗခ်း ခိုဂ်.ပုခ်	If when others do witchcraft or make offerings to a spirit and you go secretly to meet them and share a meal with them like rice and curry, meat or fish.
13.	လူးမေ့လူလးမိုင်းလူးတဂ်းပေ,တင်, ပခ်းပုခ်းဂှ်းတဂ်းလီတဂ်းလျ.	If you go to a palm reader or astrologer and you keep this company.
14.	ယူ,ကမ်,လီ ဂိခ်းကမ်,ဝါခ်းလးဂှ်း. ခွခ် (ဂှ်း.ဗခ်)	If you are not well and can't eat and you go for divination to call back your spirit to your body.
15.	ခါလပ်;ခါယု;လှ်ဂးမးခ်, ပိခ်ဂှ်း,လူ.တးသိင်;ယဝ်.	If you sell drugs or alcohol.

ဗိတ်းသိခ် <i>Phit Sin</i> 'Breaking the Rules/ Wrong Religious Observance'		
	Shan	English
1	ဂိခ်းငိုခ်းယု. ငိုခ်းလဂ်.မပ်, ငိုခ်းမိုပိုခ်း	If you make money through corruption, bribery, fining others, then you have destroyed the honour [of the triple gem]. ["Loaning rice or money and receiving interest is not considered a means for living" <i>Pi Kon Kham</i> 2016: 145]
2	ဂိခ်းလင်းဂျပ်, တင်, -ဂှ်း; ဂှ်းတင်; ဂှ်းလပ်; မဂ်,မိုဂ်;လှ်ယမ်း	If you earn money from carrying/ being a porter of guns, swords, bullets, gun powder, then you are then you have destroyed the honour [of the triple gem].
3	ဂိခ်းလင်းတင်,ဂျပ်,ခိုဂ်.လိပ်;ပုလိပ်; သခ်းလှ်.ခွဂ်းလင်းခိုဂ်.	If you earn money from carrying/being a porter of raw meat or raw fish (anything uncooked), then you are then you have destroyed the honour [of the triple gem]
4	ဂိခ်းလင်းဂျပ်, တင်, ယု;ဗိခ်, လပ်;	If you earn money from carrying/ being a porter of opium or alcohol, then you are then you have destroyed the honour [of the triple gem].

5	ဂိဏ်းလောင်းဂျေးဝှမ်း၊ ဂျိုးတုဂ်းခူ၊ လောင်းခိုဝ်းသုင်၊ ထိုင်ဂျိုခင်းယေးခပ်	If you make money from herding buffalo to the house of the butcher, then you are then you have destroyed the honour [of the triple gem].
6	တုဂ်းခူလောင်းခိုဝ်း သိုဝ်းခါဝှမ်း ဂျိုး မူ ဂီ၊ ဂျပ်းသမ်၊ ဂျိုးဂျိတ်းပခပ်ဝှမ်း၊ ဂါင်ဂျေးခခမ်မခင်း	If you make money from being the broker for a butcher buying or selling cows, buffalo, pigs and chicken, then you are then you have destroyed the honour [of the triple gem].
7	ဗုဒ္ဓုယိင်းဂျေးခိုဝ်းဗုဒ္ဓ်မခင်းတံပီ၊ တခင်းဗင်လေး၊ ခင်းပင်သွမ်းခခမ်၊ ဗုဒ္ဓုလံး ဂျေးခိုဝ်းကခပ်သမ်၊ လံးဂပ်းတုဝ်ခင်းမခင်း	If a woman's husband dies and he is not yet cremated, and she has intercourse with another man, then she turns her back on the triple gem.
8	ပိုခင်းလိုင်ဝှမ်း ဂျိုး မျ၊ ဗေဂ်၊ ဂခပ်တင်း ဂုပ်းမိုဝ်းမိုင်၊ ဂခပ်ဂုပ်းကပ်တုဝ်သိုဝ်း၊ တုဝ်ခမးဝါးမျးတုဝ်ငါခခမ်၊ ပိုခင်း တွခပ်ယပ်၊ ဂုပ်းသမ်၊ ခိုခင်းကပ်တုဝ်ပေး ခခမ်။	If you breed cattle and share ownership and decide to divide up the cattle and you decide you only want female buffalo and so everyone castrates the cattle and then you change your mind, then have destroyed the honour [of the triple gem].
9	ပိုခင်းလက်၊ တွခပ်ဝှမ်း ဂျိုး မျ၊ ဂုပ်းသေ လေးဂုပ်းသမ်၊ လိုဝ်းဂိခပ်ဂိုင်းမခင်းယူ၊	If you castrate cattle, buffalo or horses and make a profit from them, then you have destroyed the honour [of the triple gem].
10	ကပ်လင်းကပ်ယျးဗခိခပ်၊ ဂမ်၊ လေး၊ တိုဂ်းတခပ်၊ ပခပ်မျ၊ ဝှမ်းဂျိုးဂျိတ်းယျးယျ	If you use liquor or opium to make medicine and give it to horses, cattle, or buffalo, then you are then you have destroyed the honour [of the triple gem].
11	ကပ်လင်းယျးလမ် ဂမ်၊ လေး၊ ဂျိတ်းယျးယျဂှမ်းခိးဂှမ်းပီခပ် လှိုင်းဂျးဂျးမးခိ၊ ပီခပ်သိခပ်လူ၊ သိုင်းသိုင်းယပ်။	If you use liquor or opium to aid ill people, all of these break a religious observance.

တွခပ်ကလျ၊ ရလူ၊ <i>Ton Atsāra Lu</i> 'The Chapter on Destroyed Conduct'		
1	သင်လံးကပ်မိ၊ ဝတ်၊ ဂျိုးဗေဂျိုးတိုခင်းသေယပ်။ ပုဂ်၊ လေး၊ ဂခပ်၊ တေး	If you take wood from the temple, you must repay it and ask for the pardon of the monks.
2	သင်ကပ်မိ၊ လရွပ်းသျလျး မိ၊ ခုဝ်ဂျိုးသင်၊ သွခပ်သေ	If the temple takes down their temple or <i>tsalop</i> or wooden bridge and you want to use/ recycle the wood, you have to ask for permission.
3	သင်လံးကပ်မိ၊ တမ်းခွခပ်၊ သံးတိုခင်းသေပုဂ်၊ လေး၊ ဂခပ်၊ တေး	If you take wood from the <i>tsam khon</i> (flagpole), you must repay it.
4	လံးဂိခပ်တင်းဂိခပ်တီးရွှင်း တဂ်းလံးဗေဂျိတ်းသေ	If you get the chance to eat food in the monastery, you should repay it.
5	သင်လံးဂိခပ်ဂျင်ခပ်၊ ဂျင်ငိုခင်း သင်၊ သွခပ်သေ	If you charge interest, you should be punished.

6	ဂူဆင်းမီးမေးယူ,သမ်.ငလ,သင် သင်,သွန်သေ	If a married man chats/ has an affair with an unmarried woman, they should be punished.
7	ထွမ်,မေဂျမ်းခင်းခင်းသမ်,ဗပ်.ပလ,ပဝ,လ, သင်,သွန်သေ	If you listen to a <i>mo khwam</i> 's folk songs which are <i>samphappalapa</i> (Pali: nonsense), you should be punished.
8	ငိုဆင်းခမ်းကဆင်လီ;လူလင်းဂုဆင်,ဂ,ဂုး	If you make money from trading the five things (weapons, drugs, alcohol, etc).
9	ငိုဆင်းခမ်းကဆင်လီ;လူလင်းဂုဆင်,ဂ,ဂုးပိုင်လုံ ဂးဗှင်ဂးမေးပီဆင်ဂျီဆင်းပီဆင်ယေးလုံ ငိုဆင်းမေးမူတ်.မေးမေလုံငိုဆင်းတင်.ဂတွဆင်းလုံ ငိုဆင်းမုဆင်လင်းတင်.သီ,လ ငိုဆင်းဗူးတင်;ပေ,တင်,ဂျူးတြး ငိုဆင်းဂီပ်.ဂင်ငိုဆင်းတိပ်.တြး မပ်,သိုဝ်း ငိုဆင်းထိုဝ်းဆိ.ကပ်ဂျီတ်းဂုဆင်, ဂုင်းတြးပီဆင်လင်းငလ;သင်ကပ်ဂေ, လေ,တီ,ဂွင်းမူးငလ;သင်ကပ်ခူဆင်းကပ် လေးဆမ်ဂေ,ငလ;သင်ဂုဆင်,ဂုင်းတြးပီဆင်လင်းသင်း ထူးဂွင်းမူးထိုဝ်းဆိ.ကမ်,ထုဂ်,ခုပ်.ပံး	If you are going to build a Buddha image or pagoda, you should not use money made from arranging a marriage, money made from spirit mediumship, being a heretic, money from a monk with no <i>sila</i> , money from an astrologer, money made through corruption, bribe money, money made dishonestly. If you make Buddha images or pagodas using this money, they are not suitable for worship.
10	ဂူဆင်းဂိဆင်ဗိဆင်,ဂိဆင်ပင်းလမ်.မပ်,လီ ဂျီမံးဂဆင်လူ, ပီဂ်.မဆင်းဂျေးတြးဂေးမပ်,လီထမ်,	If a man takes opium or marijuana- it is not good, and you shouldn't give any offerings or listen to his sermons.
11	ပိုဆင်းမားယွဆင်းလုဂ်;ယိုင်းသင်ဂုဂ်း မပ်,လီဝါးဂးခဆင်မဆင်း	If others come and ask about your young unmarried daughter, it is not good to say a price.
12	ခွင်းခွင်ဝီ.ဂျိုးပိုဆင်း ပဆင်ပိဆင်းယပ်.ဝါးမား ခွ်းလျ.သမ်.ယွဆင်းခိုဆင်	If you give someone something and then you ask for it back afterwards– then you are then you have destroyed the honour [of the triple gem].
13	ခွင်တီးဂျင်းလမ်.သင်,သိုဝ်.ကပ်ကမ်, ပီဆင်သင် ဗးလမ်.ကမ်,ပီဆင်သင်ပေး ဂျူးလွင်းမဆင်း	* <i>Meaning of this sentence is not clear.</i>
14	မိုဝ်းသိုဝ်.တင်လူ,ကမ်,လီသီတ်း	When you buy offerings to donate, it is not good to bargain.

15	ခွင်ပိုင်းပိတ်းလေးသင် ဂျူလင်းပိုင်း တင်းခိုင်းမားကင်ဆင်းမင်လီကင်	If others leave something behind and you know they will come back- don't take it or it is stolen.
16	တိမ်းလိက်းယွင်းတင်းလူပင်ပင်ပိုင်းမင်ကပ်း	If you write a letter with praise of the offerings of others, it is not suitable.
17	ပိုင်းမာပ, မှ်ဂင်သေ ကင် ငိုင်းဆင်းပင်ဂုင်းမင်, လီကင်	Money made from corruption or bribes is not appropriate.
18	ငိုင်းလျ, ဆေးလျ, လင် မင်, လီဂိုတိးပိုင်းဝင်, လူ, ဂွမ်းတင်းဂုင်း	When we make an offering and people make a contribution, we shouldn't keep it.
19	ကင်ဂိင်မင်, လီ မွှ်ယုးခင်, တိက်, ဝးတင်းလူ, ဗြူး တြးသင်, ချ, သမ်. ကင်ပုဂ်. လော့ဂင်, တေးပေး, ငမးဂုင်းထင်မင်, လီ	You should not offer the same popcorn and fruit that is to be offered to the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, to pay homage to your elders or parents.
20	ခွင်ပိုင်းလင်, ပိုင်းယု. ပိုင်းဂိုမင်တင်းလူဆင်းမင်, လီသိုဝ်.	Things that have been stolen, spoiled or plundered, they are not appropriate, and you shouldn't buy them. [Refers to the Second Precept, to abstain from stealing.]
21	မိုင်းပွဲ. သိင်လူမင်, လီဂျးခါ	When observing the precepts, it is not appropriate to trade.
22	ဆမ်းမေး, တီးရွင်းမင်, ဂိင်လိး	It is not appropriate to drink from the monastery well.
23	တီးရွင်းကလိလင်. ခင်လျ, ဂုင်းမင်, လီဂိင်	It is not good to eat at <i>alajji</i> [<i>alajji</i> 'shameless' refers to corrupt monks] temples.

**Appendix E: The Brahma-Gāla Suttanta [The Brahmajāla Sutta] as translated in
T.W. Rhys Davids Dialogues of the Buddha: Translated from the Pāli (16-26).**

“Whereas some recluses and Brahmans, while living on food provided by the faithful, earn their living by wrong means of livelihood, by low arts [*micchājīva*], such as these: –

- 1) Palmistry–prophesying long life, prosperity, &c. (or the reverse), from marks on a child’s hands, and feet, &c.
- 2) Divining by means of omens and signs.
- 3) Auguries drawn from thunderbolts and other celestial portents.
- 4) Prognostication by interpreting dreams.
- 5) Fortune-telling from marks on the body.
- 6) Auguries from marks on cloth gnawed by mice.
- 7) Sacrificing to Agni.
- 8) Offering oblations from a spoon.
- 9- 13) Making offerings to gods of husks, of the red powder between the grain and the husk, of husked grain ready for boiling, of ghee, and of oil.
- 14) Sacrificing by spewing mustard seeds, &c., into the fire out of one’s mouth.
- 15) Drawing blood from one’s right knee as a sacrifice to the gods.
- 16) Looking at the knuckles, &c., and, after muttering a charm, divining whether a man is well born or lucky or not.
- 17) Determining whether the site, for a proposed house or pleasance, is lucky or not.
- 18) Advising on customary law.
- 19) Laying demons in a cemetery.
- 20) Laying ghosts.
- 21) Knowledge of the charms to be used when lodging in an earth house.
- 22) Snake charming.
- 23) The poison craft.
- 24) The scorpion craft.
- 25) The mouse craft.
- 26) The bird craft.
- 27) The crow craft.
- 28) Foretelling the number of years that a man has yet to live.
- 29) Giving charms to ward off arrows.
- 30) The animal wheel–

Gotama the recluse holds aloof from such low arts.

‘Or he might say: “Whereas some recluses and Brahmans, while living on food provided by the faithful, earn their living by wrong means of livelihood, by low arts such as these– Knowledge of the signs of good and bad qualities in the following things and of the marks in them denoting the health or luck of their owners: – to wit, gems, staves, garments, swords, arrows, bows, other weapons, women, men, boys, girls, slaves, slave-girls, elephants, horses, buffaloes, bulls, oxen, goats, sheep, fowls, quails, iguanas, earrings, tortoises, and other animals–

Gotama the recluse holds aloof from such low arts.”

‘Or he might say: “Whereas some recluses and Brahmans, while living on food provided by the faithful, earn their living by wrong means of livelihood, by low arts, such as soothsaying, to the effect that –

[10] The chiefs will march out.
The chiefs will march back.
The home chiefs will attack, and the enemies' retreat.
The enemies' chiefs will attack, and ours will retreat.
The home chiefs will gain the victory, and the foreign chiefs suffer defeat.
The foreign chiefs will gain the victory, and ours will suffer defeat—
Thus will there be victory on this side, defeat on that—

Gotama the recluse holds aloof from such low arts.”

‘Or he might say: “Whereas some recluses and Brahmans, while living on food provided by the faithful, earn their living by wrong means of livelihood, by such low arts as foretelling—

- 1) There will be an eclipse of the moon.
- 2) There will be an eclipse of the sun.
- 3) There will be an eclipse of a star (Nakshatra)
- 4) There will be an aberration of the sun or the moon.
- 5) The sun or the moon will return to its usual path.
- 6) There will be aberrations of the stars.
- 7) The stars will return to their usual course.
- 8) There will be a fall of meteors.
- 9) There will be a jungle fire.
- 10) There will be an earthquake.
- 11) The god will thunder.
- 12-15) There will be rising and setting, clearness and dimness, of the sun or the moon or the stars, or foretelling of each of these fifteen phenomena that they will betoken such and such a result.

‘Or he might say: “Whereas some recluses and Brahmans, while living on food provided by the faithful, earn their living by wrong means of livelihood by low arts, such as these:

-
- Foretelling an abundant rainfall.
 - Foretelling a deficient rainfall.
 - Foretelling a good harvest.
 - Foretelling scarcity of food.
 - Foretelling tranquillity.
 - Foretelling disturbances.
 - Foretelling a pestilence.
 - Foretelling a healthy season.
 - Counting on the fingers.
 - Counting without using the fingers.
 - Summing up large totals.
 - Composing ballads, poetizing.
 - Casuistry, sophistry—

Gotama the recluse holds aloof such low arts.”

‘Or he might say: “Whereas some recluses and Brahmans, while living on food provided by the faithful, earn their living by wrong means of livelihood, by low arts, such as—

- 1) Arranging a lucky day for marriage in which the bride or bridegroom is brought home.
- 2) Arranging a lucky day for marriages in which the bride or bridegroom is sent forth.
- 3) Fixing a lucky time for the conclusion of treaties of peace [or using charms to procure harmony].
- 4) Fixing a lucky time for the conclusion of treaties of peace [or using charms to procure harmony].
- 5) Fixing a lucky time for the outbreak of hostilities [or using charms to make discord].
- 6) Fixing a lucky time for the calling in of debts [or charms for success in throwing dice].
- 7) Fixing a lucky time for the expenditure of money [or charms to bring ill luck to an opponent throwing dice].
- 8) Using charms to make people lucky.
- 9) Using charms to procure abortion.
- 10) Incantations to bring on dumbness.
- 11) Incantations to keep a man's jaws fixed.
- 12) Incantations to make a man throw up his hands.
- 13) Incantation to bring on deafness.
- 14) Obtaining oracular answers by means of the magic mirror.
- 15) Obtaining oracular answers through a girl possessed.
- 16) Obtaining oracular answers from a god.
- 17) The worship of the Sun.
- 18) The worship of the Great One.
- 19) Bringing forth flames from one's mouth.
- 20) Invoking Siri, the goddess of Luck –

Gotama the recluse holds aloof from such low arts.”

‘Or he might say: “Whereas some recluses and Brahmans, while living on food provided by the faithful, earn their living by wrong means of livelihood, by low arts, such as these:–

- 1) Vowing gifts to a god if a certain benefit be granted.
- 2) Paying such vows.
- 3) Repeating charms while lodging in an earth house.
- 4) Causing virility.
- 5) Making a man impotent.
- 6) Fixing on lucky dwellings.
- 7) Consecrating sites.
- 8) Ceremonial rinsings of the month.
- 9) Ceremonial bathings.
- 10) Offering sacrifices.
- 11-14) Administering emetics and purgatives.
- 15) Purging people to relieve the head (that is by giving drugs to make people sneeze).
- 16) Oiling people's ears (either to make them grow or to heal sores on them).
- 17) Satisfying people's eyes (soothing them by dropping medicinal oils into them).
- 18) Administering drugs through the nose.
- 19) Applying collyrium to the eyes.
- 20) Giving medical ointment for the eyes.
- 21) Practising as an occultists.
- 22) Practising as a surgeon.
- 23) Practising as a doctor for children.

- 24) Administering roots and drugs.
- 25) Administering medicines in rotation–

Gotama the recluse holds aloof from such low arts.”

‘These brethren, are the trifling matters, the minor details, of mere morality, of which the unconverted man, when praising the Tathâgata, might speak.’

Here ends the Long Paragraphs on Conduct [*Mahāsīla*].

Appendix F: Glossary of terms

atsen ane the list of additional rules regarding moral behaviour followed by the Zawti laity. Used interchangeably with the Shan term *phing thung tām*.

bhikkhu a fully ordained monk.

daḥhī-kamma a strengthening ritual used by monks from a less prestigious lineage when they wish to stay at a temple/ join the lineage of a more orthodox monastic lineage.

dhamma shelf translation of the Shan *kheng trā* or *toek trā* which refers to the Zawti's *dhamma* altar which takes the place of a Buddha altar.

gaing (Burmese Pali derived from Pali *gaṇa*) Refers to monastic groups, divisions, or lineages.

gopka derived from the Pali *gopaka*. Used by the Zawti to refer to the lay committee in charge of temple affairs and organization.

ho lik a type of lay ritual practitioner, the reader of texts.

ho lu a type of lay ritual practitioner, the reader of offerings, with the sense of a 'leader' of offerings.

kappiya a male ritual attendant.

kāp āon 'small batch' refers to the small Zawti ordination ceremony for boys who have completed primary ordination.

kāp lūng 'big batch' refers to the large Zawti ordination ceremony for boys who have not completed primary education.

khing Zawti term for male elders. Khing are males who take part in the temple sleeping practices during the rainy season. The term is also pronounced as **ching** by some Zawti.

khing khaep the male lay head in charge of rice husk.

khing ho wat the male lay head of the *wat*, the Zawti village temples with resident monks.

khing kyong the male lay head of the monastery. The *khing kyong* of Paññālaṅkāra Monastery is also known as the *bhukyaung* and he leads the laity in community rituals with the monks.

khing kyāw the male lay head in charge of meals.

khing tsalong ing the head male lay attendant at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery.

kyong (Shan) temple, monastery.

lik long traditional Shan poetic literature.

loka derived from the Pali *lokiya* (belonging to this world). Used by the Zawti to refer to refer to beliefs associated with auspicious omens and superstitions related to worldly affairs.

nai Zawti term for female elders. *Nai* are women who take part in temple sleeping practices during the rainy season.

nai hoen som the group of lay women who prepare the food for the monks at Paññālaṅkāra Monastery.

nāyaka derived from the Pali *nāyaka*. For the Zawti, the term *nāyaka* refers to the committee of *khing ho wat* and *zare* practitioners who use *lik long* texts to lead ceremonies held at the local *tai wat*.

pabajjā the novice (*sāmaṇera*) ordination ritual procedure.

paramat group refers to the term *paramattha* (Pali: the highest truth) but it is more often used derogatorily to describe groups who pursue ultimates by extreme unorthodox means. The Zawti were wrongly labelled as being Paramat in nineteenth century scholarship.

phing thung tām literally meaning ‘the customs and traditions’ refers to the list of additional rules regarding moral behaviour followed by the Zawti laity.

phī in Shan this is a general term for spirits. The Zawti use it to refer to spirits and beliefs associated with spirits.

poi (Shan) festival, celebration. Derives from the Burmese term ပွဲ ပွဲ, meaning ‘festival’.

poi sang long (Shan) novice ordination celebration.

sang long (Shan) novice-to-be.

saṅghakamma monastic legal procedures.

saopha royal title used by the Tai hereditary rulers.

sāmaṇera a Buddhist novice monk.

shinbyu (Burmese) novice ordination celebration.

State Sanghamahanayaka Committee a regulatory committee established in 1980 by the Ne Win government to oversee monastic affairs.

Tai the Tai are an ethnolinguistic group spread throughout mainland Southeast Asia, southwestern China and as far as Assam in north-eastern India who share the same broad ethnicity, closely related languages, religion and culture.

tai wat Zawti temples with no resident monks that house Buddha images and *lik long* texts.

Thudhammā gaing The largest monastic group in Myanmar.

udakukkhepa-sīmā the water *sīmā*, an unconsecrated monastic boundary in which monastic procedures can take place. The *udakukkhepa-sīmā* is the Zawti monks' *sīmā* of choice.
upadesa derived from the Pali *upadesa* (instruction). Used by the Zawti to refer to the rules regarding moral behaviour followed by the Zawti laity.

upasampadā the (*bhikkhu*) higher ordination ritual.

uposatha Buddhist days of observance calculated in accordance with the four lunar phases: the new moon, full moon, and two quarter moons in between.

Varajoti the name of the monks who founded the Zawti tradition.

vassa Buddhist monastic rains retreat, takes place for three months during the wet season in Southeast Asia.

veda in the Tai context *veda* refers to the practices associated with the Brahmanical tradition which includes astrology and palm reading.

zare Shan term for educated lay ritual practitioners who are experts in composing, reciting and writing traditional Shan literature. The term *zare* derives from the Burmese term ဘုရား meaning 'clerk'.

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