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Buddhist Monastic Lists and the Making of a Mon Nation in Myanmar: Beyond Criticism of Fixed Ethnicity

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Abstract

The act of not publishing the population of each ethnic minority is no less political than "fixing" ethnic minorities in specific categories. Myanmar, known as a multiethnic country, has yet to release data of the ethnic populations enumerated in its recent census or numerical data about the ethnic monks of the national saṅgha. In order to counter such official invisibility of ethnicity, this paper introduces two sets of unofficial demographic data about ethnic Mon in Myanmar: one of Mon monasteries and one of the Mon monks that have passed Myanmar's official high Buddhist exam. In this process, we will unveil the population distribution of the Mon and elucidate the importance of ethnicity in the national saṅgha using the case of the Mon, who form their own distinct networks to prepare for the state Buddhist examination. Finally, we will discuss the making of such unofficial lists as a form of ethnic nationalism very present among Mon Buddhist monks.

Keywords

Mon in Myanmar, Enumeration of Ethnic Populations, Theravāda *Saṅgha*, Dhammācariya Examination

0. Introduction

Study of ethnicity and nationalism has cast a doubt over the objectivity of the numerical data of population censuses, arguing that the findings of a census can reflect a state's imagination, or intentional depiction, of its people's attributes (cf. Hirschman 1987; Anderson 2016: 163-170; Keyes 2002). Applying this theoretical framework, studies of the 2014

Myanmar census note how the state's classification of people according to 135 official national races (as subcategories of the "eight major national races") attracted controversy from ethnic minority activists (Ferguson 2015; Callahan 2017). It does seem almost impossible for a state to group each citizen into one of several official ethnic categories, as one person may have multiple ethnic identities and can easily switch them according to the social or political situation. Does this mean, then, that states should not classify its people by ethnicity? Does ethnic population data only indicate a state's imagination, or can it also provide certain facts related to ethnic populations? Is there a more accurate categorization than the system of delineating 135 distinct ethnicities currently used in Myanmar, and if so, for whom is it more "accurate"? While "[e]thnic nationalities in Myanmar have designed their own censuses to verify the data of the official, national one," Ferguson doubts whether international aid organizations would accept these alternative censuses (Ferguson 2015: 23). Is there, however, any unofficial data that can be useful in bettering our understanding of ethnicity in Myanmar?

This paper introduces unofficial demographic information on the Mon, one of the ethnic minorities in Myanmar. The information is derived from sources relating to Mon Buddhist monasteries and monks, and was collected by Mon monks themselves. We will discuss how such monastic statistics collected by non-state ethnic agencies can be useful to both create a populational snapshot of an ethnic people and to provide an overview of the importance of ethnicity in a national *saṅgha*, each of which are not officially disclosed in Myanmar. It is hoped that by examining data from non-state ethnic agencies, this paper can contribute to broader discussions about ethnic population data in general.

In today's Myanmar and Thailand, Mon is known as an "ancient civilization". Before the Burmese and Tai/Thai expanded their political and cultural influence at the beginning of the second millennium, ancient civilizations such as the Pyu, Mon, and Angkor flourished in western and central mainland Southeast Asia. Polities using the Mon language were known as Dvāravatī in the lower Chao Phraya basin and as Haripuñjaya in today's Northern Thailand. Mon polities also possibly existed in Lower Burma before or at the same time as the Pagan period, although more excavation and research is needed to confirm this assumption. It is commonly recognized that after the collapse of Pagan, the Mon kingdom of Pegu flourished; this is detailed in the *Rājādhirāj*, a famous work of historical literature in both Myanmar and Thailand, and in the Kaḷyānī inscription in Pegu dated 1475, a contemporary source in Pāli and Mon. The story in the latter is accepted as a monumental event of *saṅgha* purification in the Theravāda world of Southeast Asia.

Although the existence of ancient Mon civilization is well known in mainland Southeast Asian history, the Mon of today have generally not received much attention. A book published as an outcome of the 2007 Bangkok conference on Mon Studies begins: "The Mons

have been something of a 'forgotten people'.... Indeed, so strong is the understanding that the Mons have passed into history that it is not uncommon to find in Burma and Thailand today people who are unaware of the existence of communities in both countries that speak the Mon language and consider themselves Mon" (McCormick, Jenny, and Baker 2011: 1). In Myanmar, however, spoken Mon is used widely in daily conversations among villagers and Mon literacy has been recently flourishing. Hence, some studies, such as South and Lall (2016), have come to pay attention to the Mon education movements. While studies on Mon in contemporary Myanmar are not numerous, they are increasing, with recent research published on the Mon insurgent group (South 2003), civil society (South 2007), historiography (McCormick 2014) and language (Bauer 1990; Jenny 2005).[1] Despite this, basic information about the Mon, such as population figures and distribution, is not yet readily available. Therefore, this paper will offer unofficial, but perhaps the most reliable, data on the distribution of the Mon population.

It must be noted at the outset that population surveys on individual ethnic groups pose a serious dilemma. Plenty of studies have criticized official ethnic categorization and enumeration for creating fixed ethnicities, although in reality, ethnicity is flexible and changeable; it is not rare that one person has several ethnic identities and often switches from one to another depending on the circumstances. If so, should we recommend that all countries abolish official recognition of ethnicity for political use? The matter is indeed more complex: the invisibility of ethnicity that results from non-enumeration of ethnic populations can serve a state's aim to assimilate various ethnic minorities into their respective majorities. Although such "politics of invisibility" has not been extensively focused on in studies of Myanmar, it has been discussed in studies of Thailand (see for example Grabowsky 1993). This paper attempts to grasp the demographic picture of the Mons as a whole despite their invisibility in the official population census of today's Myanmar. At the same time, it will consider how private data on the Mon population is a result of ethno-nationalistic enthusiasm, in this case in the *saṅgha*.

Moreover, no scholarly work has drawn a portrait of Mon Buddhist monks or given an overview of their activities, even though almost all Mons are Buddhist and Mon monks often play important roles as leaders, not only in village life—both religiously and secularly—but also in literacy revivalism and in language nationalism. Until now, scholars have had no idea how many Mon Buddhist monasteries and monks are in Myanmar, but now that unofficial "Mon monastic lists of Buddhist lent (*vassa*)" are available, they will be used in this study to clarify the distribution of the Mon population.

Another set of private data on the Mon *saṅgha*, namely the "annual list of Mon monks

[1] The researchers mentioned here have written several papers other than these. Additional recent works include those by Jenny on Mon linguistics (2013) and the 2011 book of essays regarding Mon in Thailand and Myanmar that spans various disciplines such as archaeology, history, and literature (McCormick, Jenny and Baker 2011).

and novices who passed the official Dhammācariya Examination," will also be used in this study. The Dhammācariya Examination is a significant test for outstanding Buddhist scholars in Myanmar and it is locally considered equivalent to a bachelor's degree.[2] The list shows, on the one hand, how much the Mon *saṅgha* participates proactively in the state Buddhist exam, and on the other hand, the tendency to prepare for this very exam through distinctive ethnic monastery networks.

In short, the aim of this paper is, first, to use two types of private lists of the Mon *saṅgha* to estimate the population distribution of the Mon and to clarify distinctive involvement of Mon monks and novices in the State Buddhist Examination system in contemporary Myanmar, both of which are not officially published by the state and have therefore been made invisible. The second objective of this paper is to discuss the significance of the unofficial lists in relation to the nationalism of the Mon *saṅgha*. Prior to examination of the Mon lists, we will begin with a few considerations on 1) ethnic invisibility in both the population census and *saṅgha* statistical data in Myanmar, 2) the main difference among the "ethnic *saṅgha*s" of the Thai, Burmese, and Mon, and 3) the three orders of the Mon *saṅgha* in Myanmar. The Mon monastic lists used in this paper were compiled separately by the three Mon monastic orders.

1. Ethnic Invisibility in both the Population Census and the *Saṅgha* Administration in Myanmar

1-1. Invisibility in the State Population Census

Naturally, census data can be useful not only in discussing a state's ethnic policy, but also in confirming certain facts vis-a-vis ethnic populations, even if they only provide a partial understanding of various realities. James Scott emphasizes a thesis that valley civilizations could not climb the hills, especially in premodern times. Hill societies did not follow the religion of the lowland, and so, "whereas the valley Burmans and Thais were Theravāda Buddhists, hill peoples were, with some notable exceptions, animist and, in the twentieth century, Christians" (Scott 2009, 20-21, 58). Myanmar's 1983 population census, the latest official data providing information on the relationship between "race" and religion in Myanmar, also supports this thesis.[3]

According to the 1983 census, 98.7 percent of the Burmese "race" is Buddhist. Likewise, the percentage of Buddhists in each valley "race" is quite high: 98.3 percent of Rakhine, 99.2 percent of Mon, and 90.6 percent of Shan are Buddhist. It is noteworthy here that

[2] Those who pass the Dhammācariya Exam can study for a M.A. course in some countries, such as India and Sri Lanka. Further research will be necessary to understand how different countries recognize the results of official Buddhist examinations of other countries.

[3] "Race" here "refers to the ethnic origin of the person enumerated" (*1983 Population Census: Burma* [whole country] 1986: Part One-8).

the Mons represent the highest percentage of Buddhists, just slightly higher than the Burmese. On the other hand, hill "races" are mostly non-Buddhist: only 5.1 percent of Kachin believe in Buddhism, 21.2 percent of Chin, and 21.8 percent of Kayah (the majority is Christian). Although the general image of the Karen (or Kayin in Burmese) is that they are Christian hill people, according to the census, 73.5 percent are Buddhist and just 24.7 percent are Christian (*1983 Population Census*, 2-55). It is also necessary to note that there are quite a few Buddhist Karens living in valley areas.[4] Buddhists are, undoubtedly, the majority in Myanmar (indeed, as it is one of the most famous Theravāda Buddhist countries in the world); Buddhists accounted for 89.4 percent of the country's population in 1983 and 87.9 percent in 2014 (*The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census.* Religion, 3, 5).[5] Still, if we look at religious distribution from a geographic standpoint, there is a division between the hills and valleys. The Mons, the subject of this study, are mostly Buddhists inhabiting the valley.

It is possible to draw a picture of ethnic demographic distribution by using such census data. However, as previous studies have shown, the classification, enumeration, and publication of ethnic populations by the national census necessarily contributes to the state's policies. Contrary to the rigidly defined data collected by the state, some studies have clarified that people use or switch various ethnic categories for both themselves and others depending on the situation (cf. Moerman 1965). Some studies also reveal the arbitrariness of population censuses, that is, how a state may intentionally create ethnic categories with objective-looking demographic data that serve the interests of those in power. For example, Hirschman argues that Malaysia's census in the British period, in accordance with social Darwinism, indicated the superiority of Europeans as the ruling race over Asians by putting the former at the top of the list, thereby justifying colonial rule (Hirschman 1987).

On the other hand, it is also very political *not* to classify, enumerate, or publish the population of ethnic minorities. Grabowsky points out that the 1904 Siam/Thailand census tried to deny the existence of the Lao (mainly residing in northeast Thailand) and the Yuan (mainly residing in northern Thailand) by including them in the ethnic category "Thai," thereby preventing further territorial expansion by the French, who had already colonized today's Laos (Grabowsky 1993).[6] Thailand's population census during the latter half of the 20th century,

[4] Ikeda (2012) summaries how the image of Karens as Christians (a minority of Karen) as opposed to Buddhists (a majority of Karen), has come to dominate. In addition, Ikeda (2007) asserts that the Myaungmya incident in Ayeyarwady region in 1942 had a great impact on the formation of identity as "Karen" among Buddhist Pwo Karens.

[5] The percentage in 2014 is based on the estimated overall population, which includes non-enumerated populations, namely, 1,090,000 in Rakhine State, 69,753 in Kayin State, and 46,600 in Kachin State.

[6] Lao people are a majority in Northeastern Thailand. They share language and culture with the majority of the population in today's Laos. The Northeasterners, however, are more often called "Isan people" today, rather than "Lao". On the other hand, Chiang Mai, a center of today's Northern Thai, has had its own dynasty until the early 20th century. The majorities in both Northeastern and Northern Thailand were

which did not officially release any data about each ethnic population, is a conspicuous example: the census aided the Thai state's imagination of, and indeed its intentions to assimilate all its citizens as Thai, not divided into other ethnic groups such as Lao and Yuan (Wada 2009).[7] To this day, Myanmar has yet to publish data on ethnic populations collected in the 2014 census, making the last official data on ethnic populations the 1983 census. As a result, although the Myanmar state has recognized the multiethnic makeup of the "native" citizens or "national races" (*taingyintha lumyo*), most notably by naming its seven States according to each major "race," ethnic populations have remained officially invisible for 35 years.[8]

Although the latest 2014 population and housing census in Myanmar did enumerate the populations of 135 national races (translated as ethnicity in English), its results have not been released to the public until today. Callahan tackles the difficult work of uncovering the reason(s) why the data was not released and points out several faults in the census process.[9] Her article provides insights into major problems in the census, such as, first, the absence of an option to choose multiple self-identifications, a point recommended by international standards. Second, the people writing down answers were only enumerators; heads of households, as respondents, could not fill out the census forms by themselves. Third, enumerators were told not to accept major "race" categories (such as Kachin or Kayin), but rather to probe for subcategories (such as Jinghpaw or Sgaw) and then input the code for such sub-groups, and so on (Callahan 2017). However, Callahan's discussion consequently seems to support the authorities' explanation for withholding the release of ethnic data in the census, namely that doing so poses a potential risk to peace, a justification used by rulers all over the world. Instead of judging whether the data should be released or not, or examining the politics of such a decision, we will simply regard the state's decision as making ethnicities invisible, that is, it has resulted in a lack of substantial demographic data for all ethnic categories.

Although the ethnic population is invisible to the public, the political meaning of ethnicity was amplified in the 2010 election, in accordance with the 2008 constitution. That is, only the national races with a sufficient population in each concerned territory (Region or State), namely 0.1 percent of the national population, are able to elect their own Regional or State minister for national race affairs (for details, see Callahan 2017, 469-470). As a result, ministers

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called Lao by Bangkok until the end of 19th century.

[7] Especially, not to officially recognize Lao or Northeasterners in Thailand as a distinct ethnic group was a consistent policy of Bangkok throughout 20th century. Recently Iijima (2018) clarified how Bangkok's elite manipulated historical sources before publication in the early 20th century for the purpose of negating "the Lao."

[8] In addition, "national races" are officially recognized at the expense of "non-native" people (see Cheesman 2017).

[9] The 2014 Myanmar census was conducted mainly by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Union of Myanmar Ministry of Immigration and Population (MOIP). For further detail, see Callahan 2017.

for the Karen and Rakhine in Yangon Region, the Pa-O, Burmese, and Mon in Kayin State, and so on were elected in the 2010 and 2015 elections.[10] Although the authorities must have referred to population data of each national race for those elections of the ministers for national race affairs, such demographic data has not been made public.

Ferguson does not directly answer why the ethnic populations counted in the 2014 Myanmar census have not been released, but meaningfully discusses the criticism of the census process itself, most of which is "directed at the interpretation and application of the scheme delineating 135 ethnic sub-groups." The Kachin National Council, for example, views the adoption of the many subcategories of Kachin in the census as a threat to a single identity as "Kachin." A Chin activist group petitioned the government to correct the incorrect names of tribal groups in the census. Due to various and inconsistent criterion, the 135 subcategories, which have been used since the 1983 census, were much-criticized even before 2014 census (Ferguson 2015: 2, 15-16, 19-20). Such conflicts caused by seeking more "accurate" categorization are not easy to settle. Ethnic Mon, however, have almost nothing to do with such politics, because among the eight major national races, only the Mon have no sub-category.[11] Therefore, the Mon are an exceptional but useful case for us to concentrate on the matter of whether ethnicity is invisible or visible in demographic information.

1-2. Official *Saṅgha* Concealing Ethnicity

As mentioned above, in Myanmar not only the Burmese, but also members of some ethnic minorities are Buddhists. Monks therefore naturally reflect the country's multiethnic makeup. Myanmar's *saṅgha* administration, however, adopts a policy of "invisibility of ethnicity" by not publishing data about ethnic monks. Even if the ethnic population data of the 2014 census were to be published in the near future, ethnic monks would continue to be officially invisible. Therefore, unofficial lists of ethnic monasteries, monks, and novices that are issued by private organizations, such as the ones used in this study, are useful to comprehend the ethnic diversity among Myanmar's *saṅgha*.

As statistical data about the *saṅgha* and monasteries in Myanmar is not readily

[10] Influential Mon persons in Yangon organized a project team to carry out an independent Mon population census in 2013 in order to gain the right to elect a Minister for Mon affairs in Yangon Region in the 2015 election. They also seemed to recommend "Mon" residents whose racial record in household registry lists and/or ID cards were "incorrectly" designated as another race to "correct" them. However, in the end, this attempt did not succeed.

[11] For Mon activists, the contention with the 2014 census was the population number itself, not the ethnic category. One MP campaigned to "encourage more people to self-identify as Mon (number 601), regardless of whether they could speak or read the Mon language, if they believed they were descended from Mon people" (Ferguson 2015: 19). However, it is highly possible that the Mon monastic data in this paper reflects monks who speak Mon, but are not necessarily Mon by "blood." For how significant language is among Mon monks, see section 2 of this paper.

available in general, we will first check the official statistical data that does exist and compare it briefly with Thailand before considering the Mon monastic lists. The purpose here is only to offer the latest official monastic data; detailed analysis will be left to other studies.

Buddhist monastic lists of Thailand and Myanmar show that Myanmar has more *saṅgha* members and monasteries than Thailand (see tables 1 and 2). Among the Buddhist population of each country, the percentage of monks and novices is also higher in Myanmar than in Thailand (1.03 percent in the former and 0.58 percent in latter).[12] This roughly indicates that two out of every one hundred Buddhist males in Myanmar are monks or novices, while the number is half that in Thailand. Another notable difference between the two countries is the number of novices: in 2016 the ratio of monks to novices was 100 to 84 in Myanmar and 100 to 20 in Thailand. This partially reflects the importance that Myanmar society places on becoming a novice and the novitation ceremony, as previous studies have reported (cf. Takatani 1982).[13]

On the other hand, there is also a similar tendency between these two countries, that is, the absolute number of monasteries has been increasing during the past five years. This increase can be linked to lay people's belief in merit making through contributing to build a monastery (cf. Nash 1965, 116; Tambiah 1970, 147). More research is needed to clarify the impact of economic changes and other factors on the increase in the number of monasteries and on the overall difference in number of monasteries between Myanmar and Thailand.

Still, many puzzles remain in the monastic lists. For instance, why has the number of monks and novices in Myanmar sharply risen from the 1980s to 2000s, overtaking the numbers in Thailand? Is the decline in the number of novices in each country in proportion to the expansion of secular education? Do the differences between them and the changes over time mainly reflect the reality or the method of enumeration? What is more accurate: that Buddhism in each of the two countries is declining or flourishing? Further research will be necessary to explore these issues.

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[12] According to its 2014 population census, Myanmar's Buddhist population is 45,185,449 and according to its 2010 population census, Thailand's Buddhist population is 61,746,429. The percentage of monks and novices to the total population in Thailand was higher than today, falling from 1.85 percent in 1927 to 0.87 percent in 1969. This decline is explained as a result of the increasing availability of modern secular education (Tambiah 1976, 265-270).

[13] Indeed, Myanmar has a large number of novices, but there are notable regional differences within the country. Shan State has a particularly high proportion of novices: the ratio of monks to novices is 100 to 59 in Lower Burma, but 100 to 292 in Shan State (see Table 4). Regarding the Mon *saṅgha* in Myanmar, the ratio of monks to novices is 100 to 77, which is more similar to the ratio in Myanmar than that in Thailand (see Table 8). In addition, the proportional number of novices has gradually decreased over time in Thailand falling from 100 to 64 in 1927 to 100 to 20 in 2016 (about the past, see Tambiah 1976, 266-267). One explanation of this is the expansion of compulsory education (Channarong 2008, 63). Likewise, Kuramoto Ryosuke points out that the sudden drop in the number of novices in Myanmar occurred only after the civilian government took power and he presumes that one reason might be the spread of secular education into rural areas (oral presentation and handout at a seminar on September 21, 2018).

In any case, these official statistics say nothing about ethnicity in Buddhism. As already mentioned in the case of Myanmar, it is very clear that the *saṅgha* policies of both countries are designed to conceal ethnic diversity, with the result of making it invisible.

Table 1. Number of Monks (M) and Novices (n) in Myanmar and Thailand

		1980	1988	2002	2007	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Myanmar	M	113,445	135,325	192,459	248,640	265,204	272,928	278,873	282,365	281,366
	n	114,242	164,165	268,278	311,937	291,293	287,818	272,714	252,962	237,227
Thailand	M	357,040	289,348	267,818	258,163	293,879	289,131	290,015	298,580	292,592
	n	152,110	137,638	103,026	70,081	61,416	60,528	58,418	59,587	59,439

Sources: For the years 1980 and 1988 in Myanmar, Tin Maung Maung Than (1993, 14). For the years 2002-2016 in Myanmar, "Vassa List of Saṅgha and Thilashin by each Region and State in Myanmar, the year 2000-2016." For the years 1980-2002 in Thailand, Channarong (2008, 12, 16). For the years 2007-2016 in Thailand, National Office of Buddhism, Thailand (2005-2017).

Table 2. Number of Monasteries in Myanmar and Thailand

		2007	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Myanmar	Monastery	58,044	60,131	61,302	61,965	62,649	64,047
Thailand	Monastery	35,244	37,713	38,950	39,447	39,848	40,544

Sources: For Myanmar, "Vassa List of Saṅgha and Thilashin by each Region and State in Myanmar, the year 2000-2016." For Thailand, National Office of Buddhism, Thailand (2005-2017).

1-3. Nine Official Orders[14]

The *saṅgha* is not monolithic: various groups exist within it based on linkages from master to pupil, ordination lineages, *pavāraṇā* groups, ethnicity, and so on.[15] Myanmar has officially recognized nine orders (*gain* in Burmese or *gaṇa* in Pāli) since 1980, when the Ne Win government started to form a national *saṅgha* organization that included all monks and

[14] A group within the *saṅgha* is often translated as a "sect," but sect is not a very accurate term to describe the Rāmaññña Nikāya, the Mahā Nikāya, or Sudhammā Nikāya. Hence, this paper uses the word "order" following Reynolds (1972, 7, 201).

[15] *Pavāraṇā* is a monastic ritual at the end of *vassa*. In Myanmar, a group that conducts *pavāraṇā* together is called a *pavāraṇā gain*. Kuramoto 2013 explains that a *pavāraṇā gain* is formed based on territorial connections or regional ties, in contrast with monastic groups based on master-pupil relationships, but I have seen one *pavāraṇā gain* based on master-pupil line in Lower Burma.

Table 3. Number of Monasteries according to the Official Nine Orders in Myanmar, 2016

Order / State or Region	Sudhamma	Shwegyin	Mahā Dvāra	Mūla Dvāra	Anauk -chaung	Weluwun	Hngettwin	Mahā Yen	Ganavimok Gado	**Total**
Kachin	944	26	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	970
Chin	223	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	223
Shan	*5,763*	71	-	2	-	-	6	-	-	5,842
Kayah	200	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	204
Sagaing	7,448	991	-	-	-	-	19	-	-	8,458
Mandalay	9,295	402	27	10	-	-	21	-	-	9,755
Magway	6,180	141	-	67	-	1	1	-	-	6,390
Naypyidaw	1,119	6	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1,126
Yangon	5,185	525	53	151	2	145	27	2	1	6,091
Bago	6,033	611	277	82	-	227	20	1	-	7,251
Ayeyarwady	6,713	435	330	74	47	249	45	-	-	7,893
Rakhine	3,212	157	78	173	-	-	-	-	-	3,620
Kayin	1,524	145	-	32	-	1	4	13	-	1,719
Mon	2,369	303	81	56	-	24	3	64	-	2,900
Tanintharyi	1,368	15	-	73	-	14	-	-	134	1,604
Whole Union	57,576	3,832	846	721	49	661	146	80	135	64,046

Source: Based on *Vassa List of Saṅgha and Thilashin by each Region and State in Myanmar, the year 2016*. The sum total of monasteries in the whole Union of Myanmar (64,046) differs slightly from the total of 64,047 in Table 2 of this paper. This is due to a difference in sources.

* This paper corrected the number of monasteries in the Sudhamma Order in Shan State (the corrected number is written in italics). It is 5,767 in the original source.

Table 4. Number of Monks (M) and Novices (n) according to the Official Nine Orders in Myanmar, 2016

Order / State or Region	Sudhamma		Shwegyin		Mahā Dvāra		Mūla Dvāra		Anaukchaung Dvāra		Weluwun		Hngettwin		Mahā Yen		Ganavimok Gado		**Total**	
	M	n	M	n	M	n	M	n	M	n	M	n	M	n	M	n	M	n	M	n
Kachin	*4,057*	2,443	163	149	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	*4,220*	2,592
Chin	292	110	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	292	110
Shan	18,660	54,540	608	1,873	-	-	21	19	-	-	-	-	19	2	-	-	-	-	19,308	56,434
Kayah	686	1,071	59	346	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	745	1,417
Sagaing	25,807	18,543	4,418	4,403	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	40	21	-	-	-	-	30,265	22,967
Mandalay	48,389	42,250	3,147	3,772	89	39	33	57	-	-	-	-	225	106	-	-	-	-	51,883	46,224
Magway	16,998	*12,493*	436	*297*	-	-	133	*45*	-	-	1	-	3	*3*	-	-	-	-	17,571	*12,838*
Naypyidaw	5,182	5,189	95	91	-	-	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5,283	5,280
Yangon	43,721	25,412	5,626	5,979	517	422	901	558	18	33	912	633	279	290	60	3	3	7	52,037	33,337
Bago	25,612	11,331	4,075	2,996	915	485	281	100	-	-	761	237	63	20	4	1	-	-	31,711	15,170
Ayeyarwady	*22,033*	10,858	*2,025*	1,378	*1,359*	1,065	*293*	154	*181*	293	*689*	313	*169*	70	-	-	-	-	*26,749*	14,131
Rakhine	5,855	4,760	263	179	146	117	333	232	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6,597	5,288
Kayin	8,013	*5,405*	677	*693*	-	-	55	*1*	-	-	11	-	12	*3*	111	*38*	-	-	8,879	*6,140*
Mon	15,627	*10,187*	2,689	*2,040*	436	*198*	246	*77*	-	-	125	*32*	7	*4*	348	*242*	-	-	19,478	*12,780*
Tanintharyi	5,323	2,131	68	23	-	-	281	109	-	-	43	23	-	-	-	-	632	233	6,347	2,519
Whole Union	*246,255*	*206,723*	*24,349*	*24,219*	*3,462*	*2,326*	*2,583*	*1,352*	*199*	326	*2,542*	*1,238*	*817*	*519*	523	*284*	635	240	*281,365*	*237,227*

Source: Based on *Vassa List of Saṅgha and Thilashin by each Region and State in Myanmar, the year 2016.*

* The source adds monks and novices together. Therefore, this paper recounts the numbers of monks independently and then corrects some of the total sum data, which are written in italics here. In the original source, the total sum of monks is 281,816 and of novices is 237,229.

novices across the country.[16] In contrast to Thailand, which has only two official orders, Myanmar accepts more diversity within its *saṅgha*. However, these nine official orders in the Myanmar *saṅgha* contain no "ethnic orders;"[17] they are instead composed of two types: the eight minority orders, or *nikāya*s, and a majority Sudhamma Gain, which includes the remainder (and is in fact composed of various groups) (see tables 3 and 4).[18]

Indeed, some of the eight minor orders are regional in their distribution. For example, a considerable number of monasteries and *saṅgha* members belonging to Shwegyin and Hngettwin, which were originally based in Upper Burma, are still distributed in their original areas, not only in Lower Burma. Similarly, the other six orders are spread mainly throughout their origin areas of Lower Burma. Moreover, the distribution of some of each small order is quite concentrated in only specific areas. For example, Anaukchaung Dvāra is present mostly in the Ayeyarwady delta, Māha Yen in Mon and Kayin states, and Ganavimok Gado in Tanintharyi Region, according to their origins.

Ethnic orders, which are officially invisible, are also distributed regionally, but ethnic features, rather than geographical location, can also mark their affiliation. This paper will focus on the case of the Mon. In addition, while it is true that almost all members of the Mahā Yen order, which is one of the official nine orders, are ethnic Mon, the group is just a part of the whole Mon *saṅgha*. If that is the case, where are the other Mon monks distributed? The monastic lists of Mon monks will answer this question in detail.

2. The Characteristics of the Mon *Saṅgha*

Even though every Theravāda Buddhist monk shaves off his hair, wears a reddish brown robe, and lives in a monastery while being subjected to 227 disciplinary rules, they are not separated completely from the secular world and share some practices with lay people. Language is also shared in both monastic and secular spaces. Due to differences in their

[16] On the formation of a national *saṅgha* organization in Myanmar since 1980, see Tin Maung Maung Than (1993).

[17] An ethnic order is a group of monks whose members share the same ethnicity. There are at least two reasons why it is recognized as an order. Some are based simply on ethnic attributes, but others were established as exclusive groups based on the master-pupil line of the founder. Sometimes an ethnic *saṅgha* includes several ethnic orders: for the Mon case, see section 3 of this paper. Further research is needed to better understand the orders of other ethnic minorities.

[18] "*Nikāya*" refers to ordination lineages or groups sharing distinctive *saṅghakamma*. *Saṅghakamma* or *vinayakamma* are "the legal procedures of the monastic community" prescribed by Buddhist ecclesiastical law, including the *uposatha* ceremony and *upasampadā* (ordination of monks) (Bechert 1982: 65; Bechert 1990: 3-5). Bechert (1990) calls each of the nine official *gain* in Myanmar *nikāya*. Nonetheless, Kuramoto mentions that young scholar monks and novices easily "cross the borders" of official *gain*, that is to say, monks from different *gain* live and eat together in the same monastery for Buddhist learning (Kuramoto 2014, 68-69). To what extent each of the eight orders' ordination lines and *saṅghakamma* are exclusive is not yet well known; further research is needed to get an overview of the actual practices regarding *gain*s or *nikāya*s.

respective mother tongues, monks sometimes create networks based on the vernacular and build close relationships with a specific language community. Language is therefore key to understanding the differences between the Burmese and Mon *saṅgha*s.

Theravāda monks use at least two languages: sacred Pāli and their individual mother tongue.[19] All members of the *saṅgha* chant daily in Pāli and scholar monks learn the Pāli canon, Tipiṭaka, and its commentaries. At the same time, monks communicate with each other or with lay people in their vernacular tongue and scholar monks also study and use secular languages to enhance their understanding of the Pāli canon.

The pronunciation of Pāli chants is also significant to the uniqueness of the Mon *saṅgha*. The letters and writing system used for Pāli are almost the same in Burmese and Mon, but the way of reading differs from each other. The difference in writing only amounts to a few vowel symbols (see Table 5). Mon monks can therefore use Pāli text written in Burmese characters without hindrance, and vice versa.

Table 5. Different Letters between Burmese and Mon for Writing Pāli Language

	ī	u	e
Burmese	◌ီ	◌ု	ေ
Mon	◌ီ	◌ိ	ေ

Source: Author's survey.
＊"ī" is a dependent vowel sign, "u" and "e" are independent vowels.

When Mon monks read the same Pāli sentence, however, they pronounce it differently from Burmese and Thai monks. Table 6 offers a brief comparison of pronunciation among these three "ethnic *saṅgha*s" (see Table 6). For the Mon vernacular, the consonant letters are divided into two types, each with a different vowel sound: the head register and the chest register. Reading Pāli in Mon style (Pāli-in-Mon) also follows this rule. Using "သရ္ထံ" (M. sarɛnɔŋ) as an example,[20] while "သ" (s) is read with the vowel "a" in the head register, "ရ္" (r) is read with

[19] Of course, monks of ethnic minorities in Myanmar use the third language, Burmese, which is the official language. Most Mon *saṅgha* members can speak and read in both Mon and Burmese. Many Mon monks are also "bilingual" in Pāli chants, meaning they can chant Pāli sentences in both Mon and Burmese pronunciations.

[20] Phonetic notation for Mon in this article is mainly, but not entirely, based on Shorto's Dictionary (1962), but the grave accent for the chest register could not be written here.

the vowel "ɛ" in the chest register, not "a" as a head register.[21] Therefore the most notable feature of Pāli-in-Mon is that there are two types of vowels.

In addition, there are also variations in consonant sounds among Burmese, Mon, and Thai. Particularly, the letter "သ / ส" sounds like "ဗ" in both vernacular Burmese and Pāli-in-Burmese, which is different in sound from the "s" sound pronounced in vernacular Mon, vernacular Thai, Pāli-in-Mon, and Pāli-in-Thai. This difference of sound is the most salient and distinct characteristic of oral Pāli-in-Burmese. Furthermore, some consonant sounds, such as "ဗ / พ" or "ဂ / ค" differ among Burmese, Mon, and Thai.

We have no idea yet how many such ethnic *saṅgha*s exist in mainland Southeast Asia. In Myanmar, some Mon informants explained that, with the exception of Mon monks, other ethnic or regional *saṅgha*s seem to usually chant with the Pāli-in-Burmese pronunciation. However, Ishii clarifies that the Khun (Tai Khœn) *saṅgha* in Kengtung, Shan State, Myanmar does not conduct *saṅghakamma* such as *uposatha* with the Shan *saṅgha*, because their chant pronunciations are different from each other (Ishii 1998). Other than *saṅgha* in Myanmar and Thailand, Khmer monks may also be added to the category of these ethnic *saṅgha*s based on their distinct Pāli chant pronunciation. Further research is needed to provide an overview of the existence of ethnic *saṅgha* in mainland Southeast Asia.

Table 6. Comparison of Three Languages Regarding Pronunciation and Writing of Pāli Chants

	Pronunciation			Writing
Pāli	buddhaṃ	saraṇaṃ	Gacchāmi	
Burmese	/bouʔ dan	θaranan	giʔ sāmi/	ဗုဒ္ဓံ သရဏံ ဂစ္ဆာမိ
Mon	/put thɔŋ	sarɛnɔŋ	{ kot chāmi / kot chāmɔi/	ဗုဒ္ဓံ သရဏံ ဂစ္ဆာမိ
Central Thai	/phut thaŋ	saranaŋ	khat chāmi/	พุทฺธํ สรณํ คจฺฉามิ

Source: Author's survey.

[21] As for "ံ," it is pronounced "ɔŋ," namely a head register "ɔ" and final consonant "ŋ."

The ethnic Mon *saṅgha* is also called Rāmañña Nikāya in Thailand and Myanmar. Rāmañña is a synonym for Mon, but why is it called a *nikāya*? According to Bechert, a "*nikāya*" is a group within the *saṅgha* that do not commonly perform *vinayakamma* (*saṅghakamma* in this paper), especially the ordination (*upasampadā*) ceremony, together with the other monks (Bechert 1990).[22] This practice may come from the group's belief that it is purer and more correct than others. Certainly, the ethnic *saṅgha*s typically exhibit no such tendency. However, it is possible that members of an ethnic *saṅgha* have a tendency not to conduct *saṅghakamma* together with other ethnic monks, because they have different vernacular, chanting pronunciation, monastic practices and/or ethnic identity from others and, as a result, they have tendency not to live together with other ethnic *saṅgha*s and may form a distinct network.[23] In fact, Wachirayān (Vajirañāṇavarorosa), who was a son of the Siam King Monkut (Rama IV) and played a key role in institutionalizing the Thai national *saṅgha* in the early twentieth century, wrote about ethnic *nikāya*s (ethnic orders) in Siam/Thailand before the first modern law of *saṅgha* administration in 1902:

> Besides these three *nikāya*s [Mahā Nikāya (or Thai), Dhammayuttika Nikāya (or a royal order among Thai) and Rāmañña Nikāya (or Mon)], there were Burmese monks [in Siam/Thailand]. The Burmese monks can be considered as a distinctive *nikāya*, for they did not live with the monks from other *nikāya*s and their ways of chanting and daily religious practices were different from the other *nikāya*s. The Burmese monks, however, are not recognized as a *nikāya* here, for their number is small.
>
> (*Thaleangkan Kana Song*, vol.2: 1-2)

It is clear that the Burmese *saṅgha* was recognized as a different *nikāya*-like group by the head of the national *saṅgha* in Thailand at that time, because their chants and other monastic practices were different from others.

However, in contrast to Bechert's definition of a *nikayā*, in which members attempt to maintain an exclusive ordination lineage, the boundaries among ethnic *nikāya*s are seemingly more permeable and changeable. In Thailand today, not only officially, but also unofficially, people do not commonly refer to the Mon *saṅgha* as the Rāmañña Nikāya. This is likely due to

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[22] As for *nikāya* and *saṅghakamma*, see also footnote 18 in this paper.

[23] Whether chant pronunciations are exactly the same or not is not equivalent to whether monks can conduct *saṅghakamma* together or not, because *saṅghakamma* is mostly recited by one monk only, not chanted by many. I heard from monks in Thailand that a foreign monk can join the *saṅghakamma* such as *uposatha* and *upasampadā* of a monastery in Thailand, although he cannot chant in Thai pronunciation. The ethnic Mon *saṅgha* of 19th century Thailand and today's Myanmar, however, tend(ed) to build networks inward, mainly conducting *saṅghakamma* only among themselves, because Mon monks usually live with each other.

the boundary between the Mon and Thai *saṅgha* becoming more obscure than before, as Mon monks have come to speak and chant in Thai more and more, and conduct *saṅghakamma*, especially the ordination, only in Thai pronunciation, with a very few exceptions. On the other hand, in Myanmar today, Mon monks identify themselves with the Rāmañña Nikāya, except for two strict discipline groups (Mahā Yen and Shwegyin Mon), as mentioned in the next section.

Other than their distinct chants, it is also vitally significant that in Myanmar only the Mon *saṅgha* has received special treatment in the official Buddhist examination. This distinction has been overlooked in previous studies. That is, the examinee can choose one of three language options among Burmese-Pāli, Mon-Pāli, or Pāli-Pāli to answer exam questions. Therefore, Mon monks have been able to use their mother tongue to study the Pāli canon (Wada 2016).

3. Unknown Mon *Saṅgha* Orders

As mentioned above, there is no official data on the number of Mon monasteries, monks, and novices in Myanmar, for the Union government has not officially recognized the Mon *saṅgha* as an order or a *gain*. Accordingly, the Mon *saṅgha* is invisible in official monastic lists (see tables 3 and 4). Private monastic lists are, therefore, meaningful in offering basic information on today's Mon. However, even private lists do not include the total amount of all Mon monasteries and *saṅgha* members, because Mon monks may belong to any of the three orders, and each order issues its monastic lists independently.[24] First, we provide an overview of the Mon orders (see tables 7 and 8).[25]

Among the three orders, Mahā Yen is the only officially recognized order, or *gain*. The name of this order comes from its founder, Yen Buddhavaṃsa (1841-1918), who was a Mon monk from today's central Thailand. "Mahā" is the title granted for scholar monks who passed the third grade of the Pāli-Thai exams sponsored by the Thai state.[26] His name, "Yen," means "cool" in Thai. Whereas in Mon the order is called "Mahā Yen," this is pronounced "Mahā Yin" in Burmese. This order is also called Dhammayutti Nikāya, for the founder belonged to that official order in Thailand. In the late 19th century, Mahā Yen bhikkhu came alone to Kado

[24] Today, all monks and novices in Myanmar are supposed to belong to an official order in accordance with their ordination lines. In some cases, however, a monk belongs to two orders, officially and unofficially (especially those who are members of the official Sudhamma Order). For example, members of the Rāmañña Nikāya (Order) belong to two orders: that is, they officially belong to the Sudhamma Order, and unofficially to the Rāmañña Nikāya, as mentioned later.

[25] About how these three Mon orders have respectively become more cohesive as a social group after the 1980s, see Wada (2016).

[26] Mahā Yen is said to have passed the fifth grade of the official Pāli exam in Bangkok, which has nine grades. The Pāli-Mon examination sponsored by the Thai monarchy was not abolished yet at that time, but Mahā Yen seems to have taken the Pāli-Thai exam because the highest Pāli-Mon exam was held only up to the fourth grade. See his biography in Thai (*Traisaraṇadhaja Anussaraṇa*).

Village on the Salwin River, about 9 miles from Mawlamyine, where he gathered the support of some wealthy Mon merchants (Vedagū 1975). Nowadays the Mahā Yen group has 84 monasteries across Mon and Kayin (Karen) states and in some principal cities.

Shwegyin Mon is an unofficial order consisting of Mon monks and novices who officially belong to Shwegyin Nikāya, the second largest official order in Myanmar. To be perfectly accurate, Shwegyin Mon do not call themselves a "*nikāya*." We should therefore understand them as a sub-group or a distinct ethnic order of the Shwegyin Nikāya. The Shwegyin Mon was founded as an organization in the 1990s, stimulated by a rising social cohesion in both of the other two Mon orders. This group has a marked locality, with its distribution concentrated in Mudon Township, bordering the southern part of Mawlamyine Township.

All remaining Mon monks and novices belong to Rāmañña Nikāya. The word "belong" here does not refer to the literal meaning of the word, instead denoting ethnic attributes used as an ethnic ascription within the *saṅgha*. The leading monks of Rāmañña Nikāya have, however, carried out some significant ethno-nationalistic activities and promoted the unity of the Mon *saṅgha*. These include the publication of Buddhist Pāli canons translated to Mon, the annual private Buddhist exam for Rāmañña monks, the issuing of the *vassa* (Buddhist Lent) list comprising all Rāmañña monks, and so on. These activities of Rāmañña Nikāya usually do not include the other Mon orders, Mahā Yen and Shwegyin Mon. Officially, monks and novices in Rāmañña Nikāya belong to Sudhamma Gain; they therefore do not appear in any state religious administration documents.

These three Mon orders issue annual *vassa* lists separately, which do not overlap with each other.[27] Therefore, the combination of the three lists provided in tables 7 and 8 gives an overview of the entire scope of the Mon *saṅgha* in Myanmar. This paper will further consider the distribution of the Mon population from these tables.

[27] By contrast, there is no reliable, comprehensive, and contemporary Mon monastic lists in Thailand as in Myanmar. An official document in the National Archives of Thailand listing 162 Mon monasteries in the whole Kingdom in 1895 is significant as a historical source to imagine the full scope of the Mon *saṅgha* at that time (for English version, see Reynolds 1972, Appendix B, 276-280), but it may be too old to provide an overview of today's Mon *saṅgha*. Recently, a Mon person in Thailand compiled another comprehensive list of 271 Mon monasteries across Thailand. It also proves very useful, but it includes many ex-Mon monasteries, so it does not reflect the current condition (Manop 2012). In any case, the difference between Thai and Mon monasteries is getting more and more ambiguous these days, due to monks' preference for Pāli-in-Thai chants over Pāli-in-Mon and the gradual disuse of the Mon language both among the *saṅgha* and the lay people. The ordination ceremony with the Pāli-in-Mon pronunciation remains in only approximately five of six monasteries under six *upajjhāya*s (which were members of an unofficial special order, Rāmañña Dhammayuttika, a Mon monastic group in the Dhammayuttika) in the whole of Thailand, with the exception of border areas and immigrant monks. This is a stark contrast to Myanmar, where practically almost all Mon monasteries conduct their ordinations in Pāli-in-Mon.

Table 7. Number of Mon Monasteries in Myanmar according to Three Orders, 2017 or 2018

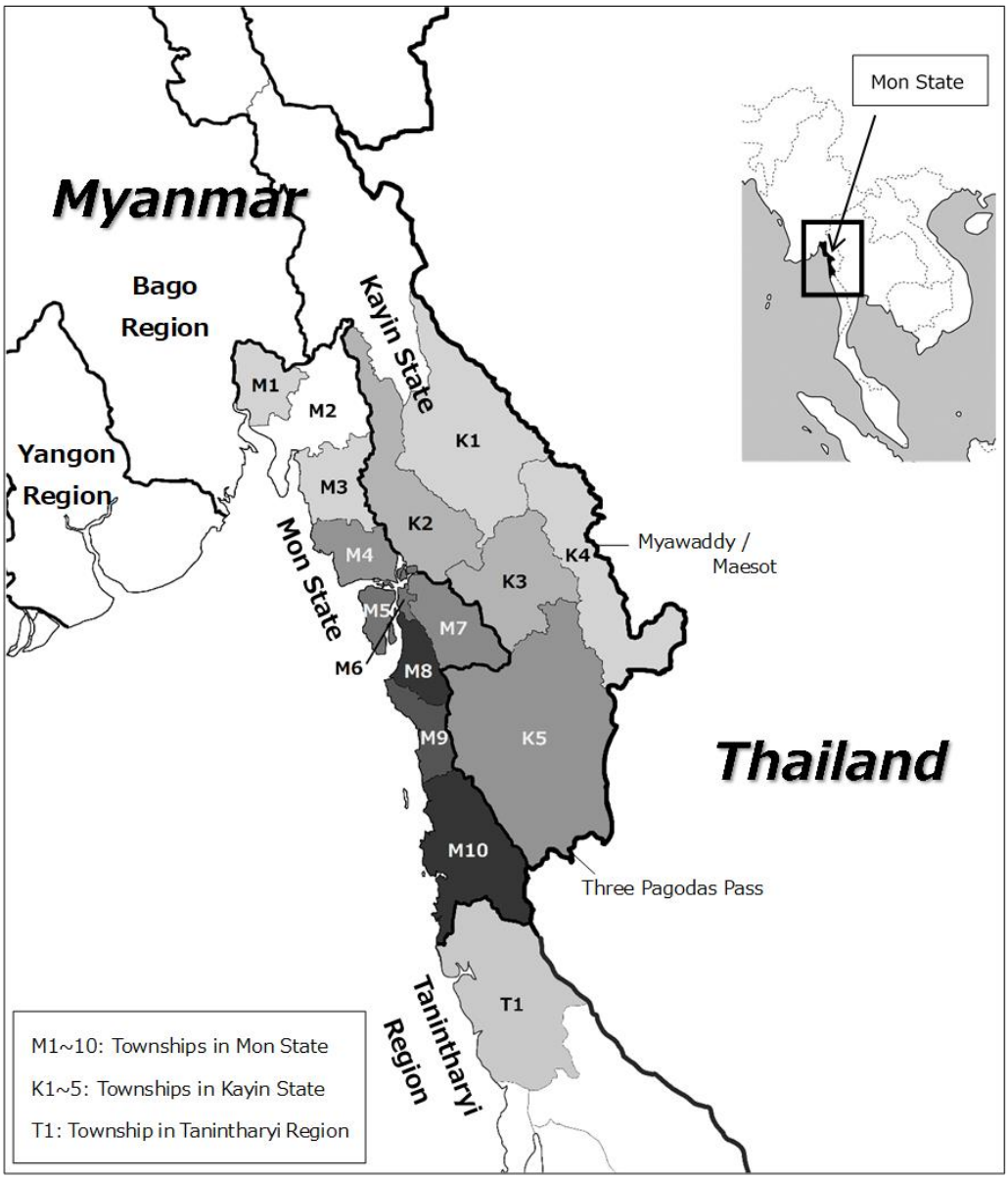
	Order / Township [or Region]		Ramañña Nikāya 2017	Maha Yen 2018	Shwegyin Mon 2018	Total of Mon Monasteries	Total of All Monasteries, (including Burmese, Mon, Karen, and so on)
Mon State	M1	Kyaikhto	4	1	-	5	282
	M2	Bilin	-	-	-	-	392
	M3	Thaton	6	-	-	6	322
	M4	Paung	59	6	1	66	318
	M5	Chaungzon	74	21	-	95	205
	M6	Mawlamyine	90	7	2	99	390
	M7	Kyaikmaraw	74	2	-	76	191
	M8	Mudon	128	15	57	200	284
	M9	Thanbyuzayat	109	14	2	125	212
	M10	Ye	181	-	3	184	305
		Sum	725	66	65	856	2,901
Kayin (Karen) State	K1	Hlaingbwe	4	-	-	4	323
	K2	Hpa-an	26	7	4	37	529
	K3	Kawkareik	34	4	-	38	246
	K4	Myawaddy		1	-	1	186
	K5	Kyainseikgyi	44	2	-	46	131
		Payathonsu	23	-	-	23	135
		Others	-	-	-	-	169
		Sum	131	14	4	149	1,719
Tanintharyi Region	T1	Yebyu	16	-	-	16	136
		Others	19	-	-	19	1,468
		Sum	35	-	-	35	1,604
Others	[Yangon Region]		45	2	2	49	6,091
	[Bago Region]		17	1	1	19	7,251
	[Mandalay Region]		5	1	-	6	9,755
	Others		-	-	-	-	34,725
		Sum	67	4	3	74	57,822
Whole Union			**958**	**84**	**72**	**1,114**	**64,046**

Sources: Based on Mon Orders' Vassa Lists. For all monasteries in Myanmar, "Vassa List of Saṅgha and Thilashin by each Region and State in Myanmar, the year 2000-2016".

Table 8. Number of Mon Monks (M) and Novices (n) in Myanmar according to Three Orders

	Township [or Region] / Order		Ramañña Nikāya 2014 [or 2017]		Maha Yin 2018		Shwegyin Mon 2018		Total of the Mon Saṅgha	
			M	n	M	n	M	n	M	n
Mon State	M1	Kyaikhto	16	6	2	-	-	-	18	6
	M3	Thaton	17	19	-	-	-	-	17	19
	M4	Paung	323	123	27	19	2	-	352	142
	M5	Chaungzon	[277]	[102]	132	68	-	-	409	170
	M6	Mawlamyine	510	582	79	89	17	-	606	671
	M7	Kyaikmaraw	471	354	18	10	-	-	489	364
	M8	Mudon	598	505	71	47	456	173	1,125	725
	M9	Thanbyuzayat	584	650	64	11	12	27	660	688
	M10	Ye	971	972	-	-	14	12	985	984
		Sum	3,767	3,313	393	244	501	212	4,661	3,769
Kayin State	K1	Hlaingbwe	n.d.	n.d.	-	-	-		n.d.	n.d.
	K2	Hpa-an	[186]	[114]	32	15	13	9	231	138
	K3	Kawkareik	170	131	58	12	-	-	228	143
	K4	Myawaddy	-	-	9	1	-	-	9	1
	K5	Kyainseikgyi	140	215	10	12	-	-	150	227
		Payathonsu	169	87	-	-	-	-	169	87
		Sum	665	547	109	40	13	9	787	596
Tanin-tharyi Region	T1	Yebyu	33	59	-	-	-	-	33	59
		Others	95	64	-	-	-	-	95	64
		Sum	128	123	-	-	-	-	128	123
Others	[Yangon Region]		356	168	50	3	5	1	411	172
	[Bago Region]		72	44	2	1	4	-	78	45
	[Mandalay Region]		39	8	9	-	-	-	48	8
		Sum	467	220	61	4	9	1	537	225
Whole Union			**5,027**	**4,203**	**563**	**288**	**523**	**222**	**6,113**	**4,713**

Sources: Based on Orders' Vassa Lists.
* For Ramañña Nikāya, the numbers are based on the list for year 2014. As the 2014 list did not include Chaungzon and Paung townships, they are based on year 2017.



Map 1. Mon Monastery Distribution in Myanmar (More Dark, Larger in Number)

4. Estimating the Distribution of the Mon Population

One of the most meaningful accounts on the Mon language and population is Christian Bauer's article published in 1990. He denies that Mon is a dying language, although this assertion or "myth" has been believed for over a century. According to him, "there is no evidence to suggest that the actual number of speakers of Mon in Burma is declining, or that there is a relative decline." He concludes by saying that even though Mon language use in Thailand is declining irreversibly, "in Burma Mon will continue to be a major regional language" (Bauer 1990, 31, 37). Bauer's assessment is consistent with my own fieldwork experience

Table 9. Comparing Population of "Mon Races" in the 1983 Census with the Distribution of Mon Monasteries in the 2017-2018 Private Vassa Lists

Division or Region / State	Myanmar Population Census 1983			Mon Vassa Lists 2017-18
	Total Population in each Division or State	Mon Race Population	Distribution of Mon Race Population (Ratio of each Division/State to Whole Union)	Distribution of Mon Monasteries (Ratio of each Region/State to Whole Union)
Mon	1,680,157	642,185	77.7%	76.8%
Kayin	632,962 +422,397	112,137	13.6%	13.4%
Tanintharyi	913,943 +3,304	23,430	2.8%	3.1%
Yangon	3,965,916	25,575	3.1%	4.4%
Bago	3,799,791	15,308	0.4%	1.7%
Ayeyarwady	4,994,061	3,661	0.4%	0%
Mandalay	4,577,762	1,071	0.1%	0.5%
Others		3,434	0.4%	0%
Whole Union	34,124,908 +1,183,005	826,801	100%	100%

Source: Based on *1983 Population Census* and Mon Orders' Vassa Lists.
* The number following the sign "+" is the estimated population for areas restricted for security reasons. For example, 1,055,359 as the total population of Kayin State consists of 632,962 as the enumerated population and 422,397 as an estimation of the non-enumerated population. Note, however, that each population by race, such as "Mon race population," denotes only the enumerated population and does not include the estimated one.

conversing in Mon during my stay in areas across Mon State and in and around Bangkok, where a large number of Mon come from Myanmar to work.

With the additional data provided in this article, we can now revise Bauer's article. First, he did not mention population by "races" as the result of Myanmar's 1983 census. Second, we already have monastic lists of all Mon orders.

Myanmar's 1983 census enumerated 826,801 people of the "Mon Race" across the whole country. This number does not reflect the population of Mon speakers, however, because

the definition of the word "race" in the 1983 census is not based on language use.[28] Yet, the distribution of the Mon population in each State and Division (today's Region) in the 1983 census is almost the same as the distribution of Mon monasteries today (see Table 9). It is highly possible that the number of Mon monasteries reflects the presence of the *saṅgha* and lay supporters who are using the Mon vernacular. Therefore, to a certain extent, data from the 1983 can be a useful reference to estimate the population of Mon language users at that time. In a somewhat forceful interpretation, today's population of Mon speakers could reach approximately 1.2 million people. This is estimated from the percentage of Mon comprising the total population in 1983, (2.34 percent), and Myanmar's population in 2014 of 51,486,253.[29]

In any case, the 1983 census only shows the population of the "Mon race" by States and Divisions, so data according to smaller administrative units is invisible. Since there is no official demographic data on Mons by townships, we shall refer to the private Mon monastic lists to answer the following questions (see Table 7, Map 1). First, where is the center of the Mon population, based on language use? The lists reveal that Mudon and Ye, which are located in the southern part of Mon State, are the centers. Both the absolute number of Mon monasteries (200) and the ratio of Mon monasteries to the all monasteries in the township (70 percent), are the highest in Mudon Township. Ye has the second highest number of Mon monasteries (184), which accounts for 60 percent of the total number of all monasteries in the township.

Second, what is the distribution of the Mon population? Although Thaton is a famous settlement of the ancient Mon dynasty, today there are relatively few Mons in the northern part of Mon State in places such as Kyaikhto, Bilin, and Thaton. Yet there are plenty of Mon villages from Paung in the north to Ye in the south. In the east, the Mon population is widely scattered across several townships of southern Kayin State. In the south, Mon are spread across Yebyu and the other townships of northern Tanintharyi.[30]

It should be noted that Mons are not an overwhelming majority even in Mon State. Although Chaungzon and Thanbyuzayat townships have large Mon populations, the number of Mon monasteries in each is about half of the total number of monasteries in each township. Mawlamyine Township, in which Mon State's capital is located, may be more accurately described as an ethnic mosaic rather than a Mon-dominated area.[31]

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[28] As for definitions of the term "race" in the 1983 census, see footnote 3 in this paper.

[29] The total population of Myanmar here excludes an estimated 4.25 million Myanmar-born people living abroad, especially in Thailand (*The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census: Thematic report on Population Dynamics*).

[30] Some Mon people are also scattered in urban areas such as Yangon, Mandalay, and Bago (Pegu), but the number of Mon monasteries does not necessarily reflect the actual population and may be much more numerous than the scale of the Mon population there (see Table 9 and compare "distribution of Mon Race population" with "distribution of Mon monasteries").

[31] The mosaic of "races" is also clearly recognizable in the 1983 census: for Mon State, as an example, each race's population and their percentage of the total population of Mon State (1,680,157) is written as

5. Mon Monasteries in the Largest City

We will briefly mention Mon monasteries in Yangon. The largest city in Myanmar is also known as an ancient Mon area. Indeed, some pagodas in and around Yangon still bear the Mon word "*kyaik*." It is thought that Mon place names, such as Kamayut Township, also remain in Yangon (Halliday 2000, 65). Most Mon monasteries in Yangon today, however, have been built relatively recently. Therefore, we should consider the role of largest city's Mon monasteries in the current context.

In 2013, a total of 13 Mon monasteries existed around Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon.[32] Among them, Kəma Chim Monastery on the north side of Shwedagon was built in 1923 and is the oldest one. It may also be the oldest Mon monastery in Yangon today.[33] Kyaik Sɔe Mon Monastery (or Kyaik Thi Mun in Burmese), which was founded sometime during 1954-1956, may be the second oldest Mon monastery near Shwedagon Pagoda.[34] The remaining ten are relatively new: the approximate date of foundation are the 1980s (one), the 1990s (three), the 2000s (four), and the 2010s (two).[35] Due to a lack of information, we cannot discuss here the reason(s) why the number of Mon monasteries has been increasing during the past 20-30 years, but we can confirm that various demands exist for having distinctively Mon monasteries in the large city. Monasteries in Yangon offer various social functions by providing a learning center for the *saṅgha*, a residential facility for lay students, a space to rest for travelers, a place to stay temporarily for invalids who need treatment in large hospitals, and so on.[36] Therefore, it is useful for both monks and lay people to have their own ethnic- or region-based monasteries or to know personally some monks in those monasteries.

In addition, in Yangon some Mon monasteries, but not all, have a distinct locality in that many of the monks or lay supporters are from the same region. It is also common for these Mon monasteries to be called not only by their official name, but also by an unofficial name based on the village or township where the abbot is from (with the exception of some monasteries acting as Buddhist learning centers). It is easy to imagine that such localism or

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follows: Mon 642,185 (38.2 percent), Burmese 624,489 (37.2 percent), Karen 263,990 (15.7 percent), and others. The census shows the breakdown of the population by "race" only in each State and Division, however, without providing a breakdown by smaller administrative unit, such as in Map 1 of this paper.

[32] Information in this section 5 is based on interviews at 12 of 13 Mon monasteries on the north and east sides of Shwedagon Pagoda in 2013.

[33] On the foundation date in 1923, see Rāmañña Dhammācariya Association (2016, 13). The information as "the oldest" is in accordance with interview on July 2013 with the abbot of this monastery.

[34] For the foundation year of Kyaik Sɔe Mon Monastery, see Kyaik Thi Mun Monastery (2000, 63).

[35] Of the 13 in all, I have not been able to interview the abbot of the remaining monastery, Non Thɔ Monastery.

[36] As mentioned above, lay people in both urban and rural areas seek merit by building monasteries. Further research is needed to better understand the social and religious motives related to the rise in Mon monasteries in Yangon, including domestic population flows from rural to urban areas, remittances from Myanmar-Mon migrant workers in Thailand, and so on.

regionalism, to which we should add personal relationships, can help monasteries to perform the social functions of an urban monastery as mentioned above. Sometimes monasteries tend to accept and help all people regardless of their origin or attributes, and sometimes they have relatively strong connection with a specific region or persons.

While the regionalisms of Mon monasteries are diverse and changeable depending on the context, the linguistic differences between the Mon and Burmese *saṅgha* are in themselves, as already mentioned, both prominent and considerably static. It is only in exceptional cases that a Mon monk will live in a Burmese monastery, and vice versa, because language and chant pronunciations are different between Mon and Burmese. Hence the Mon monasteries in Yangon are often founded by "purchasing" Burmese monasteries.[37] At least 5 of the 13 Mon monasteries near Shwedagon Pagoda have bought and currently use buildings and grounds of previous Burmese monasteries.

6. The Relatively High Achievement of Mon Monks on the Dhammācariya Examination

Such ethnic distinction of monasteries generates respective networks for *pariyatti*, or Buddhist learning. While many members of both the Burmese and Mon *saṅgha* similarly study for the official Buddhist examination by the Union government, they take the official examination in their respective language. This official use of mother tongue constitutes a special treatment awarded only to Mon monks among the 134 ethnic minority groups[38] recognized in Myanmar.

Large Burmese monasteries for Buddhist learning, some of which have thousands of pupils, exist in Myanmar. In comparison, are there any famous Mon monasteries for Buddhist learning that use Mon language to study? If so, where are they, in urban or rural areas? How many members do they have? We can begin to answer these questions with the information in the private *vassa* lists of Mon monasteries. According to tables 7 and 8, the average number of monks and novices in a Mon monastery is 9.7, which is slightly higher than the national average of 8.1 members. Whereas it is not uncommon for Mon monasteries to have only one monk, some have more than 100 members. For instance, *vassa* lists show that in 2017, Hnok Monastery (ဘာဇွန်) in Htaungpyin Village (Tɔŋ Prɛŋ in Mon), Ye Township had 190 members (with 69 monks and 121 novices), Nontɛwɜn Monastery in Thanbyuzayat Township had 150 members (with 39 monks and 111 novices), Sāsanarakkhita Monastery in Mawlamyine city had 125 members (with 68 monks and 57 novices), and so on (for the two latter monasteries, see

[37] Pro forma, monasteries cannot be sold and purchased, but they can be "donated" in exchange for money donation (Kuramoto 2014, 153-156, 165(notes 14))..

[38] This excludes the Burmese as the ethnic majority group

Table 10. The Total Number of Mon Monks (M) and Novices (n) who Passed the Official Dhammācariya Exam in Myanmar (2003-2018) by Mon Monastery (Arranged in order of the number)

Mon Monasteries (in Mon or Pāli Name)	Location (in Burmese Name [or Mon Name])	Saṅgha Order	M	n	Total	Thila -shin
Pɜləŋim (ဘာဗိုလ်လို့)	Yangon	Ramañña	81	8	89	
Kyaik Sɔe Mon (ဘာကျာ်သြဲမန်)	Yangon	Māha Yen	60	3	63	1
Hnok / Mahāvihāra (ဘာဧှော် / ဘာမဟာဝိဟာရ)	Kawbein [Kɔ Pin] Village, Kawkareik	Ramañña	43	4	47	
Saddhammadhaja (ဘာသဒ္ဓမ္မဓဇ / မုဟ်ဒို့)	Mudu [Muh Tɜ] Village, Chaungzon	Ramañña	39	3	42	
Kəma Chim (ဘာကွာဆီ)	Yangon	Ramañña	21		21	
Wɛasɒ (ဘာဝါဖြုဝ် / ဘာဝါသို့)	Mandalay	Ramañña	15		15	
Thommɛcak (ဘာဓမ္မစက်)	Tarana [Krena] Village, Kyaikmaraw	Ramañña	15		15	
Pariyattivedī (ဘာပရိယတ္တိဝေဒီ)	Mawlamyine	Ramañña	5	2	7	2
Pɛkɜ-Pariyatti (ဘာဗဂေါပရိယတ္တိ)	Mawlamyine	Ramañña	6	1	7	
Məraiŋ (ဘာမြောင်)	Mawlamyine	Ramañña	7		7	
Mahā Yen (ဘာမဟာယျေန် ကဒို့)	Kado Village, Mawlamyine	Māha Yen	6	1	7	
Nontɛwon-Pariyatti (ဘာနန္ဒဝန်ပရိယတ္တိ)	Thanbyuzayat	Ramañña	6	1	7	
Sāsanarakkhita (ဘာသာသနရက္ခိတ)	Mawlamyine	Ramañña	4	1	5	
Others			65	3	68	11
Whole			373	27	400	14

Sources: Author's calculations based on an annual periodical, *Book of Pariyatti*, except for the years 2017 and 2018, which are based on an annual periodical, *List of Who Passed Dhammācariya Examination*.

also Table 10). Yet, these *vassa* lists do not indicate which Mon monasteries produced a high number of successful examinees of the official Buddhist examination. The list of Mon monks and novices who passed the official Dhammācariya Examination does provide this data.

Monks, novices, and *thilashin*s (female lay renunciants) who are interested in official Buddhist learning mostly study for the official Pathama-byan Exam first. (The exam comprises three grades and the highest grade is often considered equivalent to a high school diploma). They then study for the official Dhammācariya Exam, equivalent to a bachelor's degree. The Dhammācariya Exam is known to be difficult to pass. Successful examinees that pass the three subjects of Sutta, Vinaya, and Abhidhamma, are awarded the title of Sāsana-dhaja Dhammācariya and earn the respect of Myanmar's Buddhist society.

Interestingly, the lists printed in the periodical *Book of Pariyatti* show the Mon individuals who passed the official Dhammācariya Exam and were given the title. This list is also private, and has been published annually since 2003 by the abbot of a Mon Buddhist learning center in Yangon. However, because the list has been suspended for the last two years, this study uses the Union Government's list of successful examinees and distinguishes Mon individuals from the others with help from the abbot of another famous Mon *pariyatti* monastery. Thanks to these lists, we can uncover in which monasteries most of the Mon *saṅgha* scholars prepared for the high Buddhist examination (see Table 10).

The lists show that Mon monasteries in major cities are playing significant roles in the education of scholar monks and novices, even though Mon lay residents do not constitute a majority there. Particularly prominent are the achievements of two monasteries: Pɜləŋim, near the Botahtaung Pagoda, and Kyaik Sɔe Mon, of the Mahā Yen Order, on the east side of Shwedagon Pagoda. When Kəma Chim Monastery, the oldest Mon monastery in Yangon, located on the north side of Shwedagon Pagoda, is added to the above, this amounts to three famous Mon Buddhist learning centers in Yangon. There is also one in the second largest city of Mandalay and some in Mawlamyine city. As economic, administrative, political, and religious activities are naturally concentrated in large cities, Mon monks, the same as other ethnic monks, also tend to learn in these principal cities.

On the other hand, it should be noted that some Mon monasteries in rural areas also function as Buddhist learning centers, such as Hnok / Mahāvihāra Monastery in Kawbein village, Kawkareik Township, Kayin State, and Saddhammadhaja Monastery in Mudu village, Chaungzon Township, Mon State. The total number of recipients of the official Dhammācariya title in these two rural monasteries during the past 16 years is much higher than any Mon monastery in Mandalay or Mawlamyine. Therefore, the religious power in rural areas cannot be ignored, although power here refers to success in the Union's exam, not the strengthening of

Table 11. The Total Number Passing all Three Subjects of the Official Dhammācariya Exam in Myanmar

	2003	'04	'05	'06	'07	'08	'09	'10	'11	'12	'13	'14	'15	'16	'17	'18	**SUM**
Whole Union	368	239	243	415	444	863	258	426	553	551	526	1,354	1,170	1,404	781	937	**10,532**
Mon	29	13	23	13	36	32	31	18	31	20	7	30	39	19	51	8	**400**

Sources: Same as table 10, except for the data of Whole Union in 2003-2013, which are based on "List of the Numbers of Who Passed Dhammācariya Examination between 1988 and 2013."
* Not including the upper grade Dhammācariya Exam as "Myanmar *Goundu*" and "Pāli *Goundu*."
** For only the Mon, the number does not include *Thirashin*s (female lay renunciants), 14 persons. For the whole Union, the number includes *Thirashin*s who passed the exam.

localized, folk practices.

While no candidates of the Hnok / Mahāvihāra Monastery in Kawbein village passed the official Dhammācariya Exam after 2012, on the contrary, Thommɛcak Monastery in Tarana village, Kyaikmaraw has begun to produce successful examinees only since 2015. This is because the main preceptor left the former and moved to the latter monastery around 2012-2015, and the latter has now become a learning center of the Mon *saṅgha*. In this manner, a monastery's status as a center for Buddhist learning sometimes or often depends on an individual preceptor.

Did those Mon monks, then, achieve good results on the official Dhammācariya Exam or not? Unfortunately, we do not know the total number of Mon examinees, so the success rate cannot be uncovered and compared with the nationwide success rate. Instead, we can compare them by following the ratio of successful examinees to the total number of monks as the reference value. First, there are on average 658 successful candidates per year in the entire Union (10,532 passed in total during 16 years), and similarly, an average of 25 successful candidates per year in the Mon *saṅgha* (400 during 16 years) (see Table 11). Therefore, on average, 0.23 percent of all monks in Myanmar pass the Dhammācariya exam nationwide per year (using the 2016 total number of monks in Myanmar of 281,366), and similarly, 0.40 percent of the Mon *saṅgha* pass the exam (using the 2017-2018 total number of Mon monks in

Myanmar of 6,113).[39] Accordingly, the ratio of successful Mon examinees to the total number of Mon monks is considerably higher than the national average. Although the success rate of Mon examinees of the Dhammācariya exam is unknown, it can at least be said that Mon monks participate in the state's Buddhist curriculum diligently and perform quite well.

7. Monastic Lists Make a Nation?

As seen above, at least in the Mon case, ethnicity and *saṅgha* are linked strongly to each other. The link has two sides, facts and imagination, which interact with and mutually construct each other. We will consider them in turn.

Kuramoto asserts that homogeneity and the imagined community of a "Myanmar *saṅgha*" are formed by the high mobility of young monks and novices for Buddhist learning. According to him, this "pilgrimage for *pariyatti*" follows two orientations, namely from rural to urban areas, and from the States (Ethnic-dominated), such as Mon, Shan, or Karen, to the Regions (Burmese-dominated), such as Yangon, Mandalay, or Sagaing. This is because large Buddhist learning monasteries are concentrated in urban cities and towns, and the Regions enable them to learn Burmese language for the official Buddhist examinations. This pilgrimage also creates ties beyond various *gain* groups (Kuramoto 2014, 66-70). However, his sketch completely ignores the Mon case, which represents the formation of a distinct network as the Mon "pilgrimage for *pariyatti*." Although the official Buddhist examination has an equal importance for them, very few Mon monks and novices join such Burmese "pilgrimage for *pariyatti*," or vice versa. As already mentioned, language use is crucial in the making of ethnic *saṅgha*s, especially for Mon and Burmese.

Yet, it is not only traditional language use, but also various, intentional activities that help to form the ethnic Mon *saṅgha* as an image. The creation and maintenance of the *vassa* list of Rāmaññā Nikāya is one such activity. We have no idea when the list was first made, but it is certainly not an ancient or traditional effort. The annual monastic list of Rāmaññā Nikāya today is compiled by the Rāmaññā Dhammācariya Association, an influential umbrella group of Mon monks that has conducted Mon pan-national activities since its founding in 1972.[40] Each year,

[39] Actually, the total number of successful examinees also includes novices. Yet, the novices are not added in each denominator, because they also comprise little children. If novices are included in each denominator, the ratio of successful examinees of the Dhammācariya Exam to the total number of both monks and novices becomes 0.13 percent in the entire Union (658 passed on average per year with 518,593 as the total number of monks and novices in 2016) and 0.23 percent in the Mon *saṅgha* (25 passed on average per year with 10,826 as the total number of monks and novices in 2017-2018).

[40] The word "pan" is used here to indicate various ethno-cultural activities conducted beyond merely local and regional levels with the intention of uniting all members of the same "nation" or ethnic group. It therefore involves modern imagination. About the word "national," it is puzzling which set of words should be used: the words "*ethnie*" (ethnic community) and "ethnicism," used by Anthony Smith (1986), are suitable for noting and discussing the continuity between the pre-modern and modern existence of a "state-nation," namely, the nation having a modern state now. This paper, however, chooses to use the

some information on the number of monks and novices for some townships and monasteries is left blank in this annual list, but the presence of those "blanks" following monastery names indicates the compiler's imagination of the wholeness of Rāmañña Nikāya, which includes the entire Mon *saṅgha* (without including the Shwegyin Mon and Mahā Yen). Only after looking at this private list can we draft the contour lines of the overall picture of the Rāmañña Nikāya.

Of course, the principle of an order, or *nikāya*, preceded the pan-national imagination when those monastic lists were issued. There is no integrated *vassa* list that includes all of the Mon *saṅgha*. In contrast, the annual list of successful Mon candidates of the official Dhammācariya Exam, which was compiled by a monk of Rāmañña Nikāya, includes all monks and novices belonging to any of the three Mon orders. In addition, Mon lay people in Yangon commemorate all successful Mon examinees every two years.[41] In this way, such activities instill a pan-national sentiment across various differences, such as orders or *nikāya*, master-pupil lines, local practices, regionalisms, and so on, among the Mon *saṅgha*. As another example, "the Mon calendar 2012," made by a group of pious lay people in Yangon, includes the 47 Mon monasteries in Yangon at that time, and disregards the differences of three Mon orders or the abbot's hometown. In addition, in July 2013, I joined eight Mon youth in offering handmade sweets to all 13 Mon monasteries around Shwedagon pagoda. No matter how small, such activity also awakens pan-national imagination and sentiment beyond the distinctions of order/*nikāya* and regionalism.

We have arrived at the classical discussion regarding nation. Exciting as it is, the modernist view tends to overemphasize a temporal watershed between modern and pre-modern time (cf. Anderson 2016; Gellner 1983). In contrast, "primordialists," although they do not call themselves so, look for some continuity from pre-modern times to today or sometimes emphasize the phases of a long-term cultural integration process, while admitting, but not overemphasizing, the modernist watershed (cf. Smith 1986; Obeyesekere 2002; Lieberman 2003). Which approach is more appropriate depends not only on the author's interest, but also on the specific nation or ethnic group selected as a subject of study. The case of the Mon *saṅgha* in Myanmar may demand us to take the primordialist viewpoint. On the one hand, making *vassa* lists of the ethnic *saṅgha*, especially for Rāmañña Nikāya, evokes a modern imagination based on pan-nationalism. On the other hand, however, this imagination is founded on a long historical process that has formed a relatively homogenous space by a distinctive orality, literacy, and

terms "national," "nation," and "nationalism" to highlight that *ethnie*s having no country are in many ways similar to "state-nations" (or *ethnie*s that have their own country). In other words, the Mon, as an ethnic group, conduct "pan" activities, such as publishing in their somewhat standardized language, not unlike a nation-state does.

[41] The Myanmar government holds an official ceremony annually for successful candidates of the Dhammācariya Exam, in turns in Yangon and Mandalay. A private ceremony dedicated specifically to successful Mon candidates is held only in the year when the official ceremony is held in Yangon.

chant pronunciation. Compared to the ethnic abhorrence between Burmese and Mon that has increased since the end of the 18th century (Lieberman 1978), pan-nationalism in the Mon *saṅgha* today is generally a pacific struggle. "Pacific" here does not, however, denote a passive attitude, but rather the active attempts of unarmed monks to coexist and compete with other ties of similarity, such as regionalism, *gain* or *nikāya* membership, Burmese ethno-centrism, Burmanization through language, state-nationalism, and so on.

In contrast to a "state-nation," the nationalism of an ethnic minority is, in theory, always in uncomplete process, constantly swinging between cohesion and dispersion as a pan-ethnic group. Therefore, neither the criticism of fixed ethnicity alone nor the unilateral emphasis on changeability according to situation is sufficient to fully explain ethnic minority nationalism. As it is nearly impossible to know exactly how ethnic national ideals are embodied, only after considering the layers of various official and unofficial ethnic and national aspects, such as organizations, networks, activities, cultural or linguistical features, and so on, while also examining social influences, can we begin to see an entire picture, albeit a dim one, of such nationalism. It is precisely for this reason that this paper examined the multi-layered ethnic aspects of the Mon, such as the feature of the ethnic *saṅgha*, the three monastic orders and each of their *vassa* lists, the Mon "pilgrim of *pariyatti*," and so on.

Meanwhile, the pan-nationalism among the Mon *saṅgha* described in this paper only concerns the Myanmar side. Paradoxically, if the pan-nationalism were to cross beyond the Tenasserim Hills, it would probably cause new contradictions in the future. That is to say, because Mons in Thailand are in process of being linguistically assimilated into the Central Thai and therefore losing their distinct orality, literacy, and chant pronunciation, a pan-nationalism of the Mon across the two countries is losing a main uniting factor: the basis of a common language.[42] Therefore, Mon pan-nationalists in Thailand now, in theory and also in practice, tend to rely on the criterion of the same "blood" to advance Mon nationalism.[43] As a result, Mon pan-nationalism across the two countries will likely be troubled by the prioritization of the two criteria, shared language and shared "blood".[44]

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[42] Further research is needed to trace the detailed process of linguistic assimilation of Mon into Thai, but it is clear that the abolishment of an official Buddhist examination for Mon monks and novices by orally translating between Pāli and Mon (Parian Rāman in Thai) has had a huge impact not only on the Mon *saṅgha*, but also on the future of the Mon language in Thailand. The Parian Rāman was officially held during the 19th century and was abolished in 1912 by the Bangkok authority.

[43] In addition to a common language and belief in the common "blood," other cultural elements, such as common rituals, practices of ancestor worship, food, and a common understanding of ethnic history also help create a pan-Mon identity, although to a lesser extent.

[44] Mon monks in the two countries have a partial relationship: some Mon monasteries in Thailand accept Mon monks and novices from Myanmar as resident members. The *vassa* list of Rāmañña Nikāya in 2014 also includes Mon monasteries, monks, and novices in Thailand, as well as those in Malaysia, Europe, Canada, and the USA. The list of Mon in Thailand, however, seems to enumerate only members of the Mon *saṅgha* coming from Myanmar, who are Mon speakers.

Writing very briefly, we should finally mention the Union's policy toward ethnic minorities, which, with the exception of consistently rejecting ethnic autonomy, seems to have lacked consistency since the Ne Win period until now. While the Burma/Myanmar government has surely tried to control the identity, language, culture, and history of ethnic minorities, it is unclear whether the Union has officially supported, been tolerant of, or oppressed ethnic diversity. This seems to partly depend on individual cases or the result of negotiations between the state authority and respective ethnic associations. When it comes to the *saṅgha*, while the state has never officially recognized any ethnic orders, as mentioned above, it is interesting that the annual list of all those across the country who successfully passed the official Dhammācariya Exam issued by the Myanmar state sometimes includes the word "Mun" (Mon in Burmese) before the individual names of Mon monks and novices, but does not do so for the other ethnic monks. This is likely because only Mons take the exam in their mother tongue, the Mon language. However, while such notation helps us recognize individual Mons, it does not provide us with a visible, entire picture of the Mon *saṅgha*.

8. Conclusion

As previous studies have already shown, official recognition of ethnic categories by the state can change, generate, or freeze ethnic identities and ascriptions in accordance with state policy. The categorization used in the population census is a typical example of this. By using "objective" statistical data on each ethnic population, the census creates a "reality" or "truth" of ethnicity. By contrast, however, to *not* enumerate ethnic populations also functions as an ethnic policy. Perhaps what is needed is a kind of "ethnic literacy," or skills to read an ethnic census: that is to say, we should keep in mind that any ethnic group has considerable artificial aspects, instead of exorcising or denying each official ethnicity in any ethnic statistical data, which could also, although partially, reflect some kind of reality.

The Myanmar state has not only yet to publish the data of ethnic populations from the 2014 census, it has also not enumerated the population of each ethnic *saṅgha*. Thereby, the Mon, Shan, Rakhine, and other ethnic *saṅgha* have remained officially invisible, reflecting the state's political ideal of one ethnically united *saṅgha*.

This paper attempted to unveil Myanmar's ethnic Mon *saṅgha*, which has been officially invisible as a result of state policies. Mon monastic lists, published privately, are very useful not only to help grasp the scale and scope of the Mon *saṅgha*, but also to roughly estimate the distribution of the Mon population, and to some degree, Mon speakers. These monastic lists are compiled according to each of the three Mon orders, namely, Rāmañña Nikāya, Mahā Yen, and Shwegyin Mon (Mahā Yen is the only official monastic group of the three). Only after combining these three lists and analyzing them as a whole can we grasp the

entirety of the Mon *saṅgha*, which consists of 1,114 monasteries and over 10,000 members. We can also estimate from these lists that the centers of the Mon speaking population are Mudon and Ye townships in the southern part of Mon State. Significant numbers of Mon are also scattered across Mon and Kayin states, Tanintharyi Region, and main cities, but they do not constitute an overwhelming majority in any one administrative unit. This information clearly reveals that the territorial bounds of the official Mon State do not correspond to the distribution of the Mon population.

The list of Mon individuals who passed the official Dhammācariya Exam, also published privately, offers additional information on Mon Buddhist learning centers. First, it shows that not only Mon monasteries in the major cities, but also some in rural areas have produced high-level scholar monks and novices. Second, the ratio of successful Mon examinees to the total number of Mon monks is higher than that of the whole Myanmar *saṅgha*. It is also important to note that members of the Mon *saṅgha* tend not to join the Burmese "pilgrimage for *pariyatti*" in Myanmar because Mon monks and novices enjoy the privilege of taking the official Buddhist Exam in their mother tongue. Therefore, the relationship of the Mon *saṅgha* toward the Myanmar state is both cooperative and independent: they actively participate in the state Buddhist examination, but at the same time they tend to join their own Mon "pilgrimage for *pariyatti*" in a refusal to join the Burmese one. Exceptionally, "unity in diversity" works well for the Mon in the educational system of the *saṅgha*.

The difference between Mon and Burmese monasteries is rooted in a clear distinction of inherent linguistic practices, namely, daily language use at the monastery, written vernacular for the official Buddhist Exam, and traditional pronunciation of Buddhist chants. Moreover, the pan-national oriented imagination formed by the monastic list of Rāmañña Nikāya and the successful Mon candidate list for Dhammācariya Exam is based on a particular historical continuity of language practice in the monastery. In other words, the primordialist approach to nation is a more useful approach than the modernist one for the study of the Mon *saṅgha*. Further research of long-term changes and continuity is needed to unveil and compare the use of letters and traditional chant pronunciations for Pāli by other ethnic *saṅgha*s.

This paper focused on introducing and analyzing the private monastic lists of the Mon, not on the Mon *saṅgha*'s nationalistic movements as a whole, for example, their political negotiation with a state, or their diachronic change. In this paper, we did not clarify whether the pan-national oriented Rāmañña Nikāya is only imagined in the *vassa* lists or whether it constitutes some kind of distinct social entity. If such a pan-ethnic entity exists, since when and how has this been the case? How were the Mahā Yen and Shwegyin Mon founded and how did they develop? These questions still need to be addressed in further research.[45]

[45] I have discussed this topic in Japanese (see Wada 2016).

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