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Kyoto Working Papers on Area Studies No.8
(G-COE Series 6)

October 2008

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Kyoto Working Papers on Area Studies No.8
JSPS Global COE Program Series 6
In Search of Sustainable Humanosphere in Asia and Africa

October¹ 2008

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Introduction

Mount Zwekabin (Kwekabaun) is a magnificent limestone mass visible from the marshy plains surrounding it, and especially from the Karen State capital Paan which lies to its north (photo 1). It is not only a physical landmark, or an official symbol of Karen State, but is a religious and ritual centerpiece for many of the Karen-speaking people in the area, as well as for some Karen living afar. Atop the mountain is the Upper Yedagone Monastery which is historically the leader among the numerous Karen monasteries on the plains surrounding it. During the hottest months before the rainy season, at one of the innumerable pagodas on the plains at the foot of the mountain called Don Ying Pagoda¹, on designated days of the lunar calendar from morning till noon, more than one hundred Karen couples gather clad in their best Karen attire (photo 10). Most of them are newly married couples who gather to make marital vows at the pagoda. This vow constitutes an important component of a practice which the local Pwo Karen Buddhists refer to as *Duwae*, observed widely in the plains surrounding Zwekabin Mountain as well as towards the eastern hills approaching the border with Thailand. *Duwae* as one among the layers of religious practices in the region will be the central focus of this paper.

Paan District² and the plains surrounding the Zwekabin mountain is within the

* An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 106th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association (December 1, 2007, Washington D.C.). I am grateful to Dr. Nicolas Sihle for inviting me to participate in his organized session “Paths Taken and Not Taken in the Anthropology of Buddhism: Assessment of the Field and Current Directions of Research”, and to Global COE program “In Search of Sustainable Humanosphere” for travel support. A shorter Japanese version of this paper will be published as Chapter 11 in a volume which is the outcome of a joint research of which this paper is also partially an outcome (see fn.4)『〈境域〉の実践宗教—大陸部東南アジア地域と宗教のトポロジー』(林行夫編 京都大学学術出版会 2009 春刊行予定) .

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¹ The Pagoda itself is actually located in Tao-pon Village but is called Dong Ying Pagoda. There are three villages to the southeast of Zwekabin Mountain, Tao-pon, Kothaun, and Dong Ying. Local people refer to these three villages together as Dong Ying.

² Paan district has a population of 41,000, consisting ethnically of Karen, Burma, Mon, Pao, Indian and Chinese population and lies along the route that connects the port city of Moulmein to the west via Myawaddy in the hills, to Mae Sot in western Thailand. The area is composed of three townships including Paan Township, the town which is the State capital. In the plains the Pwo-speaking Buddhists are dominant, and to the east towards the hills, Sgaw-speakers are more numerous. Karen language belongs to the Karennic languages of the Sino-Tibetan stock. The dominant sub-groups are the Pwo and the Sgaw both in Burma and in Thailand. This paper is primarily concerned with Pwo-Karen speakers, who identify themselves, according to context, as plains Kayin, Gwin Kayin, Buddhist Kayin, Mon Kayin, while the Sgaw in the hills are referred to by these plains dwellers as Shaoun or mountain Kayin.

orbit of former Mon influence, and manifests rich layers of folk and religious practices.³ Positioned on the peripheries of Burmese Buddhism, Pwo Karen Buddhist practices have evolved here with Mt. Zwegabin as its center, and weaving its own peripheries. In order to understand religious practices in Karen State, the more crucial context is Buddhist practices in Burma, and the changing positioning of the Karen in Karen State. Religious practices in the region must be seen in the totality of these processes, and then to be positioned in relation to the complex historical and political processes that have taken place in relation to Burmese Buddhism.

Even as the topic of Karen religious movements has been quite often addressed, some of the ethnographic material in this paper has been hitherto unreported outside Karen State. So far most of the analysis of Karen religious practices in Burma has been conducted based on material available outside of Burma (Stern 1968; Gravers 2001). Such analyses have tended to see these practices as specifically Karen in that they are primarily characterized as minority response to the given socio-political situation although ideological and cosmological aspects of the Buddhist elements in the movements are also addressed. I contend that the positioning of Karen Buddhism vis-à-vis the institution and politics of Burmese Buddhism, to which it has been inextricably linked from its beginning, need also to be addressed in order to understand its dynamism. This, in effect will be an attempt to understand Burmese Buddhism from its peripheries. I will here attempt an analysis on the multi-layered contextualization based on observations from Paan district in Karen State today.⁴ I will examine the width of variety and the depth of layers of religious practices in Karen State, positioning them in the dynamic process of the development of Buddhist and local religious practices

³ According to local legend, King Manuha, the Mon Buddhist King who reigned in Thaton in the eleventh century visited this area and a hunter had presented some deer meat to him. The King allowed him to rule the area, who built a palace of his own in present day Don Ying on the west side of the Zwegabin mountain. The local people still refer to him as the Karen King, and there are still remains of a brick building in Kothaun village which is believed to have been the Karen king's forest palace.

⁴ In addition, I use material written by local folklorists and Buddhist monks. Research was conducted in March and September 2005, February and April of 2006 and 2007, each time for 3 to 5 days. I am greatly indebted to Dr. Keiko Tosa with whom I conducted the initial two research trips, for all of the professional advice and comments both during and after the trip. I am also grateful to Daw Mi Mi Kyaw for helping me with the translation of the material gathered in Paan. I thank the local villagers in the Dong Ying area for always welcoming me warmly. After my final trip to Paan, the protest movements by monks in Yangon and other cities took place in August 2007. I have not been able to confirm how this has affected the Paan Buddhist Pwo Karen. Research was made possible by scientific grant-in-aid, FY2002 to 2004, (「ミャンマー北・東部跨境地域における生物資源利用とその変容」 Biological Resource Use and its Transformations in the Northern and Eastern Border Regions of Myanmar, Leader: Takeda, Shinya), FY2004 to 2006, (「東南アジア大陸部・西南中国の宗教と社会変容—制度・境域・実践」 Religion and Social Change in Mainland Southeast Asia and Southwestern China: Institutions; Borders; Practices, Leader: Hayashi, Yukio), and FY2005 to FY2007 (「ミャンマー少数民族地域における生態資源利用と世帯戦略」 Ecological Resource Use and Household Strategy in Minority Areas of Myanmar, Leader: Hayami, Yoko).

since the colonial period. This involves examination of complex layer of processes: first of all, the historical experiences of the social and political processes of this border region; secondly, the dynamics between Karen religious practices and Buddhist practices; and third, the development of Karen Buddhist practices within Burmese Buddhism, on the peripheries of its organization and its historical and political processes. To that extent, attention must be paid to the politics of Karen Buddhism. Through this examination of Karen Buddhist practices, this paper will address issues that arise from the perspectives not limited to ethnicity and religion, but of state and religion, and how peripheral practices are integrated, rejected or adopted and by whom in the processes of institutionalization of religion. In addition, we need to examine whether the framework so far proposed by scholars in understanding Burmese religious practices is applicable in understanding the Karen practices among the Pwo Karen Buddhists. This includes those studies that have tried to position animistic practice or spiritual beliefs, and various practices positioned on the peripheries of Buddhism including chiliastic religious movements and sectarian practices (for example, Mendelson 1961a & b; Spiro 1970). Can Pwo Karen Buddhism found in Karen State be understood in this framework? I further examine ways in which identity as ethnic minority is involved in the dynamics of religious practices in a region that has been ridden with ethnic conflict. We must refrain from presupposing an ethnically divided structure of relationships between ethnicity and religion from the outset.⁵ However, at the same time it is also to be emphasized that the religious movements we deal with in this paper are filled with self-reflexive ethnic markers. If so, we need to question the context from which such ethnic referents in the religious practices arose. My major focus will be on *Duwae* which is practiced widely in the locale, positioning it within the dynamic processes of Buddhist and folk religious practices which have evolved among the local Karen from colonial times, then during the internal conflict, until today.

Recent studies of the dynamics of Theravada Buddhism has focused on how customary practices which have internalized and structured order has been reorganized in religious movements in the context of social changes such as capitalist development, urbanization, and the deterioration of communal relationships. It is however difficult to apply such unilinear historical process in looking at Buddhist Pwo Karen practices in Myanmar. Should our case be understood as simply a unique and incomparable case among the global religious dynamics? In politically marginalized and controlled situation, both devotees and religious leaders perpetually and reflexively reconstitute

⁵ The oldest records that mention Karen participation in rebellion was the Mon rebellion in Lower Burma in the eighteenth century. In this, not only Mon and Karen, but Pao and Shan, as well as Burmans were involved (Gravers 2001:7), so that even if it was led by Karen leaders, it cannot be characterized as an ethnic movement against Burmese rule.

their practices in varying levels of consciousness, by taking in both customary practices and Buddhist practices.

Paan is located on the plains in between the Dauna Mountain ranges that constitute Burma's border with Thailand to the east, and the Salween River to the west. The majority of the population is involved in wet-rice cultivation, as well as growing peanuts in the marshy land, and beans and sesame in the fields, fruits and vegetables on the mountain slopes. According to interview, paddy land owner-cultivators constitute twenty to thirty percent, owning two to three acres on average, and the rest are tenant cultivators. The major source of income since the 1990s is migrant labor which flows in masses towards the east across the border into Thailand.

Multiple Layers of East Pwo Karen Buddhist Culture

Buddhism is said to have been brought to this region in late eighteenth to the beginning of the nineteenth century⁶, and in mid-nineteenth century, we see a flourish of Kayin-language based Buddhist literature and culture centered on Upper Yedagone Monastery atop Zweekabin Mountain⁷, and to this day, the monasteries surrounding the mountain contain palm-leaf manuscripts from this period.⁸ There are local historians who suggest that this flourish of Pwo Karen literature during this period attests to the establishment of an orthodox Pwo Karen Buddhist sangha (Womack 2005: 148). At least it is certain that a nucleus of Karen Buddhist culture had been formed here in this

⁶ The widely dispersed archeological remains (especially statues in the limestone caves) in the region attest to widespread Buddhist influenced culture in the region since the days of the earlier Mon Kingdom. According to local legend, the original founder of Pwo Karen Buddhism was Phuu Taa Meik, during either the reign of King Bodawpaya (1782-1819 A.D.) (Kunnawuntha 1926:20), or during King Mindon's reign (1853-1878). He gained permission to be ordained in Ava from the King (according to Stern, Karen were not allowed to become monks until the time of Mindon (Stern 1968:302)), and studied the scripture. He later returned to Kyaing, his home village in Karen State and founded a monastery (Womack 2005:130). He is also associated with the founding of the Pwo Karen script. There is also a version that states that the Upper Yedagone monastery too was founded by Phuu Taa Meik in 1749 (U Zagara 1962).

⁷ In 1850, U Yaung, a Karen monk opened the Upper Yedagone Monastery atop the Zweekabin Mountain where there used to be a *yathi's* (hermit) meditation hut. From then on this monastery becomes the center of Pwo Karen Buddhist literary culture. U Yaung began transcribing and translating Buddhist texts from Pali and Mon, using a Karen script adapted from the Mon script, as well as recording Karen legends and stories. This promotion of Karen literature aimed not only towards the promotion of Karen Buddhist practices but also preservation of Karen culture. The oldest remaining Pwo Karen script found so far is a document from Upper Yedagone monastery dated 1851 and in 1920, there were documents in at least thirteen monasteries in the region (Womack 2005:127-8). Although there is no evidence, there is a possibility that Buddhist Pwo Karen script may have been invented prior to this (ibid.128-9). The monasteries surrounding Zweekabin are to this day the centers of local script and literacy as well as entertainment and social life. However, literacy was limited to the monastery, while among the lay population it was still very low (in 1901, Paan township, 6 per cent), and found only among monks, intellectuals, local officials.

⁸ U Outtama, who spent his energy on the editing of palm-leaf material, U Zagara who recorded many aspects of Karen culture, and U Santana who wrote about the history of Karen and Zweekabin are the three best known Karen writers cum monks.

period. In the background of such emergence of Karen consciousness centering on Buddhist monastic culture may have been the influx of Chinese and Indian population at the time as well as the coming of the white missionaries (ibid:138-139).

As British administration took over, Lower Burma in mid-nineteenth century was in political and social flux. In the aftermath of the second Anglo-Burmese war (1854-6), having given over Lower Burma to British rule, King Mindon (1852-77) attempted to enhance his authority in Upper Burma through purification of the Buddhist sangha, and held the fifth Buddhist Council in Mandalay in an effort to purify and revise the Pali scriptures in 1871. Meanwhile in Lower Burma, where the King's authority was no longer, numerous Buddhist sects sprang (Mendelson 1975:102-111). The promotion of Buddhist literary culture among the Pwo Karen around Paan took place in the same period.

At the same time, from this time to the beginning of the twentieth century, in Lower Burma, and also Upper Burma after colonization, innumerable uprisings against the colonial administration took place among the heavily taxed people, under charismatic leadership of those claiming to be *Minlaung* (future king), *Setkya Min* (the wheel-turning ruler), or the future Buddha (Mendelson 1975: 175-9; 1960; 1961; Gravers 2001:4-5). These leaders claimed power based on the arts of alchemy, astrology, medicinal lore, magic, and divination, and mobilized devotees and followers who believed their supernatural power. Even in the region around Paan which may seem peripheral to the colonial administration, similar movements influenced by both Buddhist millennialism as well as reacting to the Christian proselytization could be found from mid-nineteenth century with leaders claiming to be the future king, the future Buddha, or the Buddha Maitreya (see Stern 1968; Gravers 2001). Being in the backwaters of Tennasserim, the region had received much stimulus and actual influx of people in the early colonial experience. It was in such condition that we find a flourish of Pwo Karen Buddhist culture, Christian missionary work, and religious movements centering around chiliastic belief in the coming of the future Buddha, Arimetteya.

Baptist mission from its base in Moulmein reached the Paan district and stationed itself in Dong Ying in 1836. In 1837, the missionary at this station invented a Pwo Karen script to print school textbooks.⁹ Baptist missionaries found strong desire among Karen towards knowledge, script, and literature, and capitalizing on versions of legends that

⁹ There were numerous Pwo Karen Christian scripts invented in parallel at this time. Missionary work began in Tenasserim, based in Moulmein, Tavoy and Mergui, and in each of these locations, scripts were invented based on the local dialect. In Dong Ying which was within the orbit of the Moulmein mission work, in 1837, missionary Eleanor Macomber invented a Pwo Karen script, by adapting Wade's Sgaw Karen script. In 1838, Wade himself who was stationed in Moulmein invented a Pwo Karen script mixing Roman and Burmese scripts. Later, missionary Brayton invented a Pwo Karen script to transcribe the Pwo Karen spoken in the delta region, based on Burmese script. After 1846, this Brayton system (Western Pwo Karen system) became the standard for Christian Pwo Karen (Womack 2005:114-118), since the Baptist missionary work was most successful in the Delta.

referred to a lost book of knowledge among the Karen, claimed to bring script and literature to the non-literate Karen, so that printing and dissemination of text was one of the main activities in their missionary work. This constituted a great threat to the Buddhist literary movement centered around the Upper Yedagone monastery.¹⁰ It is therefore not so far-fetched to suggest that these events, the flourishing Buddhist Karen literary tradition, the in-coming Christian mission work and the locally emergent sectarian religious movements, were all part of a religious and cultural dynamism taking place in this region locally in mid nineteenth century, in response to events in Lower Burma.

Since independence (1948), the region has been placed in turmoil between the Karen National Union on the one hand, and the Burmese military on the other, which were in conflict in the region up until the 1980s. KNU area was gradually limited to the mountainous border areas, although inhabitants of this region continued to be tossed back and forth between both military factions. In a Buddhist reform council held in 1980, Ne Win's regime officially approved nine sects. Policy towards Buddhism was redrawn, and the regime began to impose its control over Buddhism in the name of purification and protection, by enforcing the registration of monks, in order to control those politically dangerous monks who threaten the regime, and controlled the masses who could be mobilized by those who claim supernatural "power", and the re-organized the Sangha towards centralization (Kojima 2006:349-352).

During this period, the Buddhist world surrounding Paan also underwent some changes. The major monasteries in the area which had been the center of the vernacular Karen culture, had been taken over by Burmese monks. Most symbolic of all was that Upper Yedagone monastery atop Zwekabin mountain, which is claimed to be the founding place of Karen Buddhist culture, was now presided by a Burmese abbot, who succeeded a line of local Karen monks. This abbot was in good contact with Tan Shwe, the secretary general of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), and later moved to a monastery in Paan town. In the mid 1990s, his nephew, a Burmese monk from Chaito Pathantau Kawidasa took over as abbot. This abbot who controls five monasteries, is enthusiastic towards public works, and construction of clinics, schools and monasteries. He has carried out various construction works of Buddhist architecture in the region in the 1990s, such as the Lomani Orchard on the eastern slopes of Mt. Zwekabin with one thousand Buddha statues and one hundred and eight pagodas (photo 2). The orchard provides a quiet park-like setting for the younger generation. Furthermore, since 2004, he has begun constructing the Mango Orchards on the southwestern slope, also with a plan to construct one thousand Buddha statues. According to his own words, it was to prevent

¹⁰ The missionary compound in Dong Ying experienced three arsons by 1838, indicating the difficulty of Christian mission in this region. Resistance towards the missionaries who treated the local Karen as illiterate people was strong, and a sense of rivalry regarding the alternative script and literature.

farmers from the surrounding areas from squatting in the land that is designated as religious land around the foothills, that he sectioned off this particular area to build a park full of Buddha statues and pagodas. Furthermore, the road leading to the top of the Zwekabin mountain at Upper Yedagone monastery where twenty or so monks reside, was also constructed so that older monks as well as laypersons could easily climb to the summit manestery. All of these construction took place within the religious land designated on and around Zwekabin mountain. The coming of this Burmese abbot to Zwekabin thus Burmanized this Karen Buddhist center. At the same time some locally revered Karen monks of the Pwo Buddhist literary tradition were given titles by the central sangha. U Zagara the local intellectual monk who has authored many books on Karen religion and culture, the revered abbot of the Kothaun monastery in Dong Ying, was given such a title in 2004.¹¹

While there are such “Burmanization” of the local Karen Buddhist tradition, on the other hand, there appeared a monk who gained the reverence of the masses from all over Burma without being controlled by the state-endorsed Buddhism. In 1981, U Winaya, the monk who had begun severe Buddhist ascetic practices on Thamanya mountain to the southeast of Paan, had become eminent as Thamanya Hsayadaw, and from the mid 1980s, Pao and Karen followers began to form communities surrounding the mountain (Tosa 2005). The abbot who had maintained political neutrality became famous, and visitors in pilgrimage to the mountain increased in the 1990s, especially after the well-known visit by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in 1995. On the other hand, U Thuzana (Myaingingoo), a Sgaw Karen monk and disciple of Thamanya Hsayadaw began building pagodas in the border hills controlled by KNU. While the elite leadership of KNU is primarily Christian, the majority soldiers are Buddhist Karen from impoverished areas, and the latter followed U Thuzana and split off from KNU and formed the Democratic Karen Buddhist Organization (DKBO). U Thuzana prophesied that after building fifty white pagodas in the hills, there will be peace. His followers believed in his supernatural power, drank his sacred water and practiced vegetarianism (Gravers 2001). They practiced meditation based in Myaingingoo monastery, at its peak numbering two thousand followers. DKBA (the DKBO military wing) was supported by the regime and fought KNU, and gained full control of the Paan plains area. Once DKBA gained the regime’s (SLORC initially, then SPDC after 1997) support, the area was pacified and liberated from the brown zone. Roads were improved from the capital. In practice, U Thuzana follows Thamanya Hsayadaw’s steps, whose followers believed in his supernatural powers deriving from

¹¹ In 2004, he was given the title Aghta Mahar Thadelema Zau Tikadaza Badaneda Zargala from the ministry of religion. At his monastery was a plate commemorating this occasion, written in Pwo Karen which records that he is a good teacher for the “*thi kaw*” (Karen word for country, which can be interpreted as either Myanmar it self, or as the Karen country, or Karen state).

ascetic practices. However, DKBA was mobilized by the regime, and held good relationship with the political powers at the time of Khin Nyunt, so that their relationship to the political status quo is quite contrastive.

Thus since the 1980s, Pwo Karen Buddhism in the region was placed within Burma's state-regulated Buddhism and was largely influenced by military and political trends. In this process, the response from the local Karen monks as well as the lay Karen were quite varied.

Diversity of religious practices in the region

As mentioned above, it was in the mid nineteenth century that Karen Buddhist culture flourished around the Upper Yedagone Monastery, amidst competing relationship with Christian missions. Against this background, various sectarian movements (referred to as *gaing* by the locals) emerged in the peripheries of Buddhist practices. We find many reports mentioning Karen religious movements that centered on the belief in the coming Buddha Ariya (BMM 1862; Gravers 2001:11; Stern 1968), of which *Leke* and *Telakhon*, are two sects that have continued to this day.

Telakhon (or *Telaku* in Sgaw) was founded in Kyaing in the 1860s, and today still has followers on both sides of the border.¹² The founder, Saw Yo (Con Yu) is said to be related to Phu Ta Maik, the legendary father of Karen Buddhism.¹³ After its foundation, *Telakhon* was split into many factions, which gradually consolidated into the Pwo and Sgaw sections. Karen costume is considered a pre-condition for being a *Telakhon* follower, and men must wear their hair in top-knots,¹⁴ and the followers are taught to lead a peaceful and harmonious life according to Karen tradition, and await the coming of the future Buddha Ariya which will bring the realization of a Karen kingdom if they maintain their tradition, order and peace. Among the later followers, some believe that Saw Yo was himself the Ariya, and that they are waiting for his return (Stern 1968:317). The *Telakhon* practice mixes elements of spirit worship, Maitreya worship, and Karen traditional practices. The local folklorist Man Thint

¹² For descriptions about the *Telakhon*, I relied on Dodge and Stern (n.d.), Stern (1967), and Gravers (2001), as well as an interview I conducted with the son of U Maun Bee, a former *bu kho* (religious leader). The Pwo Karen branch had moved to the Thai side and at one point during its peak spread to the west of Bangkok. However, by early twentieth century, it had dwindled, and the Phuu Caik line was discontinued, and followers became Buddhist. The Sgaw branch moved to the north of Sangklaburi in Thailand (Umpang Province, Mae Chan District, Laetongkhu Village) and has continued to this day (Kwanchewan 2007).

¹³ During the British colonial era, he was arrested by Burmese officials for mobilizing revolutionary movements, and was released with the help of Puu Ta Maik. He learned the Pwo Karen script based on Mon letters, as well as Mon language prayers, and is said to have founded *Telakhon* in Puu Ta Maik's monastery in Kyaing.

¹⁴ In the introduction to the *Telakhon* administrative organization as reported by Stern, both Shan and Mon were chosen as members of the management committee (Stern and Dodge n.d.:5). However, it is not clear if there just coincidentally happened to be a Shan and Mon member at the time.

Naung reports that they teach fifteen precepts directly related to domestic life, at the time of wedding ceremonies (2006b:23-7), a feature similar to *Duwa* as we will see below.

Puu Caik wears a white robe, ties his hair in a top-knot, and is referred to as *yathi*, a hermit. His disciples, called *tawabon*, are young boys above ten years of age, who are trained and from among whom the next Puu Caik will be chosen. On the Thai Side, centering around the Puu Caik stationed in the village of Timou, there were several branches with a leading hermit, holding identical organizations. Directly under the Puu Caik, there are ritual priests called *bu kho*, those leaders concerned with mundane matters called *kau kho*, and the secretaries under them. According to a rule book written in Burmese,¹⁵ there are precepts that must be kept by *Telakhon* followers. Those that call for punishment were, slander, stealing, adultery, fornication, sexual contact between unmarried couples. Adultery in particular requires the man to build a pagoda to appease his sins, and if there is sexual contact between an unmarried couple, then the couple must be married, be punished, and if they have a child from premarital sex, they are expelled from the community. Use of drugs, betting, rearing of livestock also calls for punishment. While bachelor men constitute the core of the religious practitioners, unmarried women as well as women past reproductive stage must be confined in a hut (Stern and Dodge n.d. 7-8).¹⁶

When Stern visited the *Telakhon* community on the Thai side with some missionaries in the 1960s, he met the seventh Phu Caik. According to prophecy, it was expected that at the time of the seventh Phu Caik, there would be white brothers bringing them the book, and that Phu Caik would be able to read it. According to a record from the Burma side in 1959 (Tadaw 1959), there were at the time more than ten thousand followers in Paan, Kawkareik and Kyaing, and the expectancy for redemption during the seventh Phu Caik had heightened to its peak on the Thai side as well, so that followers had increased from three thousand to ten thousand. However, it was the same period that divisions emerged, and the prophecy was unfulfilled. Some villagers had kept the magical object suggested by the Puu Caik himself (1967: 325). In 1965, around thirty households returned from the Thai side to the Burmese side, in Yomaha Village near Kyaing. Since then, they have continued in the same place up until today. In 1967, many of the followers were killed by the Burmese military for joining with the KNLA, and has since continued mainly on the Thai side of

¹⁵ They published a rulebook in Burmese in 1954, hoping to be added to the list of recognized religions in the Burmese census.

¹⁶ In the hut, they produce paper-cut work used in the rituals. Furthermore, according to the rule-book, in pre-war days, menstruating and pregnant women were not allowed to participate in daily activities of the household, but were confined in another hut. It was only after the Second World War that women could sit in the front row during rituals (Stern and Dodge n.d. pp.7-8).

the border (Stern 1968:325; Gravers 2001).

In the *Telakhon* practice, there is no inconsistency with Buddhism, although difference and order is maintained. *Telakhon* followers to this day can be Buddhist, and visit Buddhist temples, and monks are invited to the *Telakhon* festivals, to stay confined in the hut with Puu Caik. However, Puu Caik is placed higher than the monks, so that even as they coexist, they are differentiated and hierarchized. At the time of its foundation, and during its development, Puu Caik and the leaders were attributed supernatural powers, which were the bases for the followers' devotion. Later as a sect, it developed its own organization and order upon which its continuation now seems to depend.

Leke also began in this area around the same time as *Telakhon*¹⁷. According to legend, in the 1840s, two monks fasted on Zweekabin Mountain, and received the *Leke* script from the deities. Later, in Hnitcha village on the west bank of the Salween River, an elderly couple were given a document written in the *Leke* script in the 1860s. Here began the *Leke* practice, in which the followers believed that if they maintained moral practices following the dhamma and remained respectful to ones parents, Ariya, the future Buddha would arrive in a golden boat. U Yaung, the founder of the Upper Yedagone monastery mentioned above, later disrobed and is said to have participated in *Leke* practices.

Leke, however, is distinct from Buddhist practices and do not worship monks or visit monasteries. They construct their own original pagodas, a model of which is placed on the altar, and in prayer they read the *Leke* scripture, awaiting the coming of Ariya. *Leke* practice, therefore, maintains its script and scripture on the one hand and belief in Ariya on the other, and emphasizes Karen customs and tradition. Present leaders also claim that the center of their practices is Saturday service and vegetarianism (photos 4&5).¹⁸ In their Saturday services, music is used abundantly, where members compose new songs. Young men play the flute, drums, cymbals and mandolins, while young women sing. The songs narrate Ariya belief, merit-making, Karen tradition and history. The tunes are a mixture of the monotonous Karen traditional songs and more modern western tunes. After the singing, elders light candles on the altar, seven of them sit in front, and sprinkle holy water on the

¹⁷ It was explained to me by one of the leaders that the meaning of “*Leke*” is, essence, thing of importance. Most of the description in this section is either based on Stern (1967), or on my own interviews and participant observation at the Dong Ying “*Leke* University” and at one of the executive members’ house in Paan township.

¹⁸ Vegetarianism is practices in three levels. The *Leke* teachers have vowed to maintain vegan practices through their lifetime. A class below the teachers keeps vegetarian from Thursday to Saturday every week, while lay believers only on Saturdays. The teachers not only keep vegetarian practices, but also hold services every day at four and eleven in the morning, and three times on Saturdays. Lay believers participate in services only once around ten o’clock on Saturdays.

congregation as they pray. After the purification, they bow three times and recite the *Leke* scripture.

The leaders wear topknots and white robes, while the lay believers wear Karen costumes at least at the services (photo 3). The *Leke* scripture, written in Pwo Karen using the *Leke* script, is sung with a tune as in the recitation of sutras.¹⁹ At present, there are about two hundred teachers of *Leke* who can read the *Leke* script. Practitioners are distributed widely over Karen state, from Dong Ying where the “*Leke* University”, the center of training and education is located, to Hnitcha, the original place and the center of *Leke* doctrine, to the mountainside and over the border into Thai territory where *Leke* is practiced in the refugee camps.²⁰

While there are similarities between *Leke* and *Telakhon*, *Leke* is gaining in its geographical spread and is successful in recruiting younger generation of believers (sons and daughters of practitioners), unlike *Telakhon* which is losing territory. One of the three executive secretaries, U Thein Loung Gyi explained that the reason why *Telakhon* is on the decline is, firstly, due to the incident in the 1960s which devotees who joined the KNU ran recklessly into enemy lines with belief in their own supernatural power. They were shot dead, and many others lost faith. This was, according to the *Leke* secretary, because the *Telakhon* do not practice vegetarianism, so that they had no power to protect themselves against bullets, and lost legitimacy in the eyes of their followers. Secondly, *Telakhon* does not have their own script. And thirdly, they do merely follow rituals without doctrine. Yet at the same time the *Leke* secretary suggested that *Leke* is “one group of Buddhism to the extent that we believe in Ariya”, and very close in many respects with *Telakhon*. He suggested that eventually *Telakhon* and *Leke* ought to join together. Teachers of *Leke* do not make merit to monasteries and monks, but lay believers can practice Buddhism. It seemed he believed that in order to widen and maintain the *Leke*, it would be desirable to maintain such ties through religious practices. Curiously, however, U Zagara, the local intellectual Karen monk denies *Leke*’s association with Buddhism pointing out that it was originally begun by Buddhist monks, but once they developed their own script and their own doctrine, they no longer could be received as Buddhism.

Both *Leke* and *Telakhon* had begun from a group of followers centered on

¹⁹ The *Leke* pagoda must be constructed from nine trees, and the offerings also are strictly designated. Rice, sesame, areca, coconut, sticky rice, leaves of myrtaceae, banana, *mi-thi* (rice pounded in sheets), must be gathered 360 for each item. Four times every year (Dabaung, Toutalin, Nayoun, and Dazaunmon months), a festival is held, to which six to seven followers gather, and a couple wearing a cloth with *Leke* script inscribed will climb up the altar and make ten vows. They circle around the altar odd number of times clockwise. Male and female members of the committee also climb up the altar and make ten vows. However, the uppermost level is only for men, while women surround the men and sprinkle holy water.

²⁰ There are all together more than sixty places of worship dispersed all over Karen state: Paan, Dong Ying, Hlaingbwe, Kyainsekyi, Hnitcha, in Paan, and Kyainmayo in Mon State.

initial leaders recognized for certain powers, then, developed their respective organization and have continued to this day for over one and a half century. In his paper in 1967, Stern mentions that neither *Leke* nor *Telakhon* are the last of such religious movements, which have maintained their own doctrines against the background of the dynamic proselytizing of orthodox Buddhism or Christianity and of subsequent movements similar to their own (Stern 1967:308).

While the *Leke* and *Telakhon* have continued for one and a half century, Puu Taki is a young charismatic religious leader who emerged and has gathered some followers only in the past decade (photo 7).²¹ Puu Taki (childhood name was Kyaw La Thau), now around in his mid-thirties, was born in Hlaingkaba Village. During his highschool years in Dong Ying, he “found himself to be so different from other students” that he could no longer go to school. At seventeen, he became a novice and claims to have spent three years, three months and three days meditating. However, he grew his hair and was expelled from the monastery, and then began to call himself Puu Taki, a name he claims he was given in his former life as a Sgaw Karen. In another former life, he was the Karen King of Dong Ying. He has twelve costumes which represent some of these former existences, such as those of a king, and a brahma (photo 9). His followers all wear their hair in top-knots, ascetics wear white robes, while lay followers wear the Karen costume (photo 8). Puu Taki himself claims that the core of his doctrine and practice is Buddhism on the one hand and Karen custom on the other, and the primary purpose is to gain protection, secondly to await the coming of the future Buddha and subsequently to attain nibbana. He lays great emphasis on continuing Karen customs so that the Karen people “do not disappear”. Followers are vegetarian for life, and Puu Taki, in particular, eats only the spill-over hot water from boiling rice, and never solid food. His soul (*winyan*) can judge whether food is pure or not, and he himself emphasizes his transcendental knowledge he gained through meditation, and the maintenance of Karen customs. Asked where he gained his knowledge, he responded, “I think with my soul and concentrate (*samathi*), to gain knowledge. It isn’t from books that knowledge is found. It is knowledge gained from ascetic practice. It is those who practice who know the truth, not those who write.”

Initially, Puu Taki building two hundred pagodas beside Lower Yedagone monastery on the western foothill of Zwegabin near Dong Ying (photo 6). During the decade that they stayed there, they neither worshipped nor made merit to Buddhist monks, putting everything into their enterprise of building pagodas. Moreover, harboring criticisms against his strange behavior, the surrounding Buddhist villagers were hostile.

²¹ Descriptions in this section are all based on interviews conducted with Puu Taki and his followers on two occasions.

He went to Thamanya Hsayadaw and sought his advice regarding his pagoda construction and about his prospective move to Kyaing and in 1998, Puu Taki moved location from Dong Ying to the present place near the Kyaing River. The small community in Dong Yin still remains, and continues to build pagodas. In the initial stages of his meditation, Puu Taki was a disciple of Alantaya Hsayadaw (a revered monk who had since the 1960s, lived in a community with his followers) and followed his vegetarian practices. As mentioned in the above section, since the 1980s, Karen Buddhism around Paan had become aligned with the Burmese religious authorities and major monasteries had monks appointed from the center. In this trend, Puu Taki had received pressure from the Sangha, and moved to the present Puu Taki village. According to the abbot of Ounthabein Village monastery on the east side of the Zwekabin, “the reason why Puu Taki began to demonstrate obedience to the monks was because the religious authorities pressured him.” After receiving much criticism from Buddhist authorities as well as laypersons, Puu Taki visited revered monks such as Alantaya and Thamanya Hsayadaw, which has helped to legitimize his own practices. On the other hand, he constructs his pagodas, makes himself the object of donations rather than himself donating to the sangha, and refers to himself as the future Buddha, by marking himself by the choice of costumes.

At present, he claims he has around four thousand followers, and the present community of Puu Taki village consists of two hundred households. It is situated on a roaming hill, interspersed with pagodas and other constructions which represent various figures from Karen legends, giving the effect of a panoramic view of his worldview. Such construction resembles the enterprises of abbots of large monasteries, demonstrating the intention to build the land of Buddha in this world. At the school, some lay followers teach Burmese and Karen language to children. The “monastery” is an L-shaped bamboo construction, where hermit men in white robes, turbans and long hair tied in top-knots, with rosaries around their neck, accompany Puu Taki, who sits on the top stage of a three-tiered terrace. Male followers can sit on the same height, while women must sit at the bottom.

Puu Taki admits *Duwae* practice as well as *aung xae* (the ancestral ritual) as important Karen customs. Many of his followers practice *Duwae*, and the wedding vow (to be explained below) can be performed in Puu Taki village also. The ancestral *aung xae* ritual is performed to keep the family together. Normally meat is used, but here, water, sesame and coconuts are used. Puu Taki himself follows both rituals, and also conducts rituals of tying cotton strings around the wrist to keep the soul in tact.

All of the three movements I have described in this section can be characterized by a common chiliastic orientation and Maitreya belief, and are referred to in Burmese as *gaing*. Among the movements since the nineteenth century, those

chiliastic beliefs awaiting the coming of the Maitreya such as *Telakhon* and *Leke* are explained by Stern as having its roots in envy towards the lowland civilization, and bitter thoughts towards the oppressive carriers of these civilizations. At the same time they are strongly influenced by Burmese Buddhism (Stern 1968). They attempt to resist or evade Burma through practices influenced by Burmese Buddhism.

In a discussion of the above U Thuzana and *Telakhon*, Gravers recognizes that the Karen religious movements were profoundly influenced by the Burmese and Mon cosmology, and admits commonalities with Burmese popular Buddhism as does Stern, but also points out the importance of the specificity of Karen culture within the Buddhist cosmology (Gravers 2001:22). The common characteristic among these Karen movements and practices he raises are: communal life awaiting the coming of the Maitreya, the building of pagodas, vegetarian and moral life, as well as the strict practice of Karen customs, all towards building a world appropriate for the future Buddha, towards the reconstitution of a world. In Gravers' own words these "movements are not merely resisting modernity or external forces, ... they also try to correct a skewed universe, including the failure of or the flawed coherence between past and present, the lack of recognition of culture and identity, and the lack of decent moral order, as well as the lack of a decent livelihood. Thus, they cannot be analyzed only as reaction, resistance, or defensive action against others but rather as a genuine project of re-enchantment of the world, its forces and its relations." (Gravers 2001:5). Even though the envy and bitterness theme emphasized by Stern might be specific to a particular historical period, we cannot but admit that the same ethnic sentiments have continued to this day. Gravers adds to this the accumulation of memories through the recent history involving Karen. It is true that religious movements and communities such as these have emerged regardless of specific historical conditions. Yet in the case of the Karen in this region, it has become a repeated motif, and the repetition itself adds power and momentum to the individual movements.

On the conceptual level, both Stern and Gravers emphasize the influence of Buddhism on these religious movements. However, it is important to further place these movements within the historical and institutional development of Burmese Buddhism and relate the Karen movements in the context of how Karen Buddhism is positioned in this development. As we have seen, Karen Buddhism has emerged from within this context, so that the current religious movements must be understood within the wider context of Burmese Buddhism, not only on a conceptual level, but its institutional as well as politico-religious aspects. At the same time we need to recognize the importance of Karen cultural elements which enable these sects to ensure continuity of Karen practices which are emphasized in moral terms.

In looking at Burmese religion as a total whole, Mendelson places the belief in

weikza as a third constitutive element along with spirit beliefs and Buddhism. The sources of the mystical power of *weikzas*, (leaders of the groups of mystical practices (*gaing*) who are reputed to have transcendental powers) are in such secular arts as alchemy, astrology, magic and herbal medicine, as well as in meditation (Mendelson 1961a:230). He goes on to suggest that, rather than look at these three elements of Burmese religion as three separate realms, one might question the conceptual emphasis on “pure Buddhism” through the relationships among the three (231), and to relativize the concepts of orthodox and unorthodox Buddhism, rather than condemn it as unorthodox. He describes a specific community of followers of *weikza* called *gaing*, and how their practices are based on the chiliastic expectation of the coming of the future Buddha (*payalaung*), under the leadership of the *weikza* as *Setkya Min* or *minlaung* (future king) (1961a:231-5). The above Karen movements can most certainly be understood as being a part of this phenomenon.

Mystical practices tied to the ideology of the future king manifested as millennialistic religious movements under the colonial administration in nineteenth century Burma. These have been considered as practices of the minority, peripherally positioned in the central Buddhist tradition (Spiro 1970:163-187), and emerging at times of political, economic and social upheaval (Tambiah 1984; Spiro 1970; Stern 1968). For example, leaders such as the most well cited Saya San, claiming supernatural powers as *Setkya Min* or *minlaung*, rebelled against the British administration. From the above point of view, this would be a movement resisting administration by outsiders and awaiting the coming of the Buddhist king. However, Mendelson points out that *weikza* beliefs have continued well after independence, and therefore should not be seen as being confined to particular political and historical conditions. Rather the ideology and movements should be placed centrally within the Burmese religious tradition (1961a). In line with such argument, Schober also suggests that such movements should not be understood merely as political resistance. Both “normative Buddhism” and mystical practices, should be understood as emerging from within the Buddhist tradition, so that it is impossible to draw a line between what is Buddhism and what is not. Rather, such movements and mystical practices should be positioned in its relationship with the community of mystical practices on the one hand and the monastic community on the other, and the secular world, within the Theravada Buddhist tradition (Schober 1988).

Tosa takes up this argument from the point of view of the delineation of knowledge and practices within and outside institutionalized Buddhism by the regime. In her monograph discussing *weikza* beliefs, she points out the necessity of understanding the process of re-positioning secular and religious knowledge within and outside Buddhism, in relation to the modern definition and institutionalization of

knowledge and religion by the status quo (Tosa 2000). In the process whereby Buddhism is defined as the institutionalized religion of the state since the times of Bodawpaya (late eighteenth century), religious knowledge related to the attainment of *nibbana* is defined as Buddhist knowledge, while other forms of knowledge have fallen out of this delineation and excluded from religious knowledge, as something orthodox Buddhist practices should not be involved in. Especially after 1980, policies regarding religion explicitly aimed to separate the secular knowledge of the arts such as alchemy and magic from the monastic sangha. Such secular knowledge (*lawki pinnya*), including alchemy, astrology, folk medicine, etc. had been inseparable from religious knowledge that has to do with the attainment of *nibbana* (*lawkuktara pinnya*) in the monastic setting. The reformist council of 1980 on the one hand systematized and made use of the secular knowledge, while at the same time disallowed its involvement with the religious institution, separating Buddhist religious knowledge and the sangha on the one hand from the secular knowledge, its practitioners and their followers on the other (Tosa 2000:318). Some sects (*gaings*) where devotees of the supernatural power, adopting elements of such secular knowledge and meditative practices, as well as mystical and Mahayanist elements of Buddhism, were repressed after the reformist council (Tosa 2000:251-3). However, Tosa argues that such intentions bare paradoxical results, in that delineation of realms of knowledge have led to the enhancement of mystical practices and *weikza* beliefs among the people. The knowledge and supernatural power emerging from the borders in the delineation between the religious and secular, is mobilized and received by the people, and is paradoxically enhanced by policies of exclusion. The series of religious movements among the Karen is not to be separated from the millennialistic ideology based on knowledge and power in Burmese Buddhism. Neither is it to be separated from the effects of this modern process of delineation and exclusion of knowledge and practices to be found in the Burmese religious context. Similar processes of delineation and definition can also be found among Karen religious authorities as we see in the *Duwae* practices below. We shall see how such definition has at the same time allowed the continuation of Karen practices.

***Duwae* Practices**

Duwae is a widely observed practice among the Buddhist Pwo Karen in and around Paan today. It is often listed together with *Telakhon* and *Leke*, and originates from around the same period or possibly earlier.²² *Duwae*, unlike *Telakhon* and *Leke*, is not referred to as *gaing* or sect, but rather, its practitioners claim that they are Buddhist and

²² On the second floor of the Karen Museum in Paan, there is a corner on Karen history and folk traditions. Here, *Telakhon*, *Leke* and *Duwae* are juxtaposed in an exhibition of Karen traditional religious practices.

that as *Duwa*e practitioners, they are *yoya-win* (followers of tradition or custom). However, once we begin to investigate into the origins, the practices and discourse pertaining to *Duwa*e, we find extremely varied perspectives depending on the writer, narrator, or practitioner. Relationship with Buddhist practices as well as the belief in Ariya or in spirits, inclusion of details of Karen customs appear and disappear, not allowing us to grasp it in any single light as with a kaleidoscope. It is this, which I will pursue below.

Origin and organization According to local Karen monks and local folklorists, the original foundation of *Duwa*e took place in Tao-pon Village, where the present *Duwa*e pagoda is located, and the founder was Shin Duwon (anonymous n.d.; Kunna Wuntha 1926; Man Ne San 2005; Man Thint Naung 2006; 2007).²³ Duwon became a novice in Ava in the Inwa period²⁴ and returned to this area. According to one version of the legend, he used to live in a graveyard, and every morning walked for alms from there.²⁵ At the time, the peasants in the area performed sacrificial rituals for the spirit of a large Bodhi tree, offering livestock and wine. However, Duwon came and taught them to meditate and lead a vegetarian life. It is also said that he cured illness by use of knowledge he learned as a novice (Man Ne San 2005:53). The villagers built a monastery for him, and his presence brought prosperity to the village. After he expelled the spirits by chanting protective sutras and cutting down the bodhi tree, he built a pagoda and villagers could cease to perform sacrificial rites (Man Thint Naung 2006:28-34).

*Duwa*e practice was thus founded in Tao-pon Village in Dong Ying, and Duwon is said to have founded a similar pagoda south of Hlaingbwe in Lounkain village, where there are similar legends regarding its foundation (Man Thint Naung 2006b:54-97). U Santana, the knowledgeable monk (aka Man Ne San) remarks that Duwon had transcended designation as monk and was known as a *minlaung* (Man Ne San 2005:97-99). Duwon had gathered many followers and the legends all agree that he was revered as *minlaung*, or in some cases Maitreya with supernatural powers (Man Ne San 2005:97-99). Once Duwon departed, villagers elected their own priests to and continued the practice.

The story of the beginning of *Duwa*e is thus at the same time the story of how

²³ The most detailed description was written by one of the three above-named Karen monks, U Santana who used the name Man Ne San. Man Thint Naung revised this and wrote a few books after 1996. The founding period is also debated. Man Thint Naung proposes 1788 as the year of his return (2006a:54), and others 1830 (Kunna wuntha 1926:24). Neither indicated the basis for the dates.

²⁴ It was until 1841 that the royal capital was in Ava (Inwa). There are many legends regarding Duwon, some say he was a monk while the majority say he was a novice (Man Ne San 2005:52).

²⁵ Living in a graveyard is often associated with *weikza* and those with mystical powers.

the local population began to adopt Buddhist practices. From its beginnings then, *Duwaë* practice was characterized as a way of liberating the locals from the spirits, and bringing Buddhist practices, as symbolized in the *Duwaë* pagoda. According to a seventy-year old elder in Dong Ying, when he was a young child, villagers had not yet taken up the practice of visiting Buddhist monasteries, but often visited the pagoda to make oaths. It was only when he had reached his adolescence (around 1945) that villagers began to frequent monasteries. If this is true, the flourish of Pwo Karen literary Buddhism we saw above was a matter for the local learned monks, centered on the limited terrain of monasteries, while the local peasants practiced spirit beliefs, then partially superseded by the *Duwaë* practices at the pagodas. Monastic Buddhism had not entered local everyday life. In any case, from all of the above, it seems that at its inception, *Duwaë* practice took a similar course as the sectarian Maitreya-oriented movements such as *Telakhon* and *Leke*.

In a book authored by a monk in 1926, *Duwaë* is referred to in parallel with *Telakhon* and *Leke* discussing them critically from the point of view of Buddhism (Kunnawuntha 1926). In 1965, missionary Dodge and anthropologist Stern made a trip to the *Telakhon* community on the Thai side and wrote a report, in which they list *Duwaë* practice in parallel with *Telakhon* and *Leke*. In this report, *Duwaë* is referred to as a chiliastic belief in the coming Ariya, where practitioners wear white robes and make offerings at two pagodas seeking salvation (Dodge and Stern n.d.14, Stern 1967: 320).²⁶ Man Ne San later points out that many people misunderstood that the *Duwaë* pagodas were places where people worshipped the spirits of *Duwaë* (Man Ne San 2005:103-108).

An event that defined *Duwaë* practice within Buddhism took place in the 1970s led by local Karen monks. In 1973, four Karen monks from monasteries in the locale took up the reconstruction of the *Duwaë* pagoda in Dong Ying. Thereafter, *Duwaë* was properly positioned within Buddhist practice. On the stone inscription in the pagoda grounds commemorating the reconstruction of the pagoda in 1973, it is written as follows:

“In 1973, in Tao-pon village of Dong Ying, Paan District, on the second day and Thursday of Kasone month, 150 monks and more than 300 people gathered from Paan,

²⁶ At the time, followers were said to number merely twenty to fifty (Dodge and Stern n.d.14, Stern 1967: 320), although this description may have been based on indirect information. In 1908, an abbot and nine *Duwaë* practitioners were reported to have visited the *Telakhon* chief in Thimaw. Therefore it is possible that the locals had indirect knowledge regarding the Thimaw leader. Furthermore, Carpenter who visited the upper Mae Klong River on the Thai side in 1872 reported that at the time, there was a Buddhist sect in the region which worshipped “the Lord Too-way” (Carpenter 1873:11). Stern points out that *Duwaë* is a sect which originally began in the east of Kyaing, was very close with *Telakhon*, and visited the *Telakhon* Puu Chaik to consult with him about the *Telakhon* beliefs during the *Telakhon* new year festival (1967:320).

Hlaingbwe and Yangon etc. The purpose of the gathering was to acknowledge the *Duwa*e pagoda and its grounds as a place of Buddhist worship, and thereby to secure and maintain Buddhist practices in the Karen region and here, a committee was formulated by members of the Sangha and those who do not practice, although nevertheless they participate in committees for the Sangha.”

The names of four monks as patron or trustees, four supervisors, four treasurers, and three auditors are inscribed, all of whom are from monasteries in Paan or Kawkareik including U Eindriya, abbot of Yedagone monastery, U Santana, and U Zagara, all Karen literary monks. In the month of Dabodwe of the same year, the foundation of the pagoda was constructed, and the following year, the pagoda, up to the thi on the top was completed (photo 10).

It is unmistakable that at this point, the conscious will of local monks to locate *Duwa*e practice within Buddhism was at work. In records written by local monks at the time of this pagoda re-construction, it is written as follows “we are recording this in order to evaluate whether the *Duwa*e pagoda is appropriate as a place of Buddhist worship. Now, it is apparent that *Duwa*e pagoda is appropriate for the purpose of Buddhism “(anonymous n.d.p.28). Subsequently, U Zagara exerted his efforts towards the reconstruction of the pagoda and construction of the monk’s living quarters on the side of the pagoda, as custodian. Thus *Duwa*e became quite consciously repositioned within the Buddhist practices among the Karen of Paan.

In the case of Dong Ying, the priest (in Burmese referred to as *Duwa*e *thein*, or *Duwa*e *saya*) is supported by the committee (*koupaka*) which controls the *Duwa*e practices, consisting of four ritual practitioners (including the priest), two male and two female, three secretaries, and one diviner. Every day, there are visitors who come to make vows or to ask for divination, coming not only from the vicinity but also from distant places. There is always at least one ritual practitioner, secretary and the diviner at the pagoda every morning until noon. Once a year in the month of Wasu, the priests, *koupaka* members, and monks who are part of the committee gather to talk about management and administration of the pagoda.

The Practice The most important event for the *Duwa*e practitioner is the ritual of vows at the time of wedding, called *thissa dain* in Burmese, and *au kin lon taw ja* (ordination and vow) in Pwo Karen. The actual wedding is performed at home by inviting monks or performing the spirit rituals. Usually before the feast, the newlywed couple visits the *Duwa*e pagoda to make a vow under the ritual leadership of the priest (photo 11). For most *Duwa*e followers, this is the only time in their lives that they visit the *Duwa*e pagoda. The wedding vow can be made at any time of the year, although there are certain days according to the lunar calendar that are said to be

auspicious. In the Kasone month, on Thursdays and Saturdays just before the full moon, or in the Dabodwe month, Tuesdays and Thursdays before the full moon are the best days, and the vow must be made before noon.²⁷ For the vow, the groom must bring a coconut, and the bride, a betel box wrapped in white cloth. These two items mark the couple as newlyweds. When they visit the pagoda, ninety percent of the couples wear Karen costumes.²⁸ At the reception they pay 1500 kyat as ritual fees, and 500 as the price of offerings, and tell their names and village, which the secretary writes down. The groom then cuts off the outer shell of the coconut with a knife, then with the offerings in hand, the couple sits facing the priest.²⁹ From the betel box, the bride takes out one cup of rice, another cup of glutinous rice, betel with leaves, some leaves, beeswax, some gold foil, turmeric powder, five cigars, and places the shelled coconut in front. After the couple give their names to the priest, they say the vow three times in Karen; the first time, the priest addresses the vow to Duwon for the bride and groom, the second time, he pours the coconut juice on the ground and together with the couple, utter prayers to the spirit of the land, and the third, again prayer to Duwon to distribute merit to all. Such vows had to be made at the beginning of the marriage.

According to U Santana, when it happened that an unmarried maiden became pregnant, there would be great trouble, and the bride and groom would pay compensation to their village and were expelled (Man Ne San 2005:3).³⁰ The *Duwae* vows were themselves thus related to control of sexuality. It is believed that the contents of *Duwae* practice were defined by the founding Duwon himself. In translating the Buddhist law into Karen, he devised the vows and various strictures of *Duwae* practice, which included rituals at times of building a house, going on a trip, beginning of cultivation, etc. and it is said that norms pertaining to marriage were the most strictly adhered to (ibid. 60, 72).³¹ In either case the contents of *Duwae*

²⁷ This approximately coincides with late April and early June, although in Eastern Pwo Karen songs, the *Duwae* vow is sung as follows: “in the month of Kasone, when the *pinma* flower blooms, the sky is covered by dark clouds, and rain and thunder begin. Rice cultivation by farmers begins. *Duwae* followers perform worship and service in this season.” (Man Thint Naung 2006:3). Following Kasone month, in Neyaun month, also, Tuesdays just before the full moon is a popular day. It cannot be performed during the cultivation season even during the Lenten season.

²⁸ The remaining ten percent came in Burmese style wedding clothes or in their daily clothes.

²⁹ According to the late Man Thint Naung, the local folklorist, in Kawkareik, men brought lunch boxes in place of coconuts, and accompanying relative brought a basket of flowers. Furthermore, while in Dong Ying, the priest made the vow as s/he tilted and poured the coconut juice onto the floor, while in Kawkareik they used mineral water for the same purpose.

³⁰ In his book on the *Duwae*, Man Thint Naung also mentions that the Karen lay great emphasis on virginity. (2006:5).

³¹ Duwon taught Buddhism to the locals, especially by recognizing the importance of existing Karen customs, and making good use of them in the new practices. For example, *Duwae* practitioners were forbidden to bring alcoholic beverages into their houses, could not crash into other people’s houses with an oxcart. If they do by mistake, apologies must be made. If women become pregnant before marriage, she

practices manifested clear continuity from existing Karen practices and norms.

Up until today, in many cases, couples come to make vows at the *Duwa*e pagoda just before their marriage, or within a couple of days of the wedding. However, there are also other cases. The most common pattern today where young couples come back in between their periods of labor migration to Thailand, often with babies or children. In such cases too, even if they meet and marry in Thailand and have children, they still believe that they must return at some point to make the *Duwa*e vow, otherwise there will be some disaster in the family. According to a woman who practices *Duwa*e in a village not far from Dong Ying, “In Dong Ying, once a year in the month of Dabaung, on full moon day, we perform ritual offerings and ask to be protected from all evil. Although it is not a matter of spirits, if we marry without making vows, we will be driven mad. *Duwa*e is like the guardian of the house, so we must go to report our marriage.” This practitioner connects *Duwa*e practice with her house, and central to the practice is the marital vow. *Duwa*e is thus intimately related to daily and domestic practices of the people (Man Thint Naung 2006b:100-108).

The Fire Festival The annual *Duwa*e pagoda festival is held in the month of Dabodwe on full moon days.³² In 2007, three monks were invited to the newly constructed meeting hall of the pagoda, to chant and make merit. In the evening, on the pagoda grounds, food stalls and game stalls were set up, and a movie show was prepared,³³ while a bonfire was prepared in the center of the grounds. *Duwa*e practitioners one by one brought sticks of bamboo or cane with strings tied at the end. The sticks were all cut in the size of their family members, each stick representing one member. These sticks were placed around a yellow pillar set at the center of the ground. When the full moon came to the highest, the monks and the *koupaka* of the pagoda began to chant the sutras, while women carrying coconuts and bananas circled around the pillar with the *koupaka*, dancing nine times around the pillar clockwise. After this, firewood was added to the pillar, and the bonfire was lit (photo 12).

It should not be far-fetched to say that *Duwa*e is, for the practitioners, more than anything else a prayer and practice to protect and bring prosperity to the domestic realm

must be expelled from the village. These were some of the tabus which were brought into *Duwa*e practice (Man Ne San 2005:113-124). However, these were not written constitutions, but rather, shared customs. Either way, the marital vows of *Duwa*e were unmistakably taken from existing norms and customs of the Karen.

³² The fire festival is held only in two places in the entire Karen state: Dong Ying and Kyaundoo. For the first time in 2007, the *Duwa*e practitioners in Klannou also began a similar fire festival at the *Duwa*e pagoda, although the timing of the bonfire was deliberately delayed from that of Dong Ying.

³³ Every year, a stage was built and *zabwe* (song and dance troupe and their show) were invited. However, this year, because the construction of the *tammayoun* (the meeting hall) had just completed, and had been a large stress on their budget. Complaints were heard that the visiting villagers preferred *zabwe* rather than the movie.

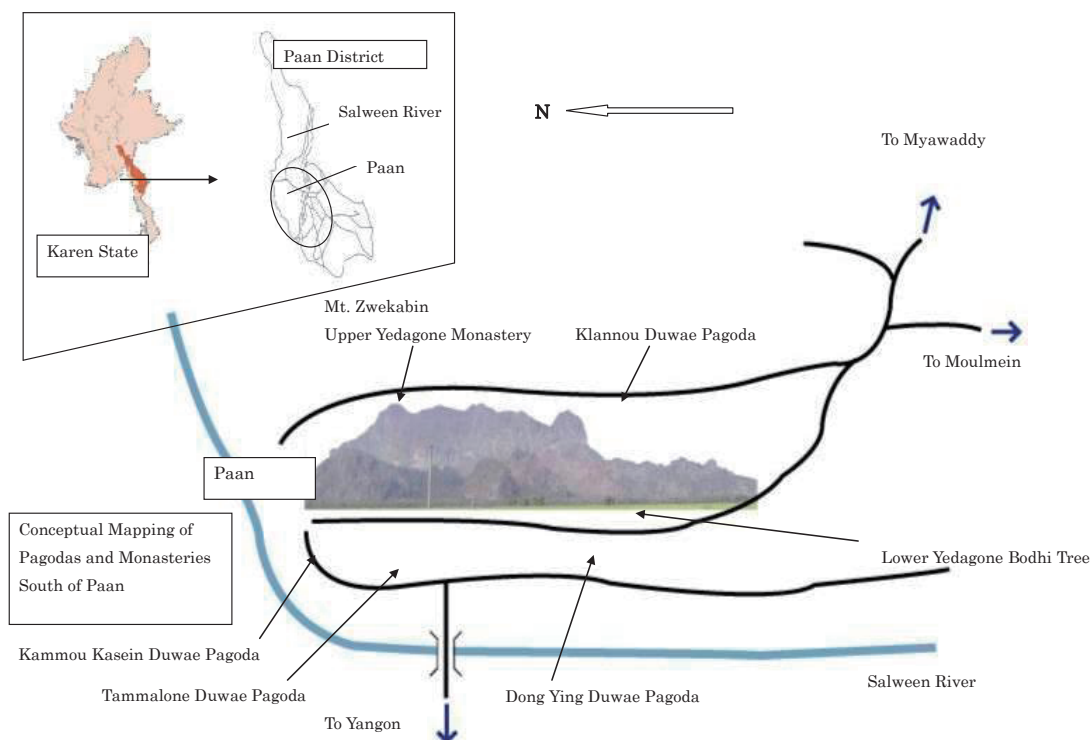
and its members.³⁴ To that extent, it shares much in common with such rituals as *aung xae* which had been practiced in the domestic realm in the Karen region. Furthermore, judging from the legends of its founding, *Duwa* was brought to this region as a substitute for practices of spirit worship which involved animal sacrifice such as *aung xae*. The local people explain *aung xae* as “the festival of the women of the house”, or “the festival of the spirit of the house”, that is handed down from mother to daughter, where the eldest daughter must act as the leader, and is performed primarily in the month of Kasone (June to July). East of the Zweekabin mountains in Ounthabein village, nearly one hundred household which constitute one third of the village today still practice *aung xae*, in parallel with *Duwa*. In such cases where *Duwa* and *aung xae* coexist, *aung xae* must be performed vegetarian style (fruit, sesame, rice, popped rice)

According to one *Duwa* practitioner “*aung xae* is higher ranking” “more complicated”, or in other words, far more demanding. As with *Duwa*, *aung xae* must be performed in cases of illness, or in beginning some new venture, and as with *aung xae*, many books written about the *Duwa* emphasize that it is “a thing for the women”. Mothers of *Duwa* practitioners certainly do not forget the customs, and transmit the rules from generation to the next, so that in families of *Duwa* practitioners, the mother maintains influence, and is involved in important decisions, especially regarding the maintenance of existing custom. This also is exactly parallel with *aung xae*. *Duwa* can be carried out without any problem even if the father is absent, but if the mother is absent, it cannot be performed. In *Duwa*, the mother is central (Man Ne San 2004:11-14). Thus from the point of view of the practicing Karen people, *Duwa* practice is first and foremost a practice of the family, just as *aung xae* is passed on from mother to daughter, as a specific form of spirit worship. It is indeed an inheritance of one aspect of the spirit worship or its replacement, which is that it must be handed down from mother to children.

After marriage, once a year inside the house, a coconut offering must be made in front of the largest pillar of the house, in the same month as the marital vows were made. Offerings must be prepared in the same number as the number of places the couple visited in making vows. There is no need to visit the pagodas after marriage. However, if there is any domestic mishap such as pertaining to health, livelihood and trade, that affect the household economy, villagers visit the pagoda to inquire with the diviner. In cases where the couple cannot both come, a relative could come, bringing the clothes of the person as representative.

³⁴ In an introduction to Man Thint Naung’s book, a monk points out the three elements of *Duwa*: to follow the dhamma and practice correct behavior in family and everyday life; to show respect to other families: and, to teach between husband and wife what is the correct behavior (Man Thint Naung 2006).

Locations The center of *Duwae* practice on the west side of the Zweekabin mountain is in Dong Ying and is called *Duwae kyi* (large *Duwae*), and it is here that receives the largest number of *Duwae* practitioners throughout the year. However, there are also other pagodas of *Duwae* practice such as on the eastern side of Zweekabin at Klannou (photo 14)³⁵ and at Hlaingbwe etc.



An important component in understanding this relationship between *Duwae* practice and the maternal line mentioned above is the choice of location for making marital vows. The majority of brides and grooms who visit the Dong Ying pagoda for marital vows also visit other pagodas on the same day. It is something like a “vowing pilgrimage course” in the local area, constituting three *Duwae* pagodas on the west side of the Zweekabin, and a bodhi tree shrine near the Lower Yedagone monastery. The course to be followed as to which pagodas must be visited, is inherited from the bride’s and groom’s parents respectively, and primarily the practices of the mother must be inherited by the child. In the most numerous cases, a couple goes to four different places to make vows. Since the bride’s and groom’s practices must be both taken to account, the course to be followed is also considered from one case to another at the time of marriage. What especially drives the practitioners is the fear that, unless they follow the course of *Duwae* practices as handed down from the maternal side, disaster will take

³⁵ At present there are two priests at Klannou pagoda, one male and one female, although they do not stay at the pagoda every day as in the case of Dong Ying. The abbot of the Ounthabein monastery manages the pagoda.

place in the family.³⁶

Looking at these places one by one, it becomes apparent that the width of *Duwaë* practice is not only geographical, but also in the variety in the content of their practices. Even on the same side of the Zweekabin mountain, the practices focusing on the pagodas are varied from one pagoda to another, especially in the extent to which spirit worship, which the *Duwaë* practice in its origin rejected, is permitted and adopted, and explicit elements of Buddhist practices are involved.

For example, in Lounkain Village, the three *saranam* (the Buddha, the dhamma and the monk) are uttered at the beginning of the vowing ritual just as in Buddhist ceremonies. On the other hand, in the *Duwaë* pagoda at Tammalone Village manifests clear elements of spirit worship. The priest is a woman, and her position is handed down matrilineally. On the terrace of her house there is a shrine, and the pagoda, constructed when the villagers received Buddhism in the colonial era (photo 15). The priestess is vegetarian and refrains from drinking. Couples who come to make their marital vows must first make the vows in front of the shrine on her terrace, and then go out to the pagoda to pray. Up until her generation, the *Duwaë* practiced in this village had used alcohol for libation. However, according to the priestess herself, in recent years, she received a message in her dream that this was inappropriate, and changed to lime soda (photo 13).³⁷ In this ritual using the lime soda, the marital couple prepares a bottle, pours it in a cup which is handed one by one among those present, each taking a sip, and then prayer is made. The procedure of this drinking ceremony is exactly the same as the ritualist liquor tilting and prayer (called *khwaë si* in Sgaw Karen) practiced among Karen elsewhere (Hayami 2004). In other words, it is a ritual that is performed in the name of the guardian spirits of land. The interpretation of *Duwaë* practice by the Tammalone priestess seemed to be more permissive or closer to spirit rituals than at the Dong Ying pagoda.³⁸ As we saw above, in the three prayers made during the wedding

³⁶ If the wife is a *Duwaë* practitioner and the husband is not, and the husband is unwilling to come to make a vow, the wife can bring a piece of her husband's clothing to the pagoda and make a vow by herself. The *Duwaë* committee at Dong Ying narrated to me a case where a woman came to make a vow alone for her marriage with a Muslim man. Subsequently, the husband's business improved greatly, and the husband accompanied her to come to pay gratitude. Upon divorce, a couple need not visit the pagoda, but upon re-marriage, there must be a new round of marital vows with the new spouse. Couples will come to make a vow at the pagoda on occasions such as when they decide to abandon a long-kept familiar practice such as the ancestral ritual *aung xae*, or if they make small changes within the practice of *aung xae*, or any other changes in the familial customs. If a couple fails to come at the time of marriage and something ominous takes place after marriage, they will attribute it to the omission of marital vows, and might decide to come belatedly. *Duwaë* practitioners ideally will practice vegetarianism on the new and full moon days during the Buddhist Lenten season.

³⁷ Later, I confirmed this matter with the priest of Dong Ying, who gave me an alternative account of events, that it was the *koupaka* of the Dong Ying *Duwaë* pagoda that prohibited the use of alcohol and suggested to the Tammalone practitioner to use lime soda.

³⁸ According to this priestess of Tammalone Village, once or twice a year, one of the four priests at Dong Ying "receives a message" from the spirit, and when this happens a meeting is held. She talked about this

vow, the priest at the Dong Ying pagoda also prayed the second time for the spirit of the land.

Another location visited by the marital couple to perform the vow is the bodhi tree at Yedagone Waterfall (Lower Yedagone): Strictly speaking, the ritual at Yedagone waterfall is “unrelated to *Duwae*”, as the *koupaka* members at the Dong Ying pagoda insist. There is no pagoda here but two intertwined bodhi trees and a shrine where a Buddha statue is installed as if to guard the tree. As we have seen, in Duwon’s legend, the bodhi tree appears as the home of spirits. Here, the bride and groom pour sacred water on the tree, and the groom circles around the tree clockwise three times as he encircles the tree with a string. An old lady who acts as the ritual practitioner asks for their names and prays with the betel box, just as with the prayer at the *Duwae* pagodas. As noted above, the vowing ceremonies concentrate on specific days of the lunar calendar. On one occasion, the number of couples visiting Dong Ying Pagoda in the half-a-day of the auspicious date numbered as many as 223. In the months of Dabodwe and Kasone in 2007, I interviewed forty-two couples who had come to make their marital

No. of locations visited by one couple	No. of couples	Locations Visited for vows
Dong Ying only	9	
Two sites	18	Dong Ying, Yedagone (11), Dong Ying and Kamokasein (6)
Three sites	4	Dong Ying, Yedagone, and Kamokasein
More than four	4	Dong Ying, Yedagone, Kamokasein and Tammalone

[Table 1: Locations visited for wedding vows by couples interviewed at Dong Ying Pagoda]

vows at Dong Ying pagoda. Regarding the vowing course, two-thirds of the couples visited at least two locations. However it was also apparent that if they visited only one, it was Dong Ying pagoda, and if they visited only two, it was the Dong Ying Pagoda and the bodhi tree at the Lower Yedagone waterfall. Thus, even though the *koupaka* of the *Duwae* pagoda may characterize and place *Duwae* within Buddhist practices, the actual rituals of vows that the practitioners perform in the course of their tour include elements more akin to spirit worship.

One older *koupaka* member said, “the priest at the time of building the pagoda, Phu Sein Yae, was a *nat saya* (spirit doctor). Some people claim he was a *nat kadaw*

in the same terms as the *nat kadaw* (spirit medium in Burma). If this is true, the *koupaka* of Dong Ying would surely not admit that what they define fully within Buddhist orthodoxy is in any way associated with spirit mediumship. The *koupaka*, on the other hand, told me that they do indeed hold a meeting once a year, where monks are also invited, to make important decisions for the pagoda. I was not able to pursue the difference in these claims.

(spirit medium), but we don't call him that since we are now Buddhist ourselves.” A majority of practitioners emphasize that *Duwae* is *yoya* (custom). They do not deny that it includes elements of spirit worship, and in fact, in practice also elements of spirit worship are not completely eliminated, but rather admitted if not encouraged.³⁹ Furthermore, according to the founding legend, there are elements of millennialism and belief in the supernatural power of the founding Duwon who is referred to as *Minlaung*. *Duwae* practice does not involve a defined community of practitioners (*gaing*) such as in *Telakhon*, *Leke* or Puu Ta Khi. However, the numerous *Duwae* pagodas spread on both sides of Zwekabin mountain, the vegetarian priests of the pagodas, the sharing and maintaining of Karen customs and morals, all of these together suggest that there is an invisible space over which a community of practitioners is dispersed widely in the Paan plains, sharing the same practices.

Tosa points out that since the Buddhist purification promoted by King Bodawpaya in late eighteenth century, there have been attempts to differentiate lay esoteric arts and knowledge from Buddhist knowledge towards the attainment of *nibbana*. The Buddhist institutional framework define and delineate the religious, separating it from secular knowledge. This however, has resulted in the enhancement of what fell outside the delineation as the esoteric realm (Tosa 2000). If the nineteenth century religious rebellions might be interpreted as resistance under specific political situation of colonial administration, in the longer flow of time, *weikza* beliefs and the foundational practices of their powers have been elements of Burmese religious practice that gained power and grew through the process of institutionalization of religion and modernist delineation of knowledge. Among the Karen, the emergence of Puu Taki, the recent resurgence of *Leke*, and the Buddhicization of *Duwae* practices must also be understood in the context of the effects of this delineation by the Buddhist purification policy on the world of East Pwo Karen Buddhism. The institutional delineation of Buddhist practices, whether by redefining them within the borders, or by excluding them and giving them another name, ultimately resulted in creating another niche, a place where its has over a century and a half, accumulated its own history and memory, thereby further strengthening the niche. It is in this niche that expressions of the continuities of ethnic identity has found its place.

Saw Ehlu, a farmer from the neighboring village and a member of the *koupaka* (pagoda committee) at the Dong Ying *Duwae* pagoda, visits the pagoda every morning to pay his respects. He explains the relationship thus: “Here we have a Buddhsit statue but

³⁹ When I asked Puu Ta Khi, who is most concerned about Karen customs, whose own followers practice *Duwae*, he responded that *Duwae* practice is centered on the pagoda, but it is not Buddhism. He claimed that the *Duwae* priest is a *nat-saya* (a spirit doctor). He emphasized further that to begin with, Shin Duwon who began the practice was himself not a monk but a novice.

no monks. The top part of *Duwae* is Buddhism, and the bottom is *yoya* (customs). There is no problem with that, even for the monks.” From the point of view of the practitioners as well as the supporting Karen monks, as *yoya*, *Duwae* can co-exist with Buddhists practices, and in this sense it can be differentiated from *Leke* or Puu Taki. However, the high-ranking non-Karen monks who are appointed to this region from outside, are not persuaded. The abbot of Upper Yedagone monastery, now the representative of the sangha at the district level, when asked about *Duwae*, responded: “*Duwae* is nat belief and not Buddhism. But if we don’t allow the local Karen to continue the practice, they will be unhappy. So we let them follow their way. The *Duwae* priest is a *nat kadaw*.” Thus, from the point of view of the sangha, *Duwae* practice is outside its delineation but allowed from political consideration.

Concluding discussion

We have examined the multi-layered religious practices among the Buddhist Pwo Karen in Paan district, within the historical experience of the region and in relation to the developments of Burmese Buddhism.

In nineteenth century Lower Burma under colonial rule, and due to the mapping of control over Buddhist organization and practices, and resistance towards the colonial administration, we see the emergence of multiple Buddhist sects among religious elites on the one hand, as well as numerous millennialistic movements by the masses on the other. Both of these trends reached and affected the East Pwo Karen Buddhism. Monastic Buddhism flourished in the mid-nineteenth century with special emphasis on promoting Buddhist Karen script, while at the same time religious movements, parallel with millennialist movements in Lower Burma, yet adopting elements of Karen customs and folk traditions also emerged.⁴⁰ Prior to the rise of Buddhist nationalism against colonial rule among the Burmans, in Karen State, it is noteworthy that a Karen-specific Buddhist monastic order was promoted, which clearly differentiated themselves from the Burman Buddhist order. It is not a nationalistic movement with a modern organization or ideology, but a self-reflexive and self-conscious movement which recognized themselves as Karen vis-à-vis the Burmans.

After 1980, Newin’s regime increased control of Buddhism in the name of purification and reform, and the East Pwo Karen Buddhist world was also definitively absorbed into the institutional Buddhism of the Ministry of Religion and the sangha. Locals in the immediate vicinity of Paan, which had been the center of Karen Buddhism

⁴⁰ I have not covered all of the varied forms of religious practices in Paan District. For example, there is a Christian-influenced group called *Mucheli*, which recently emerged in Dong Ying. Locals tend to line such groups as *Leke*, Puu Taki and *Mucheli* together, as their local and original religious groups (such as in a Karen language song about the local traditions).

since the nineteenth century, could not remain uninvolved from the political control over Buddhism, or with sectarian conflicts in the name of religion. As the DKBO separated from the Christian-led KNU, and the former gained the backing of the regime, ethnic conflict became conflict in the name of religion. As DKBA gained control in the area, where the local population has been predominantly Buddhist, the eastern Pwo Karen Buddhist region gained some political and military stability. The prominent monasteries in Paan received Burmese monks, and a revered local intellectual Karen monk received a title from the Ministry of Religion. The Paan district that had been the center of Karen Buddhism since the nineteenth century, was not and could not possibly be detached from the politics surrounding Buddhism in Burma. In the midst of this, however, and emerging from those Burmese Buddhist tradition of the masses, were such religious practitioners as Thamanya Hsayadaw, or Puu Taki. These developments on the periphery can on the one hand be understood separately from the powerful momentum to involve the entire Buddhist world of the East Pwo Karen into Burmese Buddhism. However, it may also be interpreted as a consequence of the institutionalization of the Karen Buddhist world. The delineation and incorporation of the region's Buddhist practices into institutionalized Burmese Buddhist world may have resulted in mutual enhancing of peripheral practices such as Puu Taki and *Duwa* each consciously seeking its position on the peripheries of Buddhism.

Buddhist practices and its peripheries Institutional religion would attempt to draw lines and boundaries on what to incorporate under its wing and what not to. However, taking the Karen as a case, if we try to determine what is orthodox and what is not, the delineation would differ greatly according to perspective: that of institutional Buddhism of the state led by the Ministry of Religion; the monastic organization; local Karen monks. Local practitioners on the peripheries might be able to take the delineation to their advantage. It is the gap between these lines of delineation as recognized by the different levels of authorities that make possible the continuity and sometimes the enhancement of these local level practices.

From the perspective of the practitioners or followers, delineation is not of much concern. What is more important is where and how to seek power of protection and future redemption. Take, for example, pagoda construction. Pagoda construction is simultaneously a religious act of merit, and an occasion to demonstrate power. To succeed in construction, the founder will practice vegetarianism, chant the protective sutras and seek protective magical powers. Successful construction becomes evidence of such power attained. The construction of a pagoda is in a sense the construction of a world in itself, while at the same time it is an index of prestige and easily used by those in power (Tosa 2000:129-133). At the same time, it is an act of constructing/creating a

world (Gravers 2001).

Most of the religious practitioners and movements mentioned in this paper are in one way or another involved in pagoda construction. The thousand Buddha orchard at the foot of Zwekabin Mountains which has been constructed energetically by the Burmese abbot of Yedagone monastery was accomplished by the politically backed power of a high-ranking monk in the institutionalized religious order supported by the regime. It is also an enterprise that brings the world of Burmese Buddhism to the peripheries of the country, the Karen State, which has been the locus of conflict between anti-state forces and the military. It is an attempt to redefine this peripheral state in the name of the central religious order. As if in competition with this construction, Puu Taki also was involved in an energetic construction of pagodas, just south of the above mentioned thousand-Buddha orchard. Puu Taki emphasizes vegetarianism, meditation, and inner wisdom, claiming knowledge and clairvoyance, he presents himself as the future king *Minlaung* in a worldview which mixes Brahmanism and Buddhism. Defining himself as being different from either monks or from lay, and without depending on Buddhist textual knowledge, he emphasizes meditation and strict asceticism. He energetically constructs religious monuments, prompts contributions through *thatanapyu* (religious mission), and claims to bring salvation. Puu Taki might be categorized along with leaders of esoteric cults (Schober 1988). The construction enterprise of pagodas is based on none other than such power. While claiming himself to be different from monks, Puu Taki also claims to be disciples of certain charismatic monks and that he himself aims to attain *nibbana* (Buddhist salvation). By this claim he is legitimizing his practices and attempting to join the ranks of the locally endorsed and mutually interlinked lineage of revered monks.

Thamanya Hsayadaw, rather than construct pagodas, constructed a world on the small mountain of Thamanya, a politically neutral space which focuses on vegetarianism and asceticism. While those who make obeisance to the status quo may gain high places in the sangha organization amid the Buddhist purification policy, those such as Thamanya who maintain ascetic practices while maintaining neutrality, gain the respect of the masses, so that from the point of view of the followers, whether he attains *nibbana* as a Buddhist saint, or whether his power is such as the *weikza* based on supernatural power and knowledge is not of much concern (Tosa 2000:188-190). In other words, delineations made by institutional Buddhism have little meaning in the eyes of the devotees (Schober 1988). U Thuzana also having attained reputation for power through ascetic practices as with Thamanya, attempted to construct a peaceful realm for the Karen as an alternative from the KNU, and gained devotees through his pagoda construction. His power is based on asceticism and practice, but due to his anti-KNU stance, he was easily taken in by political intentions.

At a time when Buddhist practices had not taken root in the lives of the ordinary people, *Duwae* was accepted by the people, bridging spirit related practices and Buddhist practices. The founding legend emphasizes that this was less because Duwon was a monk (or a novice), but because he was believed to have protective powers capable of ridding the people of their spirits. The confusion in the legends attests that it is not a question of whether it is the power attained in Buddhist practices and through the knowledge of dhamma, or the power of esoteric knowledge. Yet, subsequently, in 1973, the local Karen monks stood up to reconstruct the pagoda, by which they redefine and incorporate the pagoda into the local Buddhist order. From the point of view of practitioners, this allowed them to continue to practice *Duwae*, and from the point of view of the monks, this contributed to the grass-roots fortification of Buddhism.

Continuity and Succession among the Karen Finally, let us return to the world of Karen customs and tradition, within the context of historical, social and political positioning of a minority in the border regions. The aspect that is most emphasized by those who practice *Duwae* is the protection over the house or family members, and the stress on continuity and succession from the parental generation to the next. At its foundation when Buddhism overtook the spirit cults, the logic of familial succession within the spirit cults and traditional practices was itself taken over by *Duwae* practices. *Telakhon*, *Leke*, as well as *Puu Taki* all lay emphasis on Karen customary practices, especially those practices related to domestic and marital matters related to parent-child and wife-husband relationships, as well as rules governing everyday life, and the emphasis is on succession. This clearly differentiates these practices from the Burmese *gaing* and similar religious movements. *Telakhon*, *Leke* and *Duwae*, all have gradually lost the esoteric emphasis of the founding period, with increasing emphasis on practices and organization itself, down the generation, and modifying the contents of their practices considerably. However, they are unchanging on the continuity and succession of customs and moral norms embedded in Karen everyday life. Thus devotion to such cults and leaders become a meta-level message of self-reflexive emphasis on Karen customs and their succession.

“What is Buddhism” or “whether it is Buddhism” is narrated differently among lay practitioners, followers, founders, leaders, sangha members and those in power. Orthodoxy is constructed in the layer of practice, narratives and power. In existing religious practices followers are attracted by a locus of power, which derives its power from multiple sources. What is important for the follower is, whatever the nature of the power, that the pagoda is constructed demonstrating the possibility of a new world, attracting followers, so that the relationship between power and the followers, and the world thus constructed is reproduced and maintained in succession. In the Karen

practices too, the source of power is not in question. Rather, how an orderly world is formulated and maintained is important. And it is because the succession of practices from parental generation to the next is emphasized, and the practices inherently tied to their everyday domestic practices as Karen, that it becomes deeply entrenched in being Karen as the locus of self-reflexivity, identity, and the key to succession and continuity.

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Photo 1 Zwekabin Mountain overlooking the marshy plains



Photo 2 One thousand Buddhas at the Lomani Orchard



Photo 3 Leke elders in front of the Leke University in Dong Ying



Photo 4 Leke Saturday morning service: the altar and elders



Photo 5 Leke Saturday morning service: the singing youth group



Photo 6 Puu Taki's pagoda construction



Photo 7 Puu Taki



Photo 8 Puu Taki's closest disciples



Photo 9 Puu Taki dressed as two of his many former existences



Photo 10 Dong Ying Duwae Pagoda



Photo 11 Bride and groom making vows at Dong Ying Duwae Pagoda



Photo 12 Fire Festival at Dong Ying Duwae Pagoda



Photo 13 Tammalone Priestess preparing the lime soda



Photo 14 Duwae Pagoda in Klannou



Photo 15 Tammalone Duwae Pagoda