



## The Cult of Thamanya Sayadaw

### The Social Dynamism of a Formulating Pilgrimage Site

This article analyzes the cult of the monk Thamanya Sayadaw and examines the process by which a community-based village-dwelling monk became a forest-dwelling monk, and then a nationally prominent cult figure. Focusing on the social dynamics which led to the community becoming a major center for pilgrimage, I describe how a large-scale enterprise has emerged around this monk. The materialization of such power suggests that the cult of Thamanya Sayadaw emerged out of a dialectic transaction between the donation of religious land, and a popular belief in the prosperity of the followers as the realization of the material manifestation of the power of saints. I also argue that we need to pay attention to the participation of his followers as well as the practices of the monk himself, and also distinguish two types of participation: the participation of the residents who have settled on this land, and that of pilgrims.

KEYWORDS: cult of a saint—materialization of power—engaged Buddhism—pilgrimage—religious land—forest-dwelling

THIS ARTICLE analyzes the cult of the monk U Winaya (1912–2003), commonly known as Thamanya Sayadaw, and examines the process by which he, as a community-based village-dwelling monk, became a forest-dwelling monk and then rose to become a nationally prominent cult figure. The period I treat here concerns the years after the military coup took place in 1988, during which Burma (the Union of Myanmar) has undergone substantial political and economic change. This article focuses on the social dynamics that led to a previously uninhabited mountainous region becoming a major center for pilgrimage.

In 1980, U Winaya began ascetic practices on Thamanya Taung (Mount Thamanya) in Karen State, and gradually acquired a reputation for his supernatural powers. The land within a three mile radius of the mountain was donated to him and was designated as *thathana myei* (religious land).<sup>1</sup> The area developed into a town with a population of twenty thousand. *Thathana myei* may denote a type of land donated for religious purposes, for example, pagodas, monasteries, Christian churches, Muslim mosques, or Hindu temples, but to be recognized officially as *thathana myei*, the land must be registered with the Religious Ministry. It then becomes exempt from taxes, in contrast to nonreligious land, which comes under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

The cult of Thamanya Sayadaw belongs to the tradition of forest monks, who have been one of the central themes in the study of Theravāda Buddhist societies.<sup>2</sup> As in other such societies, forest-dwelling monks in Burma (*tàwya kyaung ne sayadaw*) are highly regarded and more likely to be worshipped than village or city-dwelling monks, since the former are believed to follow a strict ascetic regimen aimed at becoming an *arahant* (*yahànda*)—a Buddhist saint who attains enlightenment following the path set out in the dhamma.

In Burmese saint cults, however, the same saintly figure may be interpreted in different ways. Some say that Thamanya Sayadaw is an *arahant*, but others say he is a *weikza* or *htwetyat pauk* (TOSA 2000a). An *arahant* is an orthodox saint mentioned in the Buddhist canon, whereas *weikza* and *htwetyat pauk* are regarded as heterodox in the sense that their existence is not clearly described in the canon. *Weikza* literally means “one who possesses knowledge” (Pāli: *vijja*), and in Burmese Buddhism, *weikza* denotes an individual who has attained supernatural powers through the acquisition of this-worldly knowledge (*lāwki pyinnya*; Pāli: *loki*

*paññā*), such as alchemy, astrology, magical charms, or folk medicine. The significance of belief in *weikza* or *htwetyat pauk* in Burmese society has been interpreted in several different ways. MENDELSON (1961), the first scholar to discuss this phenomenon and the Messianic associations (*gaing*) based on such beliefs, saw it as a “third component” of Burmese religion, on a par with Buddhism and the cult of the *nats*. Mendelson’s position contrasts with that of Spiro, whose argument is based on the premise that Burmese people distinguish Buddhism from non-Buddhist beliefs, and he did not treat the belief in *weikza* separately in either of his books on Burmese religions. In his book on supernaturalism, SPIRO (1967) explains the four types of supernatural beings: spirits, demons, ghosts, and witches. He discusses the *weikza* belief and *gaing* activities under the same heading of “witches.” In his other book on Buddhism, Spiro includes these topics under “Esoteric Buddhism,” one of the four systems of Buddhism, and explains that the sects based on *weikza* belief, which originally derive from non-Buddhist practice, become Buddhist only when they are integrated with Buddhist beliefs in a future Buddha, or a Universal Emperor (SPIRO 1970). SCHOBER, who prefers the term “*htwetyap[t] pauk* mysticism” to “*weikza* belief,” defines *htwetyap[t] pauk* as “a place through which one leaves” the cycle of rebirth in order to attain enlightenment (1989a, 14). She criticized those assertions of Mendelson, Spiro, and Tambiah that *weikza* (*htwetyap[t] pauk*) beliefs take on millennial forms only in times of socioeconomic or political crisis, and showed that *htwetyap(t) pauk* mysticism is a perennial component of Theravāda Buddhism (SCHOBER 1989a, 264–65).

As SCHOBER (1989a, 265) points out, it is difficult to distinguish the “eremitic” aspects of *htwetyat pauk* from those of forest-dwelling monks. This is one of the reasons why a particular cult figure can be interpreted in two ways, as *arahant* or *weikza* (*htwetyat pauk*). Canonical descriptions of the supernatural powers achieved by *arahant* resemble those found in specialist writings on *weikza* beliefs. Both are believed to acquire the powers of prophecy, conferring luck, mind reading, and deliverance from the body. The terms used to refer to power are different: *eikdhi* (Pāli: *iddhi*) in the case of *arahant* and *theikdhi* in the case of *weikza* (TOSA 2000a, 298), although the powers themselves are similar. What the Canon and specialist writings on *weikza* beliefs leave unexplained, however, is why some individuals come to be regarded as saints and attract large numbers of followers.

Most Burmese people believe that saints should not talk about the stages they attain through ascetic practice. Followers cannot, therefore, know directly the level of sainthood that has been achieved. They can only look for signs of supernatural power that saints are believed to have attained at the last stage before they become *arahant* or *weikza*. In the case of Thamanya Sayadaw, his followers regarded his enterprise as evidence that he did, in fact, possess supernatural power(s).

Analyzing a similar phenomenon, Tambiah focuses on the way in which followers seek the amulets to which they believe the power of charismatic monks has become attached. Drawing on Mauss’s theory of *mana*, TAMBIAH describes this process as the “objectification of power” (1984, 339). Here I expand this focus to include other visible projects or material enterprises that embody Thamanya

Sayadaw's power. I describe how a large-scale enterprise has emerged around this monk, and the materialization of such power suggests that the cult of Thamanya Sayadaw emerged out of a dialectic transaction between the donation of religious land, and popular belief in the prosperity of those who live on the land as the realization of the material manifestation of the power of a saint. I argue that we need to pay attention to the participation of his followers as well as the practice of the monk himself, and also distinguish two types of participation: the participation of residents who have settled on this land, and the participation of pilgrims who are only transient visitors.

Here I would like to highlight a few points concerning the field data. This article is based primarily on field research conducted in Thamanya between 1995 and 2003. Some data used in reconstructing the early history of Thamanya is taken from my previous research in Yangon between September 1991 and July 1992.<sup>3</sup> Thamanya as an area is quite different from the usual "village" setting described in anthropological literature. Eastern Karen State, where Thamanya is located, has been a battlefield in the civil war between the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Burmese army for many years and has been designated a "danger area." Foreigners were prohibited from entering this area until the mid-1990s. Thus, my description of the early years of Thamanya's development is based on local Burmese literature and the narratives of early settlers. Since this is a "new town," artificially constructed over a short period of time, there has been a considerable turnover in population. Many have settled there, but some have left after only a short stay. The residents come from different backgrounds and different areas, but I was unable to corroborate their biographies comprehensively, especially for the period before they moved into Thamanya. Moreover, pilgrims come from all over the country and their total number is difficult to estimate. My data also includes findings from interviews with informants in Yangon and pilgrims I met in Thamanya.

FROM VILLAGE-DWELLING TO FOREST-DWELLING MONK: A BRIEF  
HISTORY OF MOUNT THAMANYA AND THAMANYA SAYADAW'S BIOGRAPHY

Mount Thamanya is located forty kilometers to the east of Paan, the capital city of Karen State, and was long uninhabited, although it adjoins two villages: Thayagon and Winsein. U Winaya (later Thamanya Sayadaw) was born in 1912 to Pao<sup>4</sup> peasants in Kohkyaik Village, Paan district, Karen State. Several biographies of him have been published since 1993 but there are some inconsistencies. According to a reliable hagiography (SANDIMA 1993), Thamanya Sayadaw took his vows as a thirteen-year-old novice and was then ordained at the age of twenty at Hkyan Hkin Monastery in Mawlamyain City. He later resided at twelve different monasteries in Mon State, Karen State, and also Mae Sot in Thailand. Among these were *pariyatti kyauṅ* (monastery schools) such as Hkyan Hkin Monastery in Mawlamyain City. His teachers included several famous meditation

masters such as the abbot of Shwe Yaung Pya Monastery in Bilin City, Mon State. While in Bilin City, he studied “meditation at the grave” with Muthin Sayadaw. In addition, he learned *lāwki pyinnya* (this-worldly knowledge), including astrology, alchemy, and charms, although this type of learning is not mentioned in the biographies of him. He studied alchemy under the Pao monk U Pinnya when he stayed at Hbaya Gyi (Big Monastery) at Mae Sot during the years 1937–1939.<sup>5</sup> In November 1941 the abbot of Kohkyaik Monastery called him back from Thailand and sent him to a newly-built monastery at Wasu where he stayed as the abbot for thirty-nine years. He later became the abbot of Kohkyaik Monastery when the former abbot passed away (HKUN HKYIT THAN U 2000, 7–11). U Winaya was a typical village-dwelling monk supported by the lay people of his community. He had, however, recognized the monk’s leadership. After becoming the abbot at Wasu, he also taught more than sixty monks and novices, and sent some talented students to famous *pariyatti kyauṅ* in big cities to study.

As time went on, however, U Winaya increasingly focused on the practice of ascetic meditation. In 1979, he asked his followers to build a small hut for practice. The villagers said that it was at this time that he started to express a special attachment to Mount Thamanya and they began to see subtle changes in his attitude and bearing (SANDIMA 1993, 19). On 2 March 1980, he climbed Mount Thamanya with one attendant monk and began to meditate. It is said that it was on this date that a village-dwelling monk became a forest monk, and people started to know U Winaya as Thamanya Sayadaw. At this point, however, it was only his practice that had changed; later, the relationship between the monk and his followers also changed.

#### PRACTICES AS A FOREST MONK

It is said that Thamanya Sayadaw began to meditate under a mango tree and slept in a thatched hut built by a hermit (*yathe*). He made a *deikhktan* (a vow to continue his ascetic practice for a certain period) to confine himself to the mountain for three years starting in April 1981. During his *deikhktan* period, many people who were attracted by his reputation came to see him, listened to his preaching, or practiced meditation with him. Some made merit through voluntary service, such as mowing the grass, leveling the land, or carrying water. While continuing with his practice, Thamanya Sayadaw instructed his followers to build or repair the pagodas in the village next to the mountain. He repaired old abandoned pagodas on the mountain, which came to be known as the “Myat Soe Brother Pagodas,” believed to have been built by Muktama, the queen of the famous Mon king Manuha. In Burmese society, the building and repairing of pagodas is believed to increase the donor’s social prestige and is interpreted as an activity demonstrating power. Thamanya Sayadaw’s reputation began to spread to neighboring villages. Stories from this early period emphasize the monk’s connection with a guardian goddess of the mountain, Grandma Nankyahe. According to this narrative, the

goddess discovered that Thamanya Sayadaw was her son in a former life. Some also believed that Grandma Nankyahe, the Karen Goddess, was the reincarnation of Muktama, the Mon Queen.

These narratives stress the predestined connection between Thamanya Sayadaw and the mountain by evoking the guardian spirit and pagodas that symbolize the place. They also link his ethnicity, Pao, with the main indigenous populations of Karen State, the Karen (Grandma Nankyahe), and the Mon (Queen Muktama), and justify it through karmic connections in a previous life.

Donations by the monk's followers have transformed the uninhabited mountain into a "civilized" place. One of the problems at Thamanya had been electricity. In 1982, a five-horsepower generator was donated and in 1984, two teachers at Paan City donated another generator. The other problem was the water supply, since the area was covered with gneiss and laterite, and the spring water was not fit to drink. A reservoir was dug at the foot of the mountain, pipes were laid, and water was pumped up from the reservoir.

More religious buildings were also constructed: a new *thein* (Buddhist ordination hall (Pāli: *sīma*) to meet the needs of the growing number of monks and novices, and a *damáyon* (community preaching hall) for lay people. These buildings were donated by the monk's early followers from Wasu and Kohkyaik villages. Before their construction, Thamanya Sayadaw had already extended the Paan-Myawaddy road to Kokada village at the foot of Mount Thamanya. Villagers of Indian descent from Kyo, Naunglon, and Katounta villages played an important part in constructing this road. They did not accept wages and donated their services voluntarily in the spirit of merit-making. In return, Thamanya Sayadaw allowed them to perform the *Rāmāyana* at the road's opening ceremony in January of 1984, initiating what became the basic program of the Thamanya Pyatho Festival.

The construction of this road was a turning point in several ways. A new relationship was established between the monk and his lay followers. Previous projects were mostly supported by Pao people from neighboring villages, and the relationship was typical of a village-dwelling monk and villagers. This project attracted new supporters who came from outside his village and were members of different ethnic groups. It also initiated two key aspects seen in subsequent projects: they became more public and this-worldly oriented, and not limited to religious objectives.

Around the mid-1980s, Thamanya Sayadaw began to provide vegetarian meals to every pilgrim that visited.<sup>6</sup> He may have taken this step because of the difficulty his followers faced in finding meals on the mountain, but serving them meals was no easy task. It required both money and labor. The Sayadaw's ability in being able to provide visitors with meals was seen by people as evidence of his supernatural power. It was around this time that stories began to circulate that attributed supernatural abilities to the monk. Some said that he had received seven vessels loaded with gold from the guardian goddess, others that he had the supernatural ability to double any object or the power to grant wishes.

ESTABLISHMENT OF *THATHANA MYEI*

One of the striking features of the cult of Thamanya Sayadaw is the way in which it has transformed an uninhabited mountain into *thathana myei*, a pilgrimage center to which people from all over the country visit. From the start of his association with the mountain, Thamanya Sayadaw encouraged his followers in sermons to settle on his land. Those early settlers believed that he could “see the future” and foresaw that the land would become as valuable as gold.

Thamanya Sayadaw enforced three basic rules for his followers: (1) to keep the Five Precepts, (2) to avoid bringing and eating any meat into the area, and (3) to prohibit anyone from bringing drugs, alcoholic drinks, and weapons. The first rule follows the orthodox Theravāda teaching. The second does not,<sup>7</sup> but Thamanya Sayadaw always preached the importance of avoiding the killing of any living creature. Together with the third rule, this shows his awareness of the importance of *hbeme detha* (a peaceful land without any danger, a vegetarian place—in other words, a sanctuary) in an area disrupted by civil war.

The first families began to settle in Thamanya around 1981. One of the oldest residents told me of the difficulties they had faced. The roads were only animal trails and their houses were built from trees they had cut down themselves. They had to carry almost everything—water, food, and necessities—up the mountain. Since they had no income whilst living in Thamanya, they also had to return to their villages during the farming season. Still, the population began to increase. By the mid-1980s, it had reached three hundred households and the residential area was called Thayawadi Division. By the end of the 1990s the number of households had risen to around five thousand, after which the population became stable. The original Thayawadi Division was split into twenty-four quarters, each comprising fifty to one hundred households.

Here I would like to examine the growth of the residential area in detail. For illustration purposes I have used T and N quarters, which are located near the center and overlap with the older Thayawadi Division where many early residents settled. The reason why I took two quarters and not one is because the area that the present T and N quarters cover formerly belonged to one quarter that was later divided in two.<sup>8</sup>

I asked the residents (one hundred and two households in T quarter and sixty-three households in N quarter) about when they had settled in Thamanya (TOSA 1999 and 2000b).<sup>9</sup> In the early period, immigrants were very rare. One household per year arrived from 1981 to 1984. Two households came in 1985, ten households in 1986, four households in 1987, ten households (six in T, four in N) in 1988, nineteen households (nine in T, ten in N) in 1989, eighteen households (ten in T, eight in N) in 1990, and about twenty households settled every year between 1991 and 1993. Since then the number of new households has declined annually. There were two peaks in the number of immigrants: the first was around 1986 and the second was after 1990.<sup>10</sup> The first peak was when the system of giving free land to lay people was inaugurated at Thamanya. I will deal with the second peak later. In

terms of ethnicity, the first fifteen households that settled before 1986 were all Pao, that is, people of the same ethnic group as Thamanya Sayadaw. The first non-Pao household was established by a Pwo Karen family that arrived in 1987. They were followed by four Pwo Karen families and a couple composed of a Mon husband, and a wife of Shan and Pao descent, who came in 1988. Nine Pwo Karen families and one Mon family came in 1989, followed by nine Pwo Karen families in 1990. While Paos were dominant in Thamanya in the 1980s, the Karens, who are the majority ethnic group in Karen State, have been increasing in number since 1987. Since 1990, the number of Karen households has been almost the same as that of Pao families. Members of other groups—Burman, Mon, Indian, and Chinese—also moved into Thamanya starting in 1990.

In terms of geographic origin,<sup>11</sup> all the families that settled in Thamanya before 1984 came from Thayagon, a neighboring Pao village. In 1985, one family came from Kyonhsauk village, another neighboring Pao village. In 1986, they were joined by families from other villages in Paan Township together with other Pao villages (Naungbo Taik Kyaung and Nat Kyun) in adjoining Hlainbwe Township. In 1987 a family from a Karen village in Hlainbwe Township arrived, and they were joined by people from Kokaleik Township in 1988. Many people from outside Karen State, for example from Mon State and Bago Division, moved to Thamanya between 1989 and 1990. They were later joined by city dwellers from Paan, Moulamyain, Pago, and later Yangon. Such data suggests that a growing number of pilgrims visited Thamanya. According to my interviews, almost every resident had visited the area several times before they settled there. It is reasonable, then, to infer that there were a growing number of pilgrims during or just before the two peaks in immigration.

In sum, when Thamanya Sayadaw completed the fulfillment of his *deikhtan* vow in 1984, he started constructing the road and began serving meals. He then began attracting new followers from other villages and other ethnic groups, who in turn started to contribute to the success of his new projects. Immigrants flocked to the area, and the population reached its first peak in 1986. A variety of data show that when Thamanya Sayadaw completed his ascetic practices and began to promote large-scale projects, he started acquiring new types of followers.

#### MOUNT THAMANYA AS A SANCTUARY

Ninety percent of the residents of T and N quarters moved to Mount Thamanya from other areas in Karen State. When I asked them on what grounds they had moved, or why they had decided to move to Thamanya, everyone replied it was because they respected Thamanya Sayadaw. They also mentioned, however, that “the bad situation in their villages” caused them to move to Thamanya (T: forty-six households out of one hundred and two; N: twenty-two out of sixty-three).<sup>12</sup> Many villages in Karen State had suffered during the civil war; some were burned down, others had disappeared.



People who lived in Karen State, especially in the eastern part of the state, had experienced civil war for more than forty-five years. The Karen National Union (KNU) began its uprising in 1949 with the aim of creating an independent state that was promised by the colonial government; they occupied major cities and almost reached Yangon. After General Ne Win took power, however, the national army quelled the rebellion near Yangon and pushed the KNU back to the border areas of Karen State. The KNU remained in power in these areas through the control of smuggling, and established a base at Manerplaw. The army then occupied Karen villages to search for the KNU's collaborators.<sup>13</sup> What the villagers call *akauk kun* (tax) does not refer to legitimate taxation. Both the army, and then the KNU, extorted *akauk kun* from villagers and press-ganged people into serving as porters for their respective armies.<sup>14</sup> This was forced labor without pay. If families consisted only of women, children, or the aged, or family members were unable to perform the service, they still had to pay *pawta hká* (a so-called "porter fee"). The amount depended on the economic situation of the family. Some informants said they paid several hundred Myanmar kyat; others paid tens of thousands a year. The amounts varied from the equivalent of a monthly income to nearly half a year's wages in terms of current prices; the financial and physical burden was huge.

The political situation in Karen State was, then, clearly one of the factors pushing people to move to Thamanya. While other villagers sought refuge with relatives and friends, these residents sought sanctuary in Thamanya. The KNU grip on the region has, however, weakened since 1995. In 1994, a dispute over a pagoda-building resulted in a split of the Buddhist Karens from the Christian leadership of the KNU. The Buddhist Karens established their own Democratic Kayin Buddhist Army (DKBA), joined the attack of the Burmese army on the KNU base at Manerplaw, and overran it in 1995 (GRAVERS 1999).

With the suppression of the civil war and most of Karen State coming under the control of the national army and the DKBA, the need for a sanctuary should have declined. If Thamanya was nothing more than a sanctuary, most residents would have returned to their villages. But while many people did leave, others moved in to replace them. The civil war may have been an important factor in making people move to Thamanya, but their belief in Thamanya Sayadaw, the reason most often cited by settlers, was also just as important.

#### BECOMING A NATIONAL CULT:

##### THE DIFFUSION OF STORIES ABOUT THAMANYA SAYADAW

In the mid-1980s, stories about Thamanya Sayadaw began to circulate in urban areas. By 1991, Thamanya Sayadaw was frequently mentioned by some of my Yangon informants as one who had acquired supernatural powers, and stories about his miracles, such as that he was said to have protected his followers from harm in serious accidents, started to circulate in Yangon. Pilgrims who visited him said that their luck had improved. The nature of his spiritual attainments were,

however, open to debate. Interpretations fell into two main categories: on the one hand, he was an *arahant* (*yahànda*), the orthodox type of saint mentioned in the Buddhist canon; on the other, Sayadaw was believed to have become *weikza* or *htwetyat pauk*. These competing interpretations were often the subject of lively discussion. For example, AUNG ZA (1992, 184–85), who took up this issue in *Nekkhatta Yaungbkyi* magazine, described an episode in which a follower said to Thamanya Sayadaw, “You have done incredible things.... Some believed you could do this because you became *htwetyat pauk*.” Thamanya Sayadaw answered, “*Htwetyat pauk* aim to escape *samsāra* through this-worldly practices like charms and alchemy. Charms are the most important. But I stopped pursuing this kind of knowledge and aimed to escape, instead, through *lāwkoktara* (other-worldly) practice.” We learn from this article that Thamanya Sayadaw had once sought *weikza/htwetyat pauk* knowledge, but decided to focus on orthodox Buddhist practice. Aung Za remains noncommittal about Thamanya Sayadaw’s current status as *arahant* or *weikza*.<sup>15</sup>

The diversity of interpretations did nothing, it seems, to decrease Thamanya Sayadaw’s popularity. I have often observed the following kind of discussion among his followers at Thamanya, whereby participants debate for long periods without reaching consensus, and they seem to be satisfied with continuing the discussion. So we should focus, I suggest, not on what they conclude, but instead on the directions their discussions have taken. Most Burmese Buddhists narrate deductively: “a monk engages in ascetic practices and attains supernatural power; he becomes a saint, then people begin to worship him.” I observed, however, that members of urban cults tend to focus pragmatically on the “results” of a monk’s ascetic practice, pointing out, for example, learning the canon by heart, becoming a charismatic preacher, or promoting successful enterprises. From these results, they infer inductively that the monk has obtained supernatural power. Only then do they try to analyze where the power comes from and what type of monk he is. In other words, while studying urban cults, we should focus on the direction in which the analysis proceeds, inductively instead of deductively. Material or visible success confirms the presence of power and proves that the monk might be a “saint” of some kind. This remains open to debate. To understand the social dynamics of saint cults, we need to determine what followers regard as proof of the saint’s power, the materialization of that power, and the mechanisms behind them.

#### ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

The growing number of saint cults in Burma is surely related to the rapid social changes of the 1990s. While the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSP) imposed a closed-door policy restricting imports and exports, SLORC (the State Law and Order Restoration Council, the present SPDC) opened the economy to foreign investment and shifted it to an open market in 1993. Many wealthy individuals who anticipated economic expansion founded private trading companies,

and some of my informants were involved in this trend. They sought new business opportunities, and at the same time, searched for saints with supernatural powers such as Thamanya Sayadaw who could help them survive an uncertain period. Magazines also played an important role in spreading the tales of saints with supernatural powers. One of the most obvious changes in journals and magazines of the late 1980s and 1990s was the commencement of publication of economic and religious magazines. Religious magazines such as *Yatana Mun* and *Nekkhatta Yaungbkyi Mэгazin* carried articles on mystic beliefs, which were of a kind never permitted while the BSPP was in power. *Yatana Mun* magazine published what appears to be the first account of Thamanya Sayadaw in 1987. Other religious and economic magazines began carrying articles on Thamanya Sayadaw in the early 1990s (AUNG ZA 1992; ON MAUNG 1993; MAUNG THAYA et al. 1993; and THIN MYA SANDI 1993). From 1993, several books on Thamanya Sayadaw appeared (TAWHMI YAHAN 1993; HKAING HKAN MAUNG 1993; and DIPA MAUNG 1995).<sup>16</sup> In addition to a well-known hagiography, these books describe details such as how to worship Thamanya Sayadaw, or how to pray to the monk for protection. Stories abound, such as that of a jade excavation company executive who worshipped his picture before choosing a place to dig and struck a rich vein of jade; or that of a peddler whose wares were not selling well but who had remembered Thamanya Sayadaw's way of "choosing the right time (*ahka ywé ni*)," and was then able to sell out his stock; or that of a businessman who found that his business improved after he visited Thamanya. These stories are, in a sense, manuals of religious practices that relied on the supernatural powers of Thamanya Sayadaw.

In response to demands from businessmen and merchants, amulets and charms began to be sold at Thamanya. These included pictures of Thamanya Sayadaw's handprint, or imitation gold rings. The practice of *theikdhi tin* (blessing) also became increasingly popular. *Theikdhi tin* literally means to place (*tin*) supernatural power (*theikdhi*) on or into a material object. This practice, based on the belief that the saint can infuse the objects with his supernatural power through the activity of blessing or patting them, is a common feature of saint cults. At Mount Thamanya, followers bought objects such as pictures of Thamanya Sayadaw, watches, and ornaments, and held them between their palms while Sayadaw recited Buddhist sutras. Or, if they were given the chance to meet him face-to-face, they held out the objects that they wanted transformed into amulets and Sayadaw patted them lightly. TAWHMI YAHAN explains that *theikdhi tin* was requested by his followers and that he acceded to their wishes (1993, 53). This is precisely the activity that TAMBIAH (1984, chapter 22) calls the "objectification of charisma." However, in Thailand, these amulets, which are believed to bring good luck or good business, are bought and sold, and their market value is largely determined by how the market sees their history or efficaciousness (TAMBIAH 1984, JACKSON 1999). In Burma, followers who request amulets do not buy or sell them. We must also note that as Thamanya Sayadaw grew older and more feeble, he stopped

performing *theikdhi tin*. His followers, however, believed that since he was a real saint, visiting him was enough to have some of the good luck rub off on them.

#### POLITICAL SITUATION

The political situation also seemed to drive the growing popularity of Thamanya Sayadaw even further. The BSPP headed by General Ne Win tried to promote secularization and impose control over the Sangha through the Religious Ministry. Following the military coup that brought SLORC to power in 1988, the new regime turned to promoting Buddhism, ostensibly to contribute to nation building (STEINBERG 2001). After the government's defeat in the general election of 1990 by the National League for Democracy (NLD), it turned to religion for support as it lacked international legitimacy. Since the early 1990s, religious activities by high-level government officials such as donating to sympathetic monks and attending rituals surrounding the building and repairing of pagodas have been reported as top news on television and in newspapers (TOSA 2000a). Political leaders also participated in elaborate ceremonies to award inflated titles to leading monks in 1992 (see the article by KAWANAMI in this issue). The general public, however, were largely indifferent to those monks involved with the state. People instead focused on other monks who held themselves apart from the state. It was during this period that Thamanya Sayadaw became very popular. He did not accept invitations from the government and did not attend title-awarding ceremonies. Therefore, it is said that the government had to send a messenger to take a title certification to him at his monastery.

Aung San Suu Kyi's visit to Thamanya brought the tension between Thamanya Sayadaw and the military government to a head. Although the Burmese media did not cover her visit, most people came to know about it. Photographs taken of Thamanya Sayadaw and Aung San Suu Kyi together were offered for sale by street vendors and became enormously popular. Within a few months the government proclaimed that a woman should not appear alone with a monk and prohibited further sale of the pictures. The political implications of Thamanya Sayadaw's popularity had by now become even more obvious. FINK (2001, 220–21) describes how following Aung San Suu Kyi's visit, several apocryphal stories circulated comparing her visit to that by Lt. General Khin Nyunt. One story claimed that Thamanya Sayadaw treated the general quite differently from the way he welcomed Suu Kyi. It described how the general tried to bring a forbidden weapon into his presence but was made a fool of it by the monk's power. As FINK points out, these stories show the extent to which people look up to such monks to support their political ideals, even if only symbolically (2001, 220). Here we see the belief that saints who have attained supernatural power can even overcome modern arms.

## PILGRIMAGE AS TOURISM

The fame of Thamanya Sayadaw spread throughout Burma and continued to attract a large number of pilgrims. As the number of pilgrims increased, the condition of the pilgrimage also improved. One of my Yangon informants told me about their visit to Thamanya in the mid-1980s: there were no bus tours, not even regular buses going to Mount Thamanya from Paan. They traveled to Thamanya in their private pickup trucks. As they made their way to Paan and westward, the trip turned dangerous. They heard that some pilgrims had been pressed into service by the army as porters, and that Thamanya Sayadaw had to send his people to retrieve them. Following this incident, Thamanya Sayadaw instructed his followers to fly the Thamanya flag with its sun and moon design on their cars so that soldiers would know that they were going on a pilgrimage to Thamanya. My informants followed this advice. When they reached Mount Thamanya, they found a small settlement of a few families at the foot of the mountain. They had to leave their trucks behind and climb up an animal trail, because Sayadaw still confined himself to practicing meditation on the mountain and never came down. Villagers provided water and food both for Sayadaw and for all the pilgrims. The moment they met Thamanya Sayadaw, my informants said they became devout adherents. They were served a simple vegetarian meal and slept in the open within the precincts of his monastery. However difficult the trip was, they regarded their visit to Thamanya to be a true pilgrimage, as they were tested.

Since 1995, the area has become more settled, and many vegetarian restaurants have been opened by people from Yangon. Thamanya's amenities have been transformed in terms of paved roads, spacious community halls, and a clean dining hall with water and electricity. The number of pilgrims has increased. One important reason for this was the growing number of tour companies operating package pilgrimage tours. In the BSPP period, there were bus tours called *Hpayà bhù kà* (pilgrimage bus) to famous pilgrimage spots such as Bagan, Mandalay, and Chaiktiyo. But government restrictions limited the scale of such operations. In the 1990s, many new tour companies were established and began to advertise pilgrimage tours in magazines and journals.<sup>17</sup> One of the most popular tours for civil servants, office workers, and students was a three-day trip leaving on Friday night and returning early on Monday morning. Dozens of tour buses parked at the foot of Mount Thamanya every weekend. Where formerly pilgrims had to change buses and ferries several times, they are now whisked to and from their destination in the same bus. Travel agents also make arrangements for lodgings, restaurants on the way, and for extra sightseeing. For lodgings, most agents use Thamanya Sayadaw's community halls, but when these become too crowded, arrangements are made for them to stay at residents' houses. Pilgrims sometimes leave cash offerings to residents, bringing them an opportunity for acquiring extra income. Both pilgrims and residents have benefited from the development of tourism.

Around the beginning of the mid-1990s, Thamanya Sayadaw started to show his frailty and became increasingly infirm. Gradually the time allotted for preaching

was shortened and *theikdhi tin* eliminated. He gave the Five Precepts to the audience, asked them whether they enjoyed their meals, and recommended that they eat vegetarian food. Gradually, followers had less opportunity to meet and consult with him individually. Instead they turned increasingly to the visual evidence of Thamanya Sayadaw's supernatural powers, which they found in the growing scale of his many projects. Some pilgrims noted the quickness in which the construction work on his compound was completed, which would take much longer if conducted elsewhere, and others commented how roads and buildings constructed by Sayadaw lasted undamaged, whilst government roads and buildings in contrast were more easily ruined.

#### EMBODIMENTS OF POWER:

#### SĀSANA-PYŪ AND THE IMPORTANCE OF "WORK"

In the broadest sense, "Thamanya Sayadaw's Project" is based on trust and on securing the confidence of his followers whose donations and labor make specific projects possible. As pilgrims began to visit Thamanya from all over the country to donate money to him to fund the projects, the lives of the residents improved. More stable livelihoods freed them so that they could volunteer for work required for further ambitious projects, which expanded the material evidence of Thamanya Sayadaw's achievements beyond the religious land on the mountain. Saluwin Bridge, completed in 1998, was one of his biggest successes. Although it is formally described as a government project, most people know that Thamanya Sayadaw contributed a considerable amount to the cost and aided the construction greatly by urging his followers to provide voluntary service. Another of his projects, a road to the border city of Myawaddy that trades with Mae Sot in Thailand, was completed at the end of 2002. His commitment to education is also reflected in donations for repairs of schools such as Thayagon Elementary School in Thamanya, Wekayin Junior High School in a village near Thamanya, and Kohkyaik High School in Thamanya Sayadaw's hometown. By preaching the importance of education, he helped to introduce advanced courses to these schools. Thayagon School was upgraded to a junior high school and Wekayin became a high school. He also provided financial and material assistance to their teachers and school buses for children. In addition, he built a health clinic on his religious land to promote better public health.<sup>18</sup>

As I pointed out above, the mundane nature of Thamanya Sayadaw's projects was already visible in 1984: they were not confined to the kind of religious enterprises that monks were traditionally expected to engage with. Their scope extended to more public and worldly enterprises, and included efforts to enhance the welfare of lay people. In this sense, Thamanya Sayadaw practiced what some scholars may call "Engaged Buddhism." In order to argue that Buddhism in contemporary Asia involves "engagement with social and political issues and crises," Queen points out that the most distinctive shift in thinking in socially-engaged Buddhism

is from a trans-mundane (*lokuttara*) to a mundane (*lokiya*) definition of liberation (QUEEN and KING 1996, ix, II). We should be careful, however, that while we see aspects of engaged Buddhism in Thamanya Sayadaw's projects, he himself has never preached the idea of either mundane liberation or social engagement; neither do his followers interpret his teachings in this way. Most of them, including the Sayadaw himself, perceive him as doing *Sāsana-pyú*, which literally means "propagating Buddhism, or missionary work."<sup>19</sup>

In this respect, Thamanya Sayadaw may be seen as someone similar to U Khanti, who was famous for his practice of *Sāsana-pyú* during the colonial period. By repairing and constructing Buddhist shrines and statues of Buddha at Mandalay Hill near the site of the Royal Palace, U Khanti transformed them into major pilgrimage sites. WOODWARD suggests that U Khanti created a new patronage system in the period when the kingship in Burma was abolished, and "allowed ordinary Burmese to participate more fully and to derive merit from the large-scale patronage of Buddhism" (1989, 88). In this context, *Sāsana-pyú* refers to the mobilization of lay Buddhists to propagate Buddhism, involving the construction of pagodas and Buddha images at times of crisis or on the periphery of the Burmese Buddhist world. Thamanya, located in a region where civil war was fought between the national army and the KNU—on the periphery of the national government's political control—fits this scenario perfectly. In this context, the material development of the landscape and the welfare of people are seen as visible evidence of a Buddhism that is flourishing. This may be evident in the title Thamanya Sayadaw received from the Religious Ministry: Abidaza Etga Maha Thaddhamma Zawtika (Pāli: Abhidhaja Agga Mahā Saddhamma Jotika), which is the highest award presented to monks who propagate Buddhism, and is public recognition of his *Sāsana-pyú* activity.

In the eyes of pilgrims, the landscape of Mount Thamanya is constantly developing, both religiously and materially, as new religious buildings are constructed and new roads paved. The dramatic material changes are evidence that Thamanya Sayadaw has supernatural power. This is not, however, a simple, magical notion that his power causes such construction to happen. It is, rather, recognition of the spatial and material expansion of the Buddhist world that the power of Thamanya Sayadaw makes possible. Thamanya Sayadaw, on the other hand, constantly preached the importance of his followers working on their own accord and making merit for themselves. His projects were called *bá hpayà alok* (Reverend Father's work). He stressed the importance of *alok* to lay people as well as to monks and novices, and while *alok* means "work" or "business" in the context of ordinary life, at Thamanya it also implies "merit making." Young monks and novices say that Thamanya Sayadaw taught them to participate in his projects and work hard. The monks leading specific projects see themselves as "working monks" (*alok lok te pongyi*) in contrast to "studying monks" (*sa hpat te hpòngyi*). Given that monks' practices are usually classified as either *pariyattí* (study) or *padípatí* (meditation), we can see how such *alok* is emphasized at Thamanya. Monk P, in his mid-thirties

when I interviewed him, was a monk whom Thamanya Sayadaw relied on to manage and execute his projects. He told me that his role was to put Sayadaw's plans into practice and to make them happen through physical labor. He emphasized the importance of pursuing it through his own actions, whatever Thamanya Sayadaw decided to do.

An example of the followers' devotion and how Thamanya Sayadaw spurs them on can be seen in the following: when I went to Mount Thamanya with my informants from Yangon at the end of the rainy season in 2001, we discovered that Thamanya Sayadaw was not well and was being fed via an intravenous drip. Fortunately we were still able to meet him for a short time after the treatment was finished. He told us that he was going to inspect the construction of Myawaddy Road and that we should come back again at 9:00 PM if we wanted to come along. We accepted his invitation, but wondered if his age and condition would allow him to inspect the site at night. Moreover, my informants were not accustomed to late-night construction, which is not customary in Burma. At 10:00 PM, however, Thamanya Sayadaw came out of his monastery and got into his vehicle supported by his disciples. Following him, we found many people working at a site illuminated by generator-powered lights. Having noticed that Thamanya Sayadaw had come to visit them, some spontaneously bowed, and others delightedly approached his car. These workers were residents who worked the night shift. Their leaders told me that they divided the residents into two shifts: day and night, to make up for lost time, because Sayadaw hoped to finish the road as soon as possible. My informants were deeply impressed by both the Sayadaw and the residents, and remarked that they had never seen people working as hard on government construction sites.

#### HOW THAMANYA SAYADAW'S PROJECT IS ORGANIZED

As already mentioned above, the 1980s saw improvements in local infrastructure—in better roads, water, and electricity supply. As Thamanya Sayadaw accepted donations of vehicles, generators, and road rollers, he appointed several people to be in charge of managing them. Later, he created five specialized sections at his monastery: *kà yon* (Car and Transportation Section), *ye yon* (Water Supply Section), *mì yon* (Electricity Supply Section), *set yon* (Construction Section) and *htamin yon* (Restaurant Section). All were nominally supervised by Thamanya Sayadaw himself, but practical arrangements were managed by monks and lay experts appointed by him. The Car and Transportation Section had a large garage filled with more than twenty vehicles: buses, trucks, pickup cars, and road rollers. This section was managed by monks and lay experts with a wide range of responsibilities, from maintaining vehicles to handling arrangements for school buses and assisting other sections with purchases of, for example, cement, asphalt, or food. The Restaurant Section was in charge of meal preparation. The total number of servings varied from three thousand to ten thousand meals per day.<sup>20</sup> This section



was responsible for buying food, collecting firewood, cooking, serving, and washing plates. The Water Supply Section took charge of everything required to supply water to the mountain: at first, they pumped water from the reservoir for use at the mountain. The Electricity Supply Section provided electricity using their own power generation facilities. When a high-ranking local military officer became a follower of Thamanya Sayadaw in the mid-1990s, he arranged for public water and electricity to be supplied to the mountain. The Electricity Supply Section combined the public and private systems and used the private system only when the government electricity service was unavailable. In the Construction Section, a master builder had several carpenters, apprentices, and plasterers working under him. Their responsibilities included carpentry, interior work, and making furniture for the monasteries and other buildings that Thamanya Sayadaw wished to construct. He provided financial support for lay experts.

The central person who determined the direction of projects was always Thamanya Sayadaw. When he decided to do something, he firstly informed the monk leaders. They then conferred with each other and made the necessary arrangements. Thamanya Sayadaw provided funds for each project, ordering lay attendants who kept accounts of donations to give funds required by sections undertaking the work. Alternatively, he consulted followers who had already indicated their desire to donate a certain amount of money and chose those who would make particular donations. If the follower accepted the request for a donation, he or she bore all of the expenses or paid a fixed proportion of the expenditure. In the final stages of the process, monks and lay specialists from respective sections consulted with each other, decided on the processes, and allocated responsibility. When skilled labor was needed, they hired it from outside. For unskilled labor, they mobilized the residents of the lay quarters. The general headman and the headman of each particular quarter allocated work assignments.

#### LAY ORGANIZATION

Here I describe the system by which work is allocated, based on a case study conducted at T and N quarters. Each quarter had headmen called *yatkwet luyi*, and their number was loosely fixed depending on the scale of the quarter. T and N quarters each had three headmen in the period 1997–1998. The main duties of the headmen were (1) to keep track of the residents, (2) to collect cash donations, and (3) to arrange voluntary work. The heads also acted as chiefs of the *neikban hso ahpwé* (an association to promote merit-making).<sup>21</sup>

*Neikban hso ahpwé* also exist outside of Thamanya, where their function is to solicit merit-making. This corresponds to the previously-mentioned second and third duties. In Thamanya, the first duty, keeping track of the residents, was given to the head of *neikban hso ahpwé* because there were no village headmen on the religious land. The headman's job was, I observed, very simple. Every headman made a list of residents living in his quarter. Most just added the name of newcomers to

their list, and they seldom checked for discrepancies between the list and actual residents. The second and third functions of the headmen were deeply embedded in their daily lives. Concerning the second, each resident in a quarter was required to donate at least five Myanmar kyat per month till the year 2000. The amount was insignificant as it was not even enough to buy the cheapest sweets for children. But Thamanya Sayadaw suggested this so that residents could, by contributing to his projects, make merit (*kútho*), since he worried that if they always relied on him they would make no merit for themselves. This example illustrates Thamanya Sayadaw's philosophy, which assigned great importance to actual practice and voluntary merit-making. As for the third duty, every family living on Thamanya land was expected to provide voluntary labor for the Sayadaw's projects. The majority of this work was conducted outdoors, with fewer assignments in the rainy season, for about ten or fifteen days per month, and most work was done during the dry season. Service was allocated on the principal of "one person per household" and this was not limited to men; women and children were also included. If households were unable to provide the labor requested, they were expected to pay a "tobacco fee" to other members of the quarter.

On the surface, this system of voluntary work and donations resembled forced labor and taxes imposed on those who lived outside Thamanya. Here, however, they were seen in a different light. Most residents of T and N quarters saw these activities as a means for obtaining merit-making. One resident who had been a porter both for the military and KNU said, "even if we do not take merit-making into consideration, the working conditions themselves are different." At Thamanya, the residents were given provisions such as free meals while they were working, and in case the construction site was far from their homes, transportation. This was in contrast to forced labor by the army, whereby they had to bring their own meals and walk to the construction site. Most residents found any suggestion of similarities between volunteer work and forced labor unacceptable and emphasized the difference between these two types of work.

#### ECONOMIC INFRASTRUCTURE

As the infrastructure of Thamanya developed, the quality of travel also changed for pilgrims. But how has this affected the residents and their economic base? Before moving to Thamanya, sixty-six percent (seventy households in total) of T quarter households and seventy-four percent (forty-seven households in total) of N quarter households were engaged in agriculture.<sup>22</sup> Three households had been salaried workers (public servant, school teacher), nine had been specialists (goldsmith, silversmith, folk medicine man, carpenter, and so on), and a few had been peddlers or street vendors. It was, however, impossible to engage in agriculture inside Thamanya because there were no established farms and the use of farm animals was not permitted. Although a few continued to make their livelihood by agriculture,<sup>23</sup> most settlers relied on other occupations. Many started

their own businesses.<sup>24</sup> As mentioned previously, most settlers had no income until 1985 and had to return to their villages to work during the farming season. As the number of pilgrims increased in the mid-1990s, new business opportunities appeared.

The size of the residents' businesses varied. A large market in the middle of Thamanya had been the center for Thai products and gold, attracting many pilgrims as well as other visitors. Residents who rented shops in this market earned the largest profits, but they had to have sufficient capital to pay a premium in advance and a monthly rental fee to the market committee. Fifteen households from T quarter and two households from N quarter operated retail shops at the market. People whose homes face the main street opened stalls in front of their houses and sold snacks, sundries, or medicines (fourteen households from T, three households from N). But the profits, while passable, were not as good as those of shops in the market. Residents without the money to rent or open shops sold snacks or vegetables on the street, earning a small living. Finally, there were also those doing *kyábàn lok*, casual labor.<sup>25</sup> These residents collected wild herbs, vegetables, or firewood, dug bamboo shoots, and sometimes worked for daily wages.

There is, then, a visible disparity in the economic situation of the residents of T and N quarters. Although many urban pilgrims regarded all residents monolithically as "refugees," the actual situation was not so straightforward. Two key factors—previous means and location—accounted for most of the social disparity. Every resident was entitled to apply for a plot. As the population increased, however, newcomers could only find plots in inconvenient locations, far from the central settlement. Plots in the center began to be bought and sold. In particular, T quarter became one of the most expensive areas in Thamanya. Latecomers living in T quarter "purchased" their plots from other residents. Most of them were relatively wealthy; some came from the landed class in their villages, while others were merchants with sufficient capital. Still, location and initial means were not the only factors that created disparity. Some individuals improved their economic status whilst at Thamanya. One typical case was that of settlers who followed Thamanya Sayadaw from the beginning. They received free plots at the center of the site, which subsequently rose in value. Some rented the front of their houses to shopkeepers, whilst others sold their plots. Another typical case was that of people who found new business opportunities in Thamanya. With the financial support of his wealthy parents-in-law, Mr. S, a man in his late thirties, opened a gold shop at the market. His business was highly successful. Mr. N brought a pickup truck and ran a private bus service between Thamanya and Paan. Both were former peasants who became successful with their new business ventures.

The growing number of pilgrims provided business opportunities and enabled residents to settle in Thamanya. People who made a living from retail shops or street stalls were highly conscious of the number of pilgrims arriving. One restaurant owner told me that pilgrims had increased since 1992 or 1993, but declined in

1998. That was when the impact of the 1997 economic crisis in Thailand reached Burma, and the asset-inflated economy collapsed. Economic difficulties affected the pilgrimage business and resulted in a fewer number of pilgrims. He added that after 1998, the number of pilgrims rose again. Residents who were able to go to Thailand as migrant workers also reflected Thamanya's stability. Many young people living in Karen State wanted to go to Thailand to earn more money. From Thamanya, at least one member from twenty-one households in T quarter and eighteen households in N quarter was either working or had worked in Thailand or in other countries.<sup>26</sup> A young Pwo Karen (N quarter) said, "It is safe here, so we can go and leave our old parents and children." Most emigrant workers sent money back to the families they left behind in Thamanya and tried to support them financially, which added to the stability of the residents' livelihoods.

#### PILGRIM PARTICIPATION IN PROJECTS

As already mentioned, pilgrims were not always passive participants who only donated or spent their money; some took an active part in the projects themselves. Pilgrims also constructed buildings on their own initiative. For example, a Buddhist association organized by the shopkeepers of a famous Yangon market donated a *zayat* (a rest house built on religious premises). Members of the association were among the earliest pilgrims to visit Thamanya. However, as the number of other pilgrims increased, they found it difficult to find places to stay and decided to construct the *zayat*. They solicited donations in the market, collected enough money to build the structure, and asked the Sayadaw to give them permission. It took about a year to construct the *zayat*, which was completed in 1993. Several nuns were engaged in managing the building and looked after the possessions that included Buddha images, clocks, television sets, blankets, and cookware. This *zayat* was mainly used by pilgrims from the market or by their friends, but was also open to others. Thamanya Sayadaw sent pilgrims to stay at this *zayat* when other lodgings at the foot of the mountain were full.

On the mountain, there is a shrine dedicated to the guardian goddess, Grandma Nankyahe. Inside the shrine, there are several statues of Grandma Nankyahe finely dressed in both Karen and Burmese styles, and adorned with many layers of shawls over their shoulders. According to the shrine keeper, all of the statues, dresses, and shawls were donated by pilgrims. Besides the statues of Grandma Nankyahe, there are also statues of "holy deer." They recall a famous episode in which a deer approached and guarded Thamanya Sayadaw while he was meditating on Mount Thamanya. On a hillside, there is another shrine and statues dedicated to *weikza*. When I asked the settlers of T and N quarters about *weikza*, almost half of them said that they had never seen statues of *weikza* in their villages, and some denied even knowing of their existence. I observed, however, that many settlers in both T and N quarters worshipped *weikza* at the altar in their houses.

## CONCLUSION

In this article, I have shown how a simple village-dwelling monk became a forest-dwelling monk and then a prominent national figure. The political situation, including local ethnic or religious conflicts, and the confrontation between the Democratic Party and the military government, together with the economic boom of the 1990s, may have added impetus to the search for a special saint with supernatural powers. Media coverage and domestic tourism may have been instrumental in bringing larger numbers of pilgrims to Thamanya. Thamanya Sayadaw also distinguished himself from other monks in not limiting his projects to otherworldly activities, such as building pagodas or monasteries. He incorporated this-worldly activities, which were more secular enterprises aimed at improving the welfare of his followers, including building community halls, dining halls, and schools, constructing roads, and promoting education. However, this type of activity in Burma is not seen to reflect the philosophy of “mundane” liberation; instead, it is interpreted as an outcome of his commitment to *Sāsana-pyú*, which is an endeavor to propagate Buddhism at a time of disorder at the boundaries of Burmese Buddhism.

At the local level of interpretation, Thamanya Sayadaw was seen as the focus of a traditional saint cult. As his reputation attracted followers from all over the country, both pilgrims and residents increased in number, providing funds and manpower for his projects. To his followers, these material accomplishments were “proof” that he had acquired supernatural abilities. The development of the pilgrimage site and his reputation as a saint pushed each other as two sides of a dialectical process. This explanation is, however, still too abstract. To understand in detail the development of Thamanya, the interaction of two types of actors, pilgrims and residents, must also be taken into consideration. In the local context, the function of Thamanya was that of a sanctuary. During the 1980s when Karen State was wracked by civil war, the population increased as local people fled to this sacred area to escape the crisis. During the latter half of the 1990s, when the civil war had ended, some returned to their villages. Those leaving were, however, replaced by an almost equal number of newcomers. The residents’ livelihoods came to depend on pilgrims whose presence enabled them to earn a living by selling vegetables, snacks, or gold. The pilgrims brought money and new business opportunities to the residents. Conversely, the rise and fall of their numbers affected the residents’ incomes.

What had been an experience of religious pilgrimage became a tourist excursion during which pilgrims could, if they wished, contribute to Thamanya Sayadaw’s projects—the same projects for which the residents provided voluntary labor. If pilgrims were tired of Thamanya Sayadaw’s meals, they could purchase cooked vegetables or snacks. They could rest and shower at residents’ houses when community halls were overcrowded.

In conclusion, to understand the dynamics of sainthood, it is not sufficient to understand only the saint and his followers; it is also not enough to examine the

monk's philosophy and what it is that he preaches. Thamanya Sayadaw was an active promoter of his projects, a talented and charismatic leader, a quick decision-maker, and a man with a strong will. His projects also depended on volunteers. Followers were attracted by what they understood to be the material manifestations of his supernatural powers, and they contributed donations and volunteered their services, further enhancing his saintly reputation. In addition, pilgrims and residents complemented each other in other ways: goods and services provided by residents made the pilgrimage experience more comfortable, and the pilgrims' consumption of goods and services sustained the residents' livelihoods. This is the mechanism that made Thamanya one of the most successful pilgrimage sites in Burma, a veritable religious theme park, a magical kingdom of religion where all sorts of people visited to enjoy the special atmosphere, and donated statues or shrines. Some eventually chose to settle.

When, however, Thamanya Sayadaw passed away on 29 November 2003, Thamanya lost its core symbol. Without his charismatic presence, it has become difficult to solicit donations and volunteer service. Some DVDs and video tapes of his preaching and funeral are still sold as souvenirs, but these cannot replace his living presence. The management of Thamanya has been left in the hands of his four disciples who could not agree on a new abbot to succeed the Sayadaw. So the local government stepped in and added Thamanya to the "Thayagon Village Tract" in September 2005. The land that was once consecrated and set apart for religious purposes was once again affiliated with the secular administration. Some pilgrims may continue visiting for a while and pay homage to Thamanya Sayadaw's mausoleum, but the site needs a new charismatic monk who can be the focus of worship, otherwise the site is bound to face decline.

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#### NOTES

1. Thamanya Taung was officially recognized as *thathana myei* around 1997–98, but since the government recognized it as religious land it has remained a sensitive issue, and was so even when Sayadaw was still alive. It became a bigger problem after he passed away (see also TOSA 2007).

2. TAMBIAH (1984) examined forest-dwelling monks who engaged in ascetic practices far away from towns, while village-dwelling monks resided near lay people. Tracing the history of the theoretical or canonical model of forest monks, he drew attention to the dynamics as a result of the purification or reformation of the Sangha, with the king and authorities cooperating with forest monks. TAYLOR (1993) also discusses forest monks in Thailand. MENDELSON, in his detailed history of the Burmese Sangha (1975), examines the genealogy of forest monks.

3. The research was done with the permission of Sayadaw and the headmen of the residents' quarters. I would like to thank them and the residents of T and N quarters for their help. I conducted research at the mountain in 1995 and 1996, and then did follow-up interviews with the residents of both T and N quarters between 1997 and 1999. I also conducted research in other quarters in 2000, and again in T and N quarters in 2001 and 2002.

4. Pao is a linguistic subgroup of the Karen people. It is now classified as Shan by the present government, although it was included in the Karen group during the previous BSPP period. (Linguistically, the Pao are classified as Karen, but culturally, there are ambiguous

features. The Pao people lived in both Shan and Karen; however, rather “powerful” Pao live in Shan. At the same time, if we focus on culture, the Pao (in Shan State) have some similarities to the Shan.)

5. This is according to my interviews of August 1997 and August 1998 with Aung Theik-dhi Sayadaw, who was an old Pao friend of Thamanya Sayadaw.

6. In Burma it is not customary for monks to provide lay people with meals; normally lay people offer meals to monks.

7. In most Theravāda Buddhist societies, vegetarianism, or avoiding the consumption of meat, is not an indispensable practice. In Burma, vegetarianism (*thetthatlut*) is sometimes understood as a way to gain power (see HOUTMAN 1999). I have written elsewhere about this aspect (see TOSA 2006).

8. The residents claimed that Pao people are concentrated in T quarter, and Karen people in N quarter, and my data confirmed this assertion. Pao couples accounted for seventy-five percent of marriages in T quarter, and Karen couples for eighty-five percent of those in N quarter. Gradually, however, the ethnicities are becoming more mixed.

9. I did research in 1997, but could not trace the residents who had left before then.

10. My informants said that a considerable number of the residents who came into Thamanya in the early period have already returned to their home villages. Therefore we can only speculate about the earlier state of the population based on existing data.

11. I asked the residents about where they came from before coming to Thamanya, as well as about their birthplace or hometown. Because most of the people, especially early immigrants, had moved several times due to the civil war, I cite only their last residence in this article (see also TOSA 2000b).

12. The second reason offered was the recommendation of family, friends, or relatives who had already settled in Thamanya (T: 20, N: 4). There were many families who said simply that they came because they wanted to live near the Sayadaw (T: 11, N: 15).

13. See GRAVERS 1999 on the split in the KNU.

14. DELANG (2000) collected Karen narratives, which included accounts of forced labor and portering.

15. TAWHMI YAHAN again quoted this conversation in his book on Thamanya Sayadaw, but omitted the line “Sayadaw finished these kinds of practices” (1993). As SCHOBBER pointed out (1989b), the concepts surrounding *htwetyat pauk* have been much confused. I have also observed that some *htwetyat pauk* beings head for enlightenment as *arabant* or that some followers explained that *htwetyat pauk* brought the same meaning as an *arabant*. However, most orthodox monks and some experts of *weikza* (*htwetyat pauk*) *gaings* tend to understand that they are different.

16. HKUN HKYIT THAN U (2000) wrote a book on Thamanya Sayadaw’s sermons. GRAVERS (1999) has provided the clearest explanation of the relationship between Thamanya Sayadaw in the political and religious context of Karen State.

17. I am not certain when bus tours to Thamanya began, but am able to confirm that a full-service package tour became available in 1993.

18. Health assistance is composed of qualified medical staff licensed to provide basic medical treatment, such as injections, first aid, and so on. In rural areas, medical doctors and health assistance are rare.

19. Regarding *Sāsana-pyú*, SCHOBBER (1989b, 259) defines it as “to carry forth or perform the dispensation,” and pointed out that such missionary work was related to *htwetyat pauk* belief (SCHOBBER 1989a).

20. On weekdays, there were fewer repairs, especially during the rainy season, and so demand was higher on summer weekends.

21. There are other lay organizations (*úpathaka ahpwe*) in the quarters. These cater primarily for those over sixty years old. Although it was said that anyone could participate, most of the members were of Pao descent. They circumambulate the religious land every *ubokne* (Buddhist Sabbath day), soliciting donations from the residents.

22. There are three forms of farms and products: 1) rice crops in paddy fields called *lay*, 2) rice crops or others in slash-and-burn agriculture called *taung yá* or in silted land called *kaing*, and 3) the cultivation of vegetables, fruits, or gum trees called *hkyan*.

23. Three households returned to the village during the farming season and three households sold vegetables they grew at Thamanya or on village farms. Four households continued to go outside in search of seasonal labor. Some rented their farms to others, receiving rice as rent.

24. Forty-seven households in T quarter and sixteen households in N quarter began new businesses.

25. Seventeen households from T and eleven households from N were street vendors; twelve households from T and seven households from N were day laborers.

26. Most emigrant workers from Karen State went first to Mae Sot, but some tried to go to Bangkok from Mae Sot. There were a few exceptions. One man of Chinese descent, an emigrant worker in Malaysia, married a Pao woman in Bangkok on his way back to Yangon, and moved to Thamanya. The husband of one Pao family was still in Malaysia. Compared with going to Thailand, it is difficult for ordinary peasants living in Karen State to go to Malaysia because of the high costs involved.

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