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Buddhist Leadership in the Pa-O Region: A Case Study of Venerable Razeinda Thiri

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Buddhist Leadership in the Pa-O Region: A Case Study of Venerable Razeinda Thiri

A Project for O&L 655

Presented to the Faculty of the School of Education of the

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

Organization and Leadership

by

Khun Aung Aung

May 15, 2024

APPROVED:

Seenae Chong

(Faculty Advisor)

(Date)

17 May 2024

This project, written by

Khun Aung Aung

University of San Francisco

May 15, 2024

under the guidance of the project committee,

and approved by all its members,

has been accepted in partial fulfillment
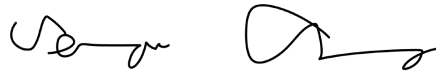
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Seenae Chong

(Faculty Advisor)

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(Date)

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Acknowledgements

To see me as the first high school graduate from our village and for me to return as a leader and educator for the Pa-O people, at the age of seven, my parents sent me to Yangon to get an education. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to them for giving birth to me and providing me with the opportunity to get an education. I lost both of my parents while I was schooling in Yangon. However, I believe they would be proud of me if they were still alive and could see who I am today. I also would like to thank my uncle and only elder sister for encouraging and supporting me to not drop out of school, but to keep flying high.

I am eternally grateful to my scholarship providers, Robert, Cathryn, Andrew, and their organization's donors for generously offering me a full scholarship to pursue my Master's degree at the University of San Francisco (USF). Their investment in my education has opened doors to more opportunities and has enabled me to grow both personally and professionally.

I extend my sincere thanks to my professors, particularly my advisor, Doctor Seenae Chong, for their guidance, wisdom, patience, understanding, push, and unwavering support throughout my study and this field project. Their expertise and invaluable feedback have greatly contributed to the quality of my research and have helped me develop as a scholar and leader.

I deeply appreciate the participants in this study, who generously shared their time, experiences, and insights. I thank my classmates, particularly Anthony and Kate, for their time and support. I would also like to acknowledge the staff at USF for creating a welcoming and intellectually stimulating environment. I also appreciate Dolores Park for being such a healing space for me. Finally, I thank all those who have supported me in various ways, both directly and indirectly. Your kindness and support have not gone unnoticed, and I am forever grateful.

Abstract

This field project explored and documented the leadership practices of Venerable Razeinda Thiri, a prominent Buddhist abbot and principal of Naung Taung Philanthropic Monastic School in Pa-O Self-Administered Zone, Myanmar. Through in-depth interviews with a senior monk, a teacher, a student, and a community member, the project investigated the servant and transformational leadership characteristics exhibited by the principal and sought recommendations for developing effective leadership skills among local leaders. The findings discovered that Venerable Razeinda Thiri demonstrated key servant and transformational leadership behaviors, including helping followers grow and succeed, embodying healing and empathy, fostering personalized communication, modeling exemplary conduct, empowering others, and providing inspirational motivation. Participants recommended that local leaders prioritize self-care and ensure honesty about agreements. The challenges encountered during the implementation of the project, such as civil war, technological constraints, personal concerns, and time zone differences, were navigated through adaptability, resilience, and effective communication. The project's implications extend beyond the Pa-O region, informing leadership practices in various educational and community-based settings and contributing to the broader discourse on effective leadership for social justice. The outcome was a practical leadership guide for abbots, monks, village leaders, and emerging community leaders in the region.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Purpose of the Project

The aim of this project was to explore and document the leadership styles exhibited by

Venerable Razeinda Thiri, a prominent Buddhist abbot and principal of Naung Taung

Philanthropic Monastic School, located in Naung Taung village, Hopong Township, Pa-O Self-

Administered Zone, Southern Shan State, Myanmar. The outcome of this field project was a

practical leadership guide intended for other abbots, monks, village headmen, and emerging

community leaders in the local area.

Statement of the Problem

Pa-O is one of the small ethnic groups in Myanmar and has its self-administered region,

officially recognized by the government. There are three townships in the Pa-O Self-

Administered Zone: Hopong, Hsi Hseng, and Pinlaung. The vast majority of Pa-O people are

Buddhists, and they are highly faithful. As Buddhism holds the primary religious position in this

region, Buddhist abbot and monks have significant influence and authority over community

members. They serve as spiritual guides, monastic school principals, teachers, and community

leaders, playing crucial roles in various sectors, especially in education and community

development. Generally, the leadership structure of a Pa-O community hierarchically comprise a

Buddhist abbot, two village headmen, four youth leaders, and regular villagers. Buddhist abbots

have the main authority to make decisions. However, based on the literature review, there is

minimal, if any, literature available on the leadership of Buddhist monastic school principals and

abbots, despite several research articles about the leadership of Christian and Islamic school principals. Furthermore, there is an absence of leadership guides tailored for local leaders.

Rationale

Why Was This Problem Chosen? This problem was chosen because there is a gap in the research when it comes to understanding the leadership of Buddhist monastic school principals and abbots in Pa-O region, Southern Shan State, Myanmar. As mentioned above, despite playing crucial leadership roles within both the monastic schools and broader local communities, very little has been documented about how these Buddhist leaders operate and make decisions. Furthermore, while leadership guides may exist for other religious school leaders, there is an absence of practical leadership resources tailored specifically for current and aspiring abbots, monks, and other community leaders in this region. Exploring and documenting the leadership of a prominent figure like the abbot of Naung Taung Philanthropic Monastic School provides an opportunity to address this knowledge gap while also creating a useful and context-specific leadership guide that can empower other leaders in the region to be more effective.

A Brief Description of the Project This field project primarily involved exploring and documenting the leadership of U Razeinda Thiri, the Buddhist abbot, and principal at Naung Taung Philanthropic Monastic School. His leadership was specifically chosen for exploration and documentation because he has established and is leading several monastic schools in various parts of the Pa-O region. Numerous children, youth, and adults, particularly those from low-income families and underprivileged villages, receive free education, food, accommodation, healthcare, clothing, and other basic necessities at his monastic schools. He is not only an active member of the regional monastic school committee but also the national one. He is frequently

invited to deliver Dhamma Talks in Pa-O communities. During his Dhamma Talks, he not only discusses the teachings of Buddha but also raises awareness among community members about current community issues and provides advice. His influence on local abbots, monks, and community members is profound. Through conducting in-depth interviews, the project offered valuable insights into his leadership practices for the community. The project encompassed not only the experiences of the Buddhist principal but also the perspectives of individuals in a relationship with him, such as teachers, students, and community members. This comprehensive approach ensured a full understanding of the leadership dynamics and contributed to the development of a thorough picture of leadership.

The ultimate outcome of this project was the development of a practical leadership guide. This guide will serve as a valuable resource for other abbots, monks, village headmen, and emerging community leaders in the Pa-O region. It can also be used as a tool to empower local leaders, enhance their leadership skills, and positively impact their communities. By addressing the existing gap in the literature and providing practical insights, this project contributed to the development of effective leadership strategies rooted in servant and transformational leadership principles.

My role was to design the qualitative methodology, approach participants, arrange and conduct primary data collection through in-depth interviews, analyze and interpret the results, and compile the leadership principles into a guide format. Key administrative tasks I accomplished include managing translation needs, organizing and securely storing data, tracking the timeline, and coordinating with my advisor.

Project Location and Duration

As mentioned above, Venerable Razeinda Thiri, whose leadership was explored and documented, has founded and is directing several monastic schools in different townships of the Pa-O Self-Administered Zone. In this case, I describe Naung Taung Philanthropic Monastic School as it is the main school campus that the abbot has been living on and in charge of since it was founded in 2001.

The project site is located in Naung Taung village, Hopong Township, Pa-O Self-Administered Zone, Southern Shan State, Myanmar. Naung Taung village is situated approximately 15 miles northeast of Taunggyi, the capital of Shan State, and 2.2 miles southwest of Hopong town, the small town of Hopong Township. Since the village is near Hopong town, there is electricity, internet, paved roads, and running water. There is a small clinic in the village, and it takes only 8 minutes by car to reach the public hospital in Hopong town. The village is quite small, with around 376 people, primarily from the Pa-O ethnic group. Another ethnic group includes Shan. Both Pa-O and Shan have their language, customs, and culture; however, they share the religion of Buddhism. The community members rely on subsistence agriculture, growing rice, vegetables, and fruit for their livelihoods. Some also produce traditional handicrafts to supplement their income.

The project site itself is Naung Taung Philanthropic Monastic School, founded in 2001 by the Venerable U Razeinda Thiri to provide free education to children, especially those from low-income families and underserved communities. The school campus occupies around 71.2 acres and contains multiple school buildings, dormitories, dining halls, an ordination hall, a health clinic, and a pagoda. There are over 2200 people, including monks, novices, nuns,

laypeople, and staff. The vast majority of them are Pa-O ethnic, and Buddhist, and come from different villages of Hopong Township, Hsi Hseng Township, and Pinlaung Township in the Pa-O Self-Administered Zone. Other ethnic students include Shan, Danu, Palaung, Kayang, and Burmese. Primary school students to university students are provided with both formal and non-formal education programs. Moreover, free health care, food, accommodation, and other basic needs are also offered on the campus.

With support from the government, residents, and donors from big cities, such as Yangon and Mandalay, Naung Taung Philanthropic Monastic School has good resources, including infrastructure, school materials, and networks with other educational institutions. This school plays a vital role in educating and empowering local ethnic children, youth, and adults. However, there is no leadership research about this kind of Buddhist monastic school principal, and there is no practical leadership guide for Buddhist abbots and other community leaders. This field project aims to fill that gap by studying the leadership of Venerable Razeinda Thiri while also incorporating the perspectives of teachers, students, and villagers relying on his leadership.

The duration of the project was estimated to be approximately five months. This timeframe allowed for an in-depth exploration of U Razeinda Thiri's leadership style and its impact on the school and community. It also provided sufficient time for data collection, analysis, and the development of the leadership guide. Throughout this period, I actively engaged with some school staff, students, and community members to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the leadership dynamics and their implications.

Participants

As a facilitator, I interviewed and organized a sharing session for my participants to explore and document the leadership approaches of the monk. I conducted individual interviews with each of the participants for about an hour to an hour and a half each and summarized key themes and insights to produce a leadership guide.

The interviewees were those who can actively share their thoughts on the abbot's leadership approaches, provide insights, and contribute feedback as needed to the themes of the guide itself. The following were the four participants with their names provided:

- "Venerable Eaindaw" – He is a senior monk who is in charge of the main education department at the school. He is Pa-O ethnic and 40 years old. He has been working at the school for 23 years.

- "Khun Htay Aung" – As a program coordinator and lead teacher, he is running Naung Taung Green Class, which is a special program established for school children at the school. He is Pa-O ethnic and 25 years old.

- "Khun Kyaw Kham" – He is a community member residing in the village of Naung Taung, where the school is located. He is a farmer and often volunteers at the school. He is Pa-O ethnic and in his thirties.

- "Nang Khin Htwe Naing" – She is a current student attending self-awareness, computer, and English classes at the school. She is half Pa-O and half Burmese ethnic and is 24.

Objectives

The five objectives completed in this field project were as follows:

- The facilitator reviewed the research literature and created interview questions based on the understanding of the literature reviewed to explore and document the leadership styles of the principal of Naung Taung Philanthropic Monastic School in November and December of 2023 and January and February 2024.

- The facilitator interviewed four participants including the principal via Zoom to capture the leadership strategies of the principal in March 2024. The facilitator edited the audio transcriptions as needed for readability and accuracy.

- The facilitator reviewed and analyzed the interview transcriptions and created a leadership guide that is relevant to the local culture and helpful for the Buddhist monks, village headmen, and young community leaders in April 2024.

- The participants reviewed the themes of the guide and provided feedback as needed for edits and revisions via Zoom in May 2024.

- The facilitator incorporated all edits and produced the final draft of the culture-relevant and helpful guide in May 2024.

Chapter II

Literature Review

The Overview of Myanmar Education

Providing background information on Myanmar's education system and Buddhist monastery schools is essential for understanding modern leadership in these schools. As monastery schools have been important learning centers for centuries (Gil, 2008), looking at their history and continued development under different governments helps us better comprehend today's leadership implications. Moreover, reviewing monks' social influence in the past and their community roles today highlights why abbots are seen as leaders beyond schools. In this section, I reviewed the current Myanmar education system, monastic education in Myanmar, the history of monastic education, monks' role in education and society, and the historical background of Buddhist monks. This extensive background helps us better understand the present dynamics surrounding monastic school principals' leadership.

The Current Myanmar Education System

There are various types of schools in the country, including public schools and universities, private schools, tuition classes, schools in churches, schools operated by ethnic armed organizations, and monastery-based schools (Lwin, 2000, 2007, 2011, 2017 as cited in Thein Lwin, 2019).

Public Schools and Universities

According to the Ministry of Education of Myanmar (2016), the current school system in the country followed a 5–4–2 structure, with 5 years of primary, 4 years of lower secondary, and

2 years of upper secondary education. However, the Ministry of Education is planning to shift to a KG+12 system, which includes 1 year of early childhood education, 5 years of primary, 4 years of lower secondary, and 3 years of upper secondary education. As of 2016, there were 9,257,970 students, 340,955 teachers, and 47,363 schools in the basic education sector (primary and secondary), operated by the government, Buddhist monks, and the private sector. Additionally, there are schools run by ethnic armed organizations, Christian churches, and local communities. Starting from the 2015–2016 academic year, the Ministry of Education introduced new textbooks for KG, Grade One, and Grade Two, one for each year. These new textbooks are based on old content, with only superficial changes to the color of pictures and some comprehension questions. Although some teachers received summer training from the government on using these new textbooks with a child-centered approach, many schools still employ content-based and rote learning methods. The assessment system remains summative, similar to the previous system. In higher education, there are 163 universities operated by 13 ministries, including the Ministries of Education, Health, Technology, Defense, Agriculture, and Religious Affairs. Unlike universities in democratic countries, Myanmar's universities are not multi-faculty but rather focus on single disciplines such as medicine, engineering, economics, arts, and science, centrally managed by the relevant ministries.

Private Schools

The topic of private schools was addressed at a seminar held by the National Network for Education Reform (NNER) in Yangon on June 22–23, 2018. The seminar focused on the condition of private schools in Myanmar, considering human rights principles. Following the military coup in 1962, all private schools and church-based schools were nationalized. Previous research stated that the revolutionary council emphasizes the need for a comprehensive

transformation of the current educational system, aspiring to develop an approach that integrates practical skills, upholds socialist moral values, and gives priority to the teaching of science (Nyi Nyi, 1972 and Lwin, 2000, as cited in Thein Lwin, 2019). NNER (2018) described that the perspectives and desires of teachers, students, and parents were secondary to the government's priorities for social control, as education was wielded as a tool for political and economic objectives. Following the 2010 election, the government introduced the Private Education Law, leading to the emergence of numerous private schools, many of which operate for profit. These commercial schools, registered under the Business Company Act, provide education services with a profit motive, charging student fees since they do not receive government support. Despite some founders having educational goals and aspirations for alternative models of education, they are constrained to use only the government school curriculum and participate in government exams, placing a financial burden on students and parents. The Ministry of Education of Myanmar (2016) reported that there were 438 private schools with 107,451 students in the academic year 2015–2016, and the number of commercial and private schools continues to grow.

Tuition Classes

According to Lwin (2000, 2007) and NNER (2018), as cited in Thein Lwin (2019), it is stated that in addition to private schools, there are external tuition classes. Due to a perception of low teaching quality in government schools, students and their parents turn to extra tuition classes after regular school hours and on weekends. Some students choose specific subjects for improvement, while others enroll in classes covering the entire curriculum. These tuition classes primarily focus on exam preparation, providing answers for anticipated exam questions. The assessment system in Myanmar schools relies on summative evaluation, emphasizing memorization and recall of facts. Moreover, the university entrance system is determined by

scores from the final year of secondary school exams. Consequently, students engage in tuition classes to equip themselves for exams. Private teachers are allowed by the education law to officially register and set up tuition classes for specific subjects. Some government school and university teachers also conduct unofficial extra tuition classes. These external tuition classes are on the rise across the country, covering education from kindergarten to tertiary levels. Some classes have large enrollments, exceeding one hundred students, while others are smaller with about ten students, yet they charge similar fees. Additionally, wealthy parents may choose to hire private teachers for home-based education for their children.

Church-based Schools

Most people in Myanmar practice Buddhism, and there are substantial Christian communities within the Kachin, Karen, Karenni, and Chin ethnic groups (CNN Library, 2018). In Thein Lwin's 2019 report, the studies stated that in ethnic regions where government schools are absent due to conflicts between ethnic armed groups and government forces, local communities have established schools in churches to ensure the education of their children. Although some ethnic villages have government schools, the instruction language is Myanmar, which many children from ethnic minority backgrounds struggle to understand, leading to high dropout rates after 1 or 2 years. Consequently, many children join church-based schools, where they can learn in their mother tongue, contributing to the growing number of such schools. The exact quantity of church-based schools is unknown, but organizations like the Thinking Classroom Foundation collaborate with them. Various churches, including the Catholic Church, Baptist Church, and Seventh-Day Adventist Church, manage schools for their religious communities, and it is estimated that Myanmar has hundreds of church-based schools. Despite

using their own curriculum tailored to local contexts, these schools lack government recognition, raising uncertainties about the future education of their students.

Schools Run by Ethnic Armed Organizations

According to Tharckabaw (2018), as cited in Thein Lwin (2019), it is found that in the 1960s, a war started, and since then, attempts to make peace between the government and groups fighting for self-determination have not succeeded. Thein Lwin (2019) stated despite the prolonged struggle, ethnic armed organizations recognized the importance of education, leading to the establishment of jungle schools. Notably, the Kachin Independence Organization manages around 200 schools, the Karen National Union oversees about 500 schools, the Karenni National Progressive Party operates approximately 100 schools, and both the New Mon State Party and the Shan State Army each run about 200 schools. These schools, attended by over 100,000 students, often employ their own curriculum, using local languages or a mix of local languages and Burmese for instruction. While the New Mon State Party follows the Myanmar Government curriculum, they also teach Mon language and history. Supported by their communities and some NGOs, these schools play a vital role in providing education in areas affected by conflict.

Monastic Schools

According to Lwin (2000, 2007), as cited in Thein Lwin (2019), the studies showed that before the British took control, people in Myanmar learned from Buddhist monasteries. When the British were in charge, those in the cities learned from British-style schools, but in rural areas, people still depended on Buddhist monasteries for education. After the independence, the government set up public schools to make sure everyone could go to primary school. However, some Buddhist monasteries still have their own schools in cities and villages (Thein Lwin, 2019).

These schools follow the government curriculum, and students take government exams. They are allowed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Even though the law says they can only teach at the primary level, some monastery schools also teach secondary education. Students sign up at nearby government schools but go to classes at the monastery. The Buddhist communities mostly support these monastic schools, so the government does not need to spend a lot of money on them (Ministry of Education of Myanmar, 2016).

Monastic Education in Myanmar

Monastic education is specifically being focused on because the Buddhist abbot, whose leadership is going to be explored and documented, is passionately and successfully leading several monastic schools. It is essential for the readers to understand the background of monastic education in Myanmar. Monastic education, as old as Buddhism, has historically served as the primary national educational system (Ei Ei Lwin, 2020). According to Lwin (2000, 2007), as cited in Thein Lwin (2019), people learned Buddhist literature, morals, and scriptures at monasteries in pre-colonial Burma. Nyo Me Aung and Nwe Nwe Yi (2016) stated that after Myanmar became independent, the country restored its own language, religion, literature, art, and culture that were lost during the time during the Colonial period and the Fascist regime. With religion coming back, the special schools related to it, called monastic schools, also appeared again because people wanted them. It was also mentioned that, in 1952, a plan for improving monastic education was created during the Pyidawthar Conference. The Public Education Council was given the responsibility to implement this plan. It was called the "Education Plan for Revitalizing the Prosperity of the State." The goals were:

1. To ensure that every citizen can read and write.

2. To educate and produce skilled workers and technicians to contribute to the nation's growth and development.

3. To train and provide enough young men and women capable of offering services required by the nation.

4. To reduce the number of people who cannot read and write in the country and create citizens strong in five different areas.

5. To promote the principles and practices of democracy throughout the nation.

Though monasteries initially focused on religious instruction, they could not ignore the importance of modern or everyday education. Monasteries from all over the country took on the important role of providing basic education. Gil (2008) stated that the monks rightfully got support from the government, including books and money. This support meant that the monasteries did not forget the old way of teaching in monasteries. They continued that traditional teaching but also joined in the broader education system following the rules in the State Education policy. Therefore, they became not just regular places for monastic learning but also places where they shared knowledge following the modern way of teaching (Nyo Me Aung & Nwe Nwe Yi, 2016). The Ministry of Education (2016) stated that 297,039 students were studying in 1538 monastic schools. Hence, monastic schools played an invaluable role in raising literacy rates and providing foundational education across Myanmar.

History of Monastic Education in Myanmar

Ei Ei Lwin (2020) found that in Myanmar, for a very long time, monasteries were the places where the country's education happened. When boys from Buddhist families turned six or

seven years old, it was a tradition for them to join the monastery. There, they not only learned to read and write but also practiced religious meditation and training.

Education during the Myanmar monarchy was mainly conducted by Buddhist monks, who were influential because the kings strongly supported Buddhism (Nyo Me Aung & Nwe Nwe Yi, 2016). Buddhism was really important in the old times when Myanmar had kings. It was like a bright light in everything - politics, money, how people lived, and learning. The way Myanmar people talked and wrote, their culture, and their customs - all of it was influenced by Buddhism (Nyo Me Aung & Nwe Nwe Yi, 2016). Monasteries became special places where people learned about religion and what Buddha taught (Ei Ei Lwin, 2020). They were like community schools where everyone shared and learned about their beliefs. The start of Myanmar's education story comes from these monasteries and their teachings.

During this period, everyone, from kings and ministers to generals and soldiers, as well as authors, poets, astronomers, astrologers, shamans, and herbalists, attended monastic schools (Nyo Me Aung & Nwe Nwe Yi, 2016). Monastic schools produced well-versed monks in the three Pitakas. These monks were sent by successive kings throughout the country to teach people, contributing to the early development of education in Myanmar (Nyo Me Aung & Nwe Nwe Yi, 2016). Hence, Myanmar's educational roots can be linked to the practice of monastic education. I drew on Nyo Me Aung and Nwe Nwe Yi's 2020 history of monastic education in Myanmar to provide a summary of key periods.

- **The Bagan Period (1044-1297)** holds great significance in Myanmar's history. During this time, Bagan's establishment played a key role in promoting Buddha's teachings and Buddhist literature. The Buddha's doctrines were highly valuable for the people of Bagan,

helping them become respectful citizens with disciplined minds. Essentially, the culture of Myanmar, deeply rooted in Buddhism, took shape during this period. In the radiant era of Buddha's teachings in Bagan, it was natural for everyone to have a proper understanding of Buddhism. To gain this understanding, there was a clear focus on studying Buddhist doctrines. Therefore, the pursuit of knowledge in Pariyatti (learning the scriptures) was not only a religious practice but also a significant educational aspect during the Bagan period.

- **During the Pinya Period (1313-1364),** after the passing of King Narathihapate in 1287, the Bagan kingdom fell apart, leading to its disintegration. The Shan Myanmar kings played a crucial role in bringing the country back together. Scholars and skilled workers migrated to Pinya, Sagaing, and Innwa. The people of the Pinya era continued to follow Theravada Buddhism, but various Buddhist sects emerged, including Mahayana, Theravada, Ceylon Theravada, Taw Kyaung (forest dweller), and Pwe Kyaung (a deviant sect of Buddhism), reflecting the diverse religious landscape of the time.

- **During the Innwa Period (1364-1752),** the teaching in monasteries, first introduced in the Bagan era, kept progressing and gained momentum. Monastic education became increasingly popular, compared to the powerful glow of a torch. Monasteries expanded in both urban and rural areas.

- **In the time of the Taungoo Period (1510-1752),** Hamsävati (Bago) became an important city for the kings, starting with King Tabinshwehti. It became the main place for running the country, doing politics, handling money, and also for culture and learning. Monks who knew a lot from places like Innwa and Taungoo moved to Hamsävati, and that helped education to grow little by little.

- **In the time of the Nyaung Yan Period (1581-1597),** when King Nyaung Yan was in charge, they built big monasteries in Innwa, and there was a lot of help for monastic education. Because of this, many smart and skilled people, who knew about both religious and everyday things, showed up in this period. The starting point for the monastic education center can be seen in the life story of Venerable Shin Mahä Silavamosa.

- **In the time of the Konbaung Period (1752-1885),** monastic education kept doing well, making people think highly of it. However, as the British took control, these education centers started to become less important. British rule also led to a decline in Buddhism. Before 1852, almost every village had a monastery, and big villages and cities had one or more. Many of these monasteries were strongholds for Buddhism in ancient places like Bago, Pyay, Taungoo, Amarapura, Innwa, and Shwe Bo. In Mandalay, the last capital of Myanmar Kings, big monasteries probably acted like Buddhist schools where monks memorized and recited the Pali texts.

- **During the Colonial Period (1885-1948),** the British fought against Myanmar in aggressive wars starting from 1824, then in 1852, and finally in 1885. From 1824 to 1885, missionaries started doing more activities. Actually, the modern Western education system was introduced to Myanmar even before the first Anglo-Burma war in 1824. Missionaries worked hard and were enthusiastic about modernizing education. They did things like publishing books in the Myanmar language, printing newspapers with the ABM press, and creating textbooks for Basic Education schools. These were the first steps in changing education during the early times of modernization.

- **During the time when Japan controlled Myanmar from 1942 to 1945 and the years after the war until 1948,** big changes happened in Myanmar's schools because of changes in the government. Things were really tough for Myanmar during Japan's control, affecting everything, like religion, society, and learning. When the New Burma Government started under Japan, U Ba Win became the Education Minister. He talked on the radio on November 25, 1942, saying there would be two types of schools - one for basic to higher education and the other for practical skills. He wanted students to choose either type, be able to work after finishing higher grades, and have the chance for more education at a university. But in reality, except for a few things like crafts, education in areas like technology, medical science, and the arts was in a bad state during this time.

- **After gaining independence from Colonial and Fascist rule (1948-1962),** Myanmar became its own country again in January 1948. In that same year, the government announced its education plan with several key points:

  1. The government would control education, and it would be a single unified system.

  2. Financial aid to schools would be stopped, and they would become State schools.

  3. Plans for mandatory primary education would be put in place.

  4. Schools would be organized.

  5. Technical and vocational education would be added.

  6. The Myanmar language would be used for teaching.

Current Types of Monastic Education

According to Nyo Me Aung and Nwe Nwe Yi (2016), there were two different types of monastic education systems, such as the Buddhist Priyatti Education System (Pāli) and the government curriculum-based monastic education system. These education systems refer to

Buddhist moral lessons and Myanmar literature reading, writing, and arithmetic lessons respectively. These lessons aimed not only to teach literacy but also to instill good behavior in students.

- **Buddhist Priyatti Education System (Pāli)** According to Khemacara et al., (2019), many monks and novices come from villages and start their education at Pariyatti monasteries before moving to urban monasteries for advanced studies. The admission procedures vary, with some monasteries having strict rules, while others are more flexible. Typically, new students are admitted before the rainy retreat, a three-month period during the rainy season when Buddhist monks traditionally emphasize their meditation and focus on monastic duties, and village monk teachers request admission to urban Pariyatti monasteries. Young children in villages, around ten to twelve years old, begin learning basic lessons, and some may attend primary schools before joining the monastery. Pariyatti monasteries focus on Pāli lessons like grammar and discourses, and teachers usually instruct students for two or three years before they move to town or city monasteries. Students are typically between 11 and 15 years old, but there are exceptions, such as young monks or university graduates attracted to monkhood. These new students bring their personal belongings, including a trunk, mat, pillow, blanket, mosquito net, robes, mugs, toothbrush, toothpaste, soap, towel, books, and notebooks.

  When kids go to the Pariyatti monasteries, their moms and village teachers come along. They do this to show how much they respect and care about the young students. The young students also need to bring a bowl with them when they go around the local areas asking for food. There is no test to get in, but the teachers at the Pariyatti monasteries watch how the new students look and behave. Just by watching them move and talk, the

teachers can tell a lot about the student's potential and attitude. Usually, there is a good relationship between the teachers in the town monasteries and those in the village monasteries. This relationship is all that is needed for the new students to be accepted. In some Pariyatti monasteries, new students need approval from certain monks. The head of the monastery gives the new student a temporary admission, but it becomes final only when the student gets approval from a teacher and a fellow student living in the monastery. This approval is important because those who give it are responsible for the new student's behavior. If the approved student misbehaves, the approvers have to share half of the punishment given to the new student. For example, if the new student has to clean 20 plants in the monastery yard as punishment for sneaking out at night, the approvers also have to water 10 plants each. So, they have to keep an eye on the students they approve and warn them when necessary. However, it is not hard to find someone willing to take this responsibility because they went through the same process as newcomers. The resident monks are used to this procedure and do not find the responsibility burdensome. The punishments usually involve tasks like cleaning the yard, watering plants, changing shrine room flowers, or cutting firewood. Everyone is happy to do such tasks, even during regular times, as they consider these tasks as doing good work for the monastery.

Pyi Phyo Kyaw (2015) showed that in Myanmar, there are many Buddhist examinations, and they fall into two types: governmental and private examinations. These exams happen every year and are organized by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The governmental examinations include Pāli Pathamabyan, Dhammācariya, Nikāya, and Tipitak selection examinations. Pāli Pathamabyan exams have four levels: Aahkyapyu

Mula (Beginner), Patham Nge (Elementary), Pathama Lat (Intermediate), and Pathama Gyi (Advanced). Sometimes, a Beginner level is added in certain years. The lessons in these exams form the basic foundation of the three Tipiṭaka. Monks also learn Pāli writing, stanza-composition, and grammar. Monks believe that understanding grammar is crucial because it helps them master the language and comprehend the true meaning of the teachings in the Tipiṭaka. The recommended grammatical text for the examinations is Kaccāyana, and another related text is Padarūpasiddhi. Additionally, for the foundation of the Abhidhamma study, monks learn Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha.

- **Government Curriculum-based Monastic Education System** Myanmar monasteries serve as sources for the preservation and passing on of Myanmar's cultural heritage. Children in these monasteries receive education in fundamental morals, civics, social rights, and responsibilities towards others (Gil, 2008). In the local community, the monastery is a hub of social life, supported by the collective effort of the entire village community.

In present-day Myanmar, the state struggles to ensure free education for everyone and often looks to adapt existing monastic centers. If these centers meet basic standards, they are registered as self-reliant schools within the state education system, allowing their pupils to take state examinations (Gil, 2008). Kyi Wai (2011) found that monastic schools not only educate a new generation of novices but also broaden the curriculum for other children and usually welcome all village children who cannot afford to attend a state school or face challenges in terms of distance. Gil (2008) stated that education in a monastic school is free, often accompanied by free meals and lodging.

The cost of government schools in Myanmar is making it hard for families with little money to send their kids to school. Because of this, monastic schools have become important for children from poor families, offering free education and helping bridge the gap in access to learning. On this account, Kyi Wai (2011) showed the case studies concerning the role of monastic education in Myanmar:

In Myanmar, families like Aye Tun's, struggling with low incomes, find it challenging to afford education for their children due to the high costs in government-run schools. Despite the government's 30-Year Long-Term Education Development Plan aiming for compulsory and free education, expenses like registration fees and learning materials make it difficult for many families. Recognizing this, monastic schools have become crucial for communities, providing free education, books, and other necessities. Aye Tun, a bus driver, emphasizes how monastic schools help families facing economic hardship. These schools, started by monks like Sayadaw U Vilarsa, cater primarily to children from poor families who cannot attend government-run schools. The monastic school system, which reemerged in 1992, has grown significantly, with over 200,000 students attending more than 2,500 monastic schools. While the government allocates funds for education, the inadequate budget results in insufficient support for schools. Monastic teachers, though not receiving fixed salaries, contribute voluntarily to bridge the educational gap. Despite challenges, the monastic schools continue to address the needs of an increasing number of students each year. Families, like Aye Tun's, find relief in the hope that monasteries will provide education beyond the primary level.

Monks' Role in Education and Society

Monks, especially the younger generation, have become more conscious of their strength and responsibility for the country. In contrast, the monkhood experiences a significant level of immunity and freedom, including the freedom to move within the country and abroad, as well as engaging in various social activities, mostly within the local area (Gil, 2008).

Recent events have highlighted that their role in society goes beyond preserving religion and rituals (Ei Ei Lwin, 2020). Monks in villages also serve as teachers and counselors for their followers, not only in religious matters but also as participants in other village activities (Gil, 2008). Educated monks emphasize their role as religious teachers. The most active and educated monks believe in adapting to the times. They view themselves not as relics but as teachers and moral guides with the right to represent and work on behalf of their community. According to the rules, it is considered ideal for monks to distance themselves from social and political matters, including modern education, which are seen as worldly pursuits for gain and fame. The engagement of monks in social or political activities is controversial, given their religious purpose of seeking spiritual liberation (Gil, 2008).

However, for many in the younger generation of monks, involvement in social life becomes unavoidable due to their significance in the community and the various responsibilities they shoulder. The current role of monks during times of disaster underscores their importance as an active group, earning respect and being easily mobilized, with access to everyone. In Myanmar, it is often emphasized that "monks are powerful," and indeed, they possess the real power to positively influence the society they inhabit (Gil, 2008).

While some may argue that the traditional curriculum and the lack of basic education in fields like economics or politics do not qualify monks as advisers, they are intimately connected with ordinary people and their struggles. As shown earlier, they live in complete dependence and symbiosis with their supporters. In Burma, it would be challenging to find better mediators and respected authorities than the members of the Sangha. Their voices could be valuable and beneficial for both the authorities and the people (Gil, 2008).

Throughout Myanmar's history, the ruler has consistently been the main supporter and promoter of religion, responsible for maintaining its purity. The king sponsored state Pali examinations and Buddhist places of worship. The Sangha, or community of monks, enjoyed the king's protection and provided him with religious guidance (Nyo Me Aung & Nwe Nwe Yi, 2016). Basically, the group of monks, called Sangha, need the help of the government to survive, especially in the large numbers we have now. The government gives them support with things like resources and helps sort out legal issues, such as problems with land or monastery property and dealing with crimes. The government supports many monastic schools, particularly in urban areas, where large groups of novices and monks live together in a single monastery. These monasteries depend on central support for maintenance and the conservation of Buddhist monuments. Gil (2008) stated that according to state guidelines, monks are prohibited from participating in secular affairs, including politics. The rules suggest that it is ideal for monks to avoid all social or political matters, as well as modern education, which is viewed as pursuits for worldly gain and fame.

Historical Background of Buddhist Monks

In line with the beliefs of Myanmar, Buddhism entered the country shortly after Siddartha Gautama, the originator of the faith, attained enlightenment and became the Buddha (Gil, 2008). According to Gil (2008), the story showed two brothers who were merchants from Lower Burma. They went on a trip to show respect to the Buddha and got eight strands of his hair to honor. These brothers were the first regular followers of the Buddha. They sought refuge in him and his teachings even before King Anawrahta (AD 1044-77) and his guide Shin Arahan started efforts to purify the existing religion and set up the Theravada order. The Bischoff (1995) also found that when the Mon Kingdom in Thaton refused to share the Tipitaka, Anawrahta organized a military journey in 1057, he led his army to conquer Thatõn and get the Tipiṭaka by using force. This not only brought back the Canon but also monks, artists, and the Mon king Manuha (Gil, 2008). As a result, the Bagan kingdom embraced Mon culture and turned into a center for learning about religion (Gil, 2008). Pali, the language of the Buddhist canon, became the sacred language for learning and literature, influencing local languages (Gil, 2008). Anawrahta's successors, like Kyanzittha (A.D. 1084-1112), continued his work, focusing on religious improvements and spreading Buddhism in the area (Gil, 2008). The king had the responsibility to uphold the sanana, which are the teachings of the Buddha, and to safeguard them from being corrupted or scattered. This required enforcing the rules of a monk's moral code through control measures (Gil, 2008). Charles Keyes (2016) mentioned that in Myanmar, most people, about 89-90 percent, are Buddhists (Theravada), but being a Buddhist can mean different things, like belonging to specific groups of monks or having different customs among regular people who follow Buddhism.

Gil (2008) stated Myanmar monastic life involves understanding how young people become monks, the different jobs monks do, and what people in society think about monkhood, making it an interesting and diverse exploration. In the traditional practice, young individuals often begin their journey as novice monks between the ages of 7 and 14. Certain monks, based on their own interests and preferences, may choose to specialize in specific areas. For instance, those keen on studying and spreading the Buddha's teachings can pursue academic studies and eventually become abbots or instructors in monastic schools. On the other hand, monks with an interest in a particular meditation school can undergo training as meditation teachers, contributing to the community in meditation centers. Monks who do not pursue advanced studies typically remain in a monastery, contributing to the community through religious services, daily life tasks, or activities connected to Buddhist festivals. Becoming a monk in Burma is quite accessible, and the path to liberation is open to everyone. Individuals can choose to be a "temporary monk," spending a limited time in a monastery to find mental clarity. For the laity, the primary religious offering involves practicing Dana, which is the act of donating to monks and venerating sacred relics. By making donations, lay followers can collect the highest religious merit, leading to positive outcomes in their future lives and bringing them closer to salvation.

Tilakaratne (2012) stated that for regular people and monks, being good is simple and involves following five rules, called Pancasila: do not kill, do not steal, do not cheat on your partner, do not lie, and do not use drugs or alcohol. There are also 38 "blessings" or advice notes about different parts of life, like how to behave in society, live well, learn things, meditate, stay away from bad actions, be noble, grow mentally, and find peace. Greene and Wei (2004) also mentioned that it is crucial to mention that when looking at Buddhist expressive traditions, we often find the seventh rule out of the Ten Precepts of Buddhism. This rule is a promise to avoid

watching dancing, listening to music (both singing and instruments), attending dramatic performances, and wearing fancy clothes or using perfume. This rule mostly pertains to monks and nuns, or regular people who show great devotion. According to Ashin Aw Ba Tha (2018), as cited in MacLachlan (2022), Buddhism has eight main rules, and monks must follow an additional 227 rules, along with many teachings that guide the behavior of monks, nuns, and regular people, including details like sitting posture. Different Buddhist communities may interpret and follow this rule in various ways.

Gil (2008) mentioned that the formally organized and sizable Sangha, or community of monks, undoubtedly relies on the material support of laypeople for essential needs like food, shelter, and clothing. What is remarkable is that in Myanmar, temples serve as places of relaxation and joy. They are indeed sanctuaries for villagers. After a day's work, people visit the monastery to relax, offer gifts to the monks, meditate, or seek both religious and everyday advice. Monastery buildings are often of higher quality and equipped better than most village houses. In some cases, the monastery may be the only place in the village with electricity, and it might even have a radio or television. It becomes the main spot for receiving and sharing news.

Leadership Frameworks

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership is one of the relevant frameworks to utilize to explore Buddhist abbots' or principals' leadership in monastic schools. This leadership style emphasizes service over self-interest and supporting followers to reach their full potential. Reviewing the literature on servant leadership literature provides a helpful lens for assessing if and how Buddhist monastic school principals embody and promote servant leadership qualities. It allows us to

evaluate in what ways their leadership approach aligns with or diverges from this model that stresses humility, empowerment, and ethical responsibility. In this section, I define servant leadership and review the characteristics, behaviors, and outcomes of servant leadership. This review will enrich our understanding of Buddhist principal leadership and its implications.

Characteristics of Servant Leaders

Servant leadership is a type of leadership that aims to fulfill the needs of others (Greenleaf & Spears, 2002, as cited in Muhammad & Sari, 2021). This leadership model emphasizes focusing on others instead of oneself and understanding the leader's role as a servant. According to Spears (2002, as cited in Northouse, 2021), the ten characteristics of a servant leader are listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. Servant leaders are good at listening, which helps them understand the needs and concerns of their followers. Through attentive listening, they recognize and validate the viewpoints of their followers. They also demonstrate empathy by trying to see things from the followers' perspective. They make sure that their followers feel acknowledged and unique. By offering support during challenges, servant leaders care about their followers' well-being and help them overcome their obstacles. Being aware of oneself and others allows servant leaders to comprehend issues comprehensively, including self-awareness and recognizing the impact they have on others. Persuasion involves clear and consistent communication to convince others. Rather than asserting authority, servant leaders use persuasion to influence their followers. Conceptualization is the ability to envision an organization's goals and direction. This skill helps servant leaders deal with complex organizational issues creatively in alignment with long-term goals. Foresight is the capacity to predict the future based on current and past events. A servant

leader with foresight has the ability to know the future. Stewardship involves taking responsibility for the leadership role, where servant leaders carefully manage people and organizations. Service, a core value, is demonstrated through a commitment to followers' personal development. Servant leaders help individuals in their teams grow personally and professionally. Lastly, servant leadership encourages community development, which is defined as a group of individuals sharing common interests and a sense of unity. Building a community provides followers with a safe and connected space while allowing for individual expression.

Similarly, influence, vision, trust, respect, risk sharing, integrity, and modeling are also the characteristics of a servant leader (Stone et al., 2004, as cited in Muhammad & Sari, 2021). These additional characteristics help a reader gain a more comprehensive view of the diverse nature of servant leadership. Influence means that leaders are great role models who are looked up to, respected, and imitated by their followers. This is a key part of transformational and servant leadership, where leaders inspire and make a positive impact (Muhammad & Sari, 2021). Vision can be understood in different ways, including having a strong imagination and having a unique perspective on the future (Webster, 2020). Moreover, the formulation and effective communication of a vision indicate leadership success, ultimately impacting performance (Muhamma & Sari, 2021). According to Locke (2009, as cited in Muhammad & Sari, 2021), trust involves having faith in fellow team members regarding qualities like honesty and competence. It is a fundamental aspect of leadership, although it can lead to uncertainty or disappointment if the leader's trust is not maintained as expected. Trust is a significant component of effective leadership as it fosters a sense of mutual respect and confidence between leaders and their team members. However, trust can be easily broken if leaders fail to maintain it. This can lead to doubt and distress among team members. Consequently, it can negatively impact

team morale and productivity. Therefore, it is essential for leaders to build and maintain trust

with their followers to ensure a positive and productive work environment. Loyalty toward

leaders can also be fostered through respect, in addition to trust and credibility (Muhammad &

Sari, 2021). Kouzes and Posner (2011, as cited in Muhammad & Sari, 2021) defined that

trustworthiness, expertise, and effective communication collectively contribute to building

credibility. Sharing risks or handing over tasks is understood as a multi-step process where

leaders assign their team members new responsibilities and decision-making authority in areas

that were previously under the leader's control (Yukl & Gardner, 2020, as cited in Muhammad &

Sari, 2021). Risk sharing does not just pass the responsibility for risk onto lower-level

employees. Instead, it offers them a chance to enhance their own skills and abilities. The term

"integrity" can have various interpretations, and it can be grouped into five distinct categories: 1)

integrity as completeness or wholeness; 2) integrity as aligning words with actions; 3) integrity

as maintaining consistency when facing different challenges; 4) integrity as being truthful with

oneself; and 5) integrity as a reflection of moral values, including honesty, trustworthiness,

fairness, and compassion (Palanski & Yammarino, 2007). Within servant leadership, integrity

plays a crucial role in influencing the effectiveness of ethical leadership (Palanski & Yammarino,

2009). In Kouzes and Posner's writing, as cited in Muhammad and Sari (2021), modeling is

when a leader shows others how to behave through their own actions, and it has a significant

leadership role. Leaders often become role models to encourage followers to be committed,

dedicated, disciplined, and strive to become better individuals. Leadership modeling is a crucial

tool for leaders to shape an organization's vision. Leaders demonstrate attributes in their culture

through their actions, and promote ethical behavior, encouraging their followers to imitate their

leadership style (Muhammad & Sari, 2021).

Behaviors of Servant Leaders

In addition to characteristics, scholars have identified behavioral patterns that define servant leadership. Conceptualizing, emotional healing, putting followers first, helping followers grow and succeed, behaving ethically, empowering, and creating value for the community are the behaviors of servant leaders (Liden et al., 2008, as cited in Northouse, 2021). Conceptualizing involves a servant leader's deep understanding of the organization, encompassing its objectives, complexities, and mission. This ability enables servant leaders to analyze complex issues, notice the problems, and creatively address them in alignment with the organization's objectives. Emotional healing involves a deep sensitivity to the personal concerns and well-being of others, demonstrating empathy by acknowledging their issues and devoting time to address them. Servant leaders who exemplify emotional healing make themselves accessible, provide support, and stand by individuals facing challenges. Prioritizing followers means showing actions and words that followers' concerns are important, which includes prioritizing followers' interests and success over the leader's. Leaders might even stop their own tasks to help followers with theirs. Servant leaders understand their followers' goals, both professional and personal, and actively help them achieve these aspirations. By offering mentorship and support along the way, they prioritize followers' career growth. Behaving ethically means consistently adhering to strong ethical principles, including transparency, honesty, and fairness, while not compromising these principles to attain success. Servant leaders maintain unwavering ethical standards in their interactions and decisions. Empowering means giving followers the freedom to be independent, make their own decisions, and be self-reliant. According to Ebener & O'Connell (2010), empowering actions help others become more capable of acting for themselves and for the organization. Creating value for the community involves servant leaders consciously and

purposefully giving back to their communities. They actively participate in local initiatives and encourage their followers to engage in volunteer community service. By doing so, leaders connect their organization's objectives with the broader community's goals, contributing positively to the community they serve. Ebener and O'Connell (2010) state that servant leaders employ three key approaches—invitation, inspiration, and affection—to inspire and encourage others to engage in service. Invitation entails personally inviting followers to take part in service activities. Inspiration involves motivating service by setting an example through acts of humility and caring for others. Demonstrating genuine care and concern for followers is a way to express affection and foster their willingness to serve.

Outcomes of Servant Leadership

Research points out that there is a variety of positive individual and organizational outcomes of servant leadership. One of the outcomes of servant leadership at the individual level is followers' self-actualization (Northouse, 2021). Through servant leaders' nurturing and supporting with followers' personal goals, followers will recognize their full abilities. According to Meuser et al. (2011, as cited in Northouse, 2021), followers who were open to servant leadership became more successful in completing their tasks and meeting job expectations when they were paired with servant leaders. Another result of practicing servant leadership is that followers might turn into servant leaders themselves. For organizations, "several studies have found a positive relationship between servant leadership and organizational citizenship behaviors, which are follower behaviors that go beyond the basic requirements of the follower's duties and help the overall functioning of the organization" (Ehrhart, 2004; Liden et al., 2008; Neubert, Kacmar, Carlson, Chonko, & Roberts, 2008; Walumbwa et al., 2010, as cited in Northouse, 2021, p. 265). Servant leadership strengthens team effectiveness by fostering

collective confidence among team members in their ability to function effectively as a group (Hu & Liden, 2011, as cited in Northouse, 2021).

Research by Ebener and O'Connell (2010) found that servant leaders encourage organizational citizenship behaviors in followers through direct mechanisms like invitation, inspiration, and showing affection, as well as indirect organizational mechanisms like cultural-building and structural initiatives. For example, servant leaders constantly invited people to acts of service. They encouraged and asked members by "tapping on the shoulder" to participate in the organization. They did not hesitate to invite others to engage in the activities of the parish. Moreover, servant leaders inspired organizational citizenship by recognizing the gifts and talents of others. These organizational citizenship behaviors, such as volunteering for extra work and helping coworkers, are "altruistic, prosocial activities that have been shown to enhance organizational performance" (Organ, Podsakoff, and MacKenzie, 2006, as cited in Ebener & O'Connell, 2010, p. 315). Therefore, servant leadership, with its emphasis on humility and service to others, can promote organizational citizenship behaviors that benefit the overall organization.

Transformational Leadership

Another leadership framework that is helpful to exploring and understanding Buddhist principals' leadership is transformational leadership. Transformational leadership focuses on creating positive change in followers and schools through leading by example, inspiring others, promoting creativity, and providing support. By reviewing studies on transformational leadership, we can better evaluate if and how Buddhist abbots or principals demonstrate these qualities and drive school improvement. This also shows how their leadership affects teachers

and students. In this section, I define transformational leadership and review the key behaviors of transformational leaders, the positive effects they can have on schools, and the leadership problems they meet. This establishes standards to evaluate the transformational aspects of Buddhist abbots' leadership. It helps our understanding of leadership focused on change in this context.

Transformational leadership is a process in which leaders inspire followers to accomplish more than what is typically expected of them (Northouse, 2021). This form of leadership requires that leaders demonstrate four key behaviors: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Northouse, 2021, Avolio et al., 1999, as cited in Aini, Nasir, & Hilmy, 2021). When they are implemented effectively, research shows that transformational leadership can positively shape organizational culture and enhance staff motivation and performance (Bass & Avolio, 1990a, as cited in Northouse, 2021, Aini et al., 2021, Abubakar, Laoh, Riniati, Mokodompit, & Putra, 2023). However, there are some challenges that transformational leaders or principals must navigate carefully.

Behaviors of Transformational Leaders

The first behavior of transformational leaders is idealized influence or charisma. This refers to leaders who exhibit very high standards of moral and ethical behavior and consistently make the right decisions (Northouse, 2021). They are deeply respected by followers, who usually place significant trust in them. They inspire their followers with a compelling vision and a sense of purpose. Followers aspire to imitate both the values and behaviors of these leaders. For example, Abubakar et al. (2023) undertook a qualitative case study of a transformational principal at an Indonesian school. They found the principal served as an ideal to teachers,

employees, students, and staff by modeling diligence, commitment to the school vision, and hard work. He modeled good attendance and work ethic by being present early and staying late at school. In addition to being a good model in terms of time, he is seen as someone who can bring people together, freely share opinions, adapt easily, does not mind checking the school regularly, and frequently assesses things to bring in new ideas for school improvement. This is evidenced by having daily briefings, leadership meetings on Mondays, and Wednesday afternoon meetings, and consistently helping students who require facility support.

Inspirational motivation is the second key behavior of transformational leaders. It involves clearly communicating expectations, and inspiring them through motivation to become committed to and a part of the collective vision within the organization (Northouse, 2021). Leaders use symbols and emotional appeals to encourage group members to work together for greater outcomes, beyond what they might do just for themselves. Aini et al. (2021) provided a descriptive case study of a female Nyai (principal) at an Islamic boarding school in Indonesia. They described that her structured implementation of rules, procedures, and intentions motivated teachers and students. Moreover, she stimulated enthusiasm for continuous learning among her team members by inspiring beliefs in growth and advancement. The impact of her inspirational motivation or transformational leadership is evident in various ways: 1) Over 35% of teachers and education officials at Roudlotun Nasyiin Islamic Boarding School hold master's degrees, 2) Increased involvement in specific activities like seminars, workshops, discussion groups, and more, 3) Engaging in comparative studies with other more professional institutions, 4) Improving and organizing materials in the Islamic boarding school library, and 5) Actively participating in Islamic competitions.

Intellectual stimulation means that transformational leaders inspire their followers to think creatively and question their own beliefs and values, as well as the leader and the organization (Northouse, 2021). This kind of leadership encourages followers as they experiment with new approaches and come up with innovative solutions for organizational problems. Abubakar et al. (2023) explained that the principal they studied promoted professional development and teamwork, and supported educators in finding better solutions to inspire growth and innovation. The principal encouraged professional development and teamwork by creating a comfortable environment at school and facilitating the freedom of teachers to develop their talents. The principal also provided supervision to improve teacher performance and encouraged a spirit of competition among the school community to motivate teachers to be better in their performance. Additionally, the principal supported educators in finding better solutions to inspire growth and innovation by implementing regular management meetings with the school principal and teacher council, which provided a structured problem-solving forum where educators were encouraged to collaborate and find innovative solutions to challenges.

The final behavior is individualized consideration, where leaders create a nurturing environment by attentively listening to the individual needs of their followers (Northouse, 2021). Leaders perform as coaches and advisers while trying to help followers reach their full potential. These leaders may delegate tasks to aid their followers in overcoming personal obstacles and growing. Abubakar et al. (2023) stated that the principal they studied employed individual strategies like discussing issues and offering encouragement to inspire struggling teachers. Aini et al. (2021) found that Nyai displayed caring, enthusiasm, giving support, and attention to individuals' needs and growth. This individualized focus helps develop followers to reach their full potential.

The Impacts of Transformational Leadership

Research indicates that by engaging in these four behaviors, transformational leaders can positively shape organizational culture. Abubakar et al. (2023) concluded the studied principal successfully established a strong school culture by modeling Islamic values. The principal's modeling of Islamic values was demonstrated through various actions that aligned with transformational leadership behaviors. For instance, the principal promoted the school's prestige established a clear vision and mission for the school, utilized the motto "Morally and Creatively Come First" to inspire and motivate, and structured activities to reinforce cultural norms. These actions not only exemplified Islamic values but also contributed to the establishment of a strong school culture. By incorporating Islamic values into the school's ethos and activities, the principal fostered an environment that encouraged greater teacher collaboration and engagement, thus demonstrating the connection between modeling Islamic values and transformational leadership.

Studies also indicate that transformational leadership raises staff motivation and performance. Transformational leaders encourage their followers to undertake more than what is normally expected of them. "They become motivated to transcend their own self-interests for the good of the group or organization" (Bass & Avolio, 1990a, as cited in Northouse, 2021). Aini et al. (2021) explained that Nyai's approach fostered high work motivation among teachers and education officials. Her leadership enhanced beliefs, stimulated continuous learning, and encouraged professional development. These effects show transformational leadership's motivational force.

Challenges of Transformational Leadership

Implementing transformational leadership can present difficulties and challenges that leaders must navigate. As Abubakar et al. (2023) explain, "The biggest challenge is that some teachers still lack self-awareness, and some stakeholders still exhibit the negative characteristics of the previous system" (p. 413). They note struggles arising when staff are resistant to cultural change. Aini et al. (2021) also imply challenges when stating that Nyai had "the courage and trust in people" and "the ability to face complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty" (p. 171). This indicates that transformational leaders can encounter uncertain situations and need persistence and risk-taking to overcome them.

Conclusion

Reviewing research on leadership styles, specifically servant and transformational leadership, and providing background on Myanmar education and Buddhist monastic schools, spotlighted the need for field research on Buddhist abbots' leadership. While both servant and transformational leadership involved supporting followers' growth, servant leadership emphasized meeting others' needs first, whereas transformational leadership focused more on organizational change through inspiration. This analysis provided helpful models to evaluate and explore leadership in Buddhist monastic schools. Even though monastic schools continued expanding, research on their leadership remained limited. This current field project helped fill this knowledge gap by exploring and documenting hands-on leadership practices and challenges in Buddhist monastic schools.

Chapter III

Activities of the Project

Introduction

As previously stated in Chapter I, there was limited literature available concerning the leadership practices of Buddhist monastic school principals and abbots, despite numerous research articles focusing on the leadership of Christian and Islamic school principals. Additionally, there was an absence of leadership resources tailored specifically for local leaders. Hopong, Hsi Hseng, and Pinlaung townships constitute the Self-Administered Zone of the Pa-O ethnicity, a minority group in Myanmar. The vast majority of Pa-O individuals follow Buddhism and hold strong religious beliefs. Given Buddhism's major religious influence in the region, Buddhist abbots and monks have significant influence and authority over community members. They serve as spiritual mentors, monastic school principals, educators, and community leaders, playing pivotal roles across various sectors, particularly in education and community development. Hence, this project explored and documented the leadership styles demonstrated by Venerable Razeinda Thiri, a prominent local Buddhist abbot and the principal of Naung Taung Philanthropic Monastic School. The ultimate goal of this field project was to develop a practical leadership guide aimed at assisting other abbots, monks, village leaders, and emerging communities in the local area to facilitate positive change more effectively.

Coming from a poor remote village and becoming an orphan at the age of seven, I mostly grew up and received my education in different Buddhist philanthropic monastic schools in Myanmar. I had a chance to meet several Buddhist principals or abbots and observe their leadership. After completing high school in 2014, my uncle sent me to Naung Taung

Philanthropic Monastic School to pursue my further education. The school provides free education, accommodation, healthcare, food, and other basic needs to thousands of students, including monks, nuns, and laypeople. From 2014 to 2016, as a trainee, I received self-awareness and English training at the school. From 2019 to 2022, I taught English and personal development to youth aged between 16 and 20 at the school. I had a chance to closely observe and learn how the principal of the school leads the school and the community as a whole.

After studying various leadership theories and practices and reviewing some literature at the University of San Francisco, I approached this field project as a reflective leadership exercise. The aim was to understand and document the leadership styles of Venerable Razeinda Thiri, the principal of Naung Taung Philanthropic Monastic School, through conducting in-depth interviews with a senior monk, a teacher, a student, and a Naung Taung villager. The leadership of Naung Taung Philanthropic Monastic School principal was chosen to explore and document because of his effective leadership and accomplishments in providing education to local children and youth, as well as fostering community development. The insights gained from this project could benefit other abbots, monks, village leaders, and emerging community leaders. Throughout the project, I aimed to explore the following two key questions and themes.

- **Key Theme 1:** What are the servant and transformational leadership characteristics and behaviors exhibited by the Buddhist abbot at Naung Taung Philanthropic Monastic School?
  - o Venerable Razeinda Thiri's Leadership Behaviors and Characteristics
- **Key Theme 2:** What recommendations do the participants have for developing effective leadership skills among monks and local leaders?
  - o Leadership Recommendations for the Local Leaders

Setting

As detailed in Chapter I, the broad setting of this field project research was focused in Naung Taung village, situated in Hopong Township within the Pa-O Self-Administered Zone, of Southern Shan State, Myanmar. Specifically, the focus was on Naung Taung Philanthropic Monastic School, where the Buddhist abbot or principal resides and provides education. Valuable insights and learnings were extracted from a senior monk, a teacher, a student, and a resident of Naung Taung village, who had extensive experience working at the school. The semi-structured interviews for the field project were conducted virtually over Zoom and recorded utilizing its audio recording feature.

Chronological Narrative of Events

As previously stated in Chapter I, the aims achieved in this field project and the steps taken to complete were as outlined below:

- **September, October, November, and December of 2023 – Literature Review and Interview Protocol.** In September, October, November, and December of 2023, I conducted the literature review by utilizing the key terms below on Google Scholar. After reading through several abstracts, I selected 20 articles and two chapters of a leadership book. Most of the articles and book chapters published in the last decade were chosen for review to gain a clear understanding of today's literary scene.
  - Key Terms Search
    - The Education System of Myanmar
    - The Roles of Buddhist Monks in Myanmar Society
    - The History of Buddhist Monks

- Monastic Education in Myanmar

- Servant Leadership

- The Characteristics AND Behaviors of Servant Leadership

- The Outcomes OR Impacts of Servant Leadership

- Transformational Leadership

- The Characteristics AND Behaviors of Transformational Leadership

- The Outcomes OR Impacts of Transformational Leadership

I read through 20 journal articles and two leadership book chapters on servant leadership, transformational leadership, the Myanmar education System, and the roles of Buddhist monks in Myanmar society. While reading, I highlighted important ideas and key quotes in a working document. These notes were then analyzed to identify the main themes to include in the literature review. From writing the literature review, I was able to determine the characteristics, behaviors, and outcomes of both servant and transformational leadership. Additionally, it gave me insights into the overview of Myanmar's education system and the roles of Buddhist monks, which I intended to explore further in a case study focusing on the leadership of the Buddhist abbot or principal of Naung Taung Philanthropic Monastic School. I was then able to create an interview protocol to explore and document the leadership of the principal. At the end of February 2024, I completed Chapter I – Introduction and Explanation and Chapter II – Literature Review. This progress not only strengthened my understanding of the field project's topic and direction but also served as a foundation for my work moving forward.

- **March 2024 – In-depth Interviews.** In late February and early March of 2024, I reached out to four participants to schedule separate 90-minute interview sessions with them over three weeks. None of the interviews were scheduled on the same day to allow me enough time to absorb and reflect on the shared insights. I conducted the four interviews via Zoom and used Zoom's recording to record both audio and video files. I could not download the audio transcripts as I utilized Burmese and Pa-O languages, which were not available on Zoom. However, I listened to the audio files multiple times and transcribed the audio recordings into written text.

- **April 2024 - Data Analysis and Field Project Product.** As previously stated, I analyzed the data through a qualitative analysis process called coding. I listened to the audio files multiple times and took memos to be able to analyze the data accurately and comprehensively. From this analysis, I ultimately synthesized the data into two key themes which informed a leadership guide intended for the local abbots, village headmen, and emerging leaders. These procedures were helpful in drafting Chapter III - Activities and Chapter IV - Conclusions, Recommendations, and Implications.

- **May 2024 - Final Institutional Draft.** I shared lessons on leadership practices from Venerable Razeinda Thiri with the interview participants and requested feedback. Additionally, I submitted my field project drafts to my advisor and received constructive feedback on writing format, organization, and other aspects. I incorporated all the final edits into my project draft for submission to the University of San Francisco.

Participants

The research project involved purposefully selecting a specific group of individuals rather than utilizing random sampling. A senior monk, a teacher, a student, and a community member were invited to participate in the interviews because they had closely worked for the Buddhist abbot or principal at Naung Taung Philanthropic Monastic School for several years. Initially, the principal himself was also invited and included in the interview process. However, this arrangement was not successful due to the outbreak of civil in the region and his busy schedule. These four participants were described in Chapter I above.

Data Collection Tools and Instruments

A semi-structured interview protocol was utilized, consisting of 11 questions (refer to Appendix A). These questions were crafted to encourage participants to reflect on their experiences and observations concerning the leadership of Venerable Razeinda Thiri, the principal of Naung Taung Philanthropic Monastic School. The interview questions were divided into three categories, each including the associated number of questions for that category as well as the purpose for each set of questions.

- Background: 2 questions
    - These were opening questions to understand the participants' personal journey and involvement with Naung Taung Philanthropic Monastic School.
    - Sample Item: Can you share your personal journey and involvement with Naung Taung Philanthropic Monastic School? What inspired you to become part of this community?
- Leadership Styles of Venerable Razeinda Thiri: 7 questions

- o These questions explored the leadership styles and values of Venerable Razeinda Thiri, the principal of Naung Taung Philanthropic Monastic School.

- o Sample Item: Can you share any experiences where Venerable Razeinda Thiri intentionally served the needs of individuals within the school or community?

- Leadership Recommendations: 2 questions

  - o These questions explored the specific leadership strategies or practices that are effective and relevant to the local context.

  - o Sample Item: As someone actively engaged in the development of the school and community, what advice would you give to monks, village headmen, and emerging leaders in fostering positive change?

Procedure

The four semi-structured interviews were held virtually via Zoom in March 2024. Each participant was interviewed individually following a semi-structured interview protocol. The Zoom sessions were recorded to ensure accuracy and lasted between 60 - 90 minutes depending on the participant's level of responses. As the interviewer, the role involved fostering reflective moments and probing for further clarification or details by rephrasing questions as necessary. Throughout the interview, key points were noted in a Microsoft Word document based on the interview protocol to help in probing and following up on questions.

Data Analysis

The data analysis of the four interview transcripts was completed in April 2024. After downloading the audio files from Zoom, I listened to them repeatedly and took detailed notes. Since Zoom did not support the local languages Burmese and Pa-O used during the interviews,

transcripts were unavailable. For data analysis, I utilized the coding technique of memoing. This involved reviewing and labeling different topics in my field notes that appeared significant. The audio recordings were replayed multiple times to ensure key concepts addressing the research questions were captured with relevant quotes. During the memo coding process, key ideas were noted to identify major patterns, categories, and themes addressing the research questions. After several reviews of the initial framework, which included notes, categories, and significant quotes, two key themes emerged from the data. The data also included numerous quotes, each linked to the participant's name. Similar quotes were grouped together to further synthesize and support ideas within each theme.

Leadership Lessons from Venerable Razeinda Thiri's Behaviors and Characteristics
Helping Followers Grow and Succeed

The participants emphasized Venerable Razeinda Thiri's deep commitment to the personal and professional growth of teachers, students, and community members. His servant leadership approach is centered on nurturing the potential of those around him and providing support and opportunities for them to grow. Nang Khin Htwe Naing described her experience:

> I arrived at Naung Taung Philanthropic Monastic School. I went there in 2019 to attend
> the Naung Taung - Social Development Program (NT-SDP), which was a 16-month-long,
> social science and civic education curriculum-based English program for youth. During
> my academic years, I sometimes got lost. I felt stressed because of my load of studies.
> When I felt lost, Venerable Razeinda Thiri reminded me of my goals to join NT-SDP and
> encouraged me by saying that I could be a great leader in my community. Thankfully, I
> graduated in 2020. After graduation, the principal witnessed my great work and potential.

Therefore, he continued providing me with both financial and emotional support. In 2022, I won a partial scholarship to attend the Community Leadership and Research Institute (CLRI) and won a full scholarship to participate in the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiatives (YSEALI) at Portland State University in the US in 2023. I would not be able to achieve these without the support and opportunities from Venerable Razeinda Thiri.

Venerable Eaindaw, the senior monk, described the abbot's holistic approach to nurturing growth:

Venerable Razeinda Thiri understands the importance of his teachers' skills and knowledge and how those can impact the students and the school overall. Therefore, he ensures that he is committed to his teachers with personal and professional growth. Before a new academic school year starts, all the teachers are invited and provided with teacher training, which includes evaluating the curriculum, designing assessments, effective teaching strategies, classroom management, and others. In addition, when the teachers attend university or training, the principal assists them by providing financial support and accommodation.

These examples illustrate how Venerable Razeinda Thiri's commitment to the growth of people. By providing guidance and resources and creating opportunities for personal and professional development, he helps his followers to reach their full potential and contribute meaningfully to the school and community.

Embodying Healing and Empathy

Another leadership characteristic exhibited by the principal, as noted by the participants, was his embodiment of healing and empathy. Following the February 2021 military coup, the civil war between the military junta and resistant armed groups happens daily throughout the country. Due to bombings and shootings in some villages in the Pa-O Self-Administered Zone, several homes were destroyed, the villagers were displaced, and their children's education was interrupted. During this challenging period, the principal demonstrated his capacity for healing and empathy towards the schoolchildren and community members by providing educational opportunities, shelter, food, and emotional support. Khun Htay Aung conveyed his observations:

> Despite the chaos and turmoil caused by the civil war, Venerable Razeinda Thiri ensures these children can continue their studies. He provides these students with accommodations, food, medical care, and education at his monasteries in Hopong and Taunggyi. He communicates with local education officials and ensures that displaced students can take the final 2023-2024 academic exams. For the villagers affected by the civil war, he also actively collaborates with respective village abbots and rebuild the communities. Furthermore, he frequently visits refugee camps and offers the villagers emotional support.

Another example illustrating the principal's embodiment of empathy is his willingness to make exceptions for school admissions for students in need. Khun Kyaw Kham described his observation:

I still remember a visit to the principal's office. A woman was requesting Venerable Razeinda Thiri a place for her niece to get an education at his Naung Taung Philanthropic Monastic School. At first, the principal declined her request by saying over 2300 students had already enrolled for the 2019-2020 academic year, and there was no more space. However, when he learned that the student was an orphan, he felt compassion and empathy and decided to admit her.

Personalized Communication and Relationship Building

Interestingly, three participants talked about the communication and relationship building style of Venerable Razeinda Thiri and stated that it makes him a great leader. The principal is friendly and easy to talk to, no matter if he is talking to children, young people, monks, abbots, or donors. Khun Htay Aung said:

It is lovely to see how the principal interacts with the students. Whenever he visits our students, he smiles, asks how they are doing, and sometimes makes jokes with the students. The students are happy and comfortable to talk to him.

The principal is good at building relationships with everyone, not just his students. Venerable Eaindaw shared how the principal's way of communicating brings him numerous

networks and friends. When the principal meets stakeholders, teachers, students, donors, and government officials, he listens to them carefully. He asks them friendly questions. He remembers important things about them, like their names, their jobs, and where they come from quite. The next time he sees them, he greets them by name and talks to them. This make his followers feel special and helps him build life-long relationships with them.

Khun Kyaw Kham also mentioned that "Venerable Razeinda Thiri's ability to build relationships helps the school get more support and resources. Donors and community partners feel a personal connection with him and desire to help the school grow and develop."

Modeling

According to the participants' insights and observations, Venerable Razeinda Thiri is truly a role model for the people around him. They shared the principal's exemplary conduct and how his daily actions and self-discipline positively influence those around him. He acts and behaves as he wants his followers to do. For example, the principal believes in Buddha and encourages his teachers and students to regularly practice Buddhist teachings, such as paying respect to Buddha, reciting the Buddha teachings, and taking meditation. These practices are even a part of the school's daily routines. Everyone who lives on the campus has to pay respect to Buddha and meditate twice a day, once in the morning and another in the evening. As he encourages them to do, he also demonstrates it. Khun Htay Aung described that Venerable Razeinda Thiri wakes up at 5 AM every morning. He always begins his routines day by paying homage to the Buddha and taking meditation. He practices these religious habits before he goes to bed at night as well. He avoids drinking alcohol, smoking, or gambling. His actions align with what he preaches and teaches to his audiences.

Through the commitment to lifelong learning, the principal shows a significant leadership quality for his followers to exercise. He reads books and news articles on various subjects, from Buddhist philosophy to modern educational practices. Venerable Eaindaw praised that the principal is active in learning new things even though he has lots of knowledge and experiences. When there are Monastic Education conferences both within Myanmar and abroad, he actively participates, learn new insights, and apply them to enhance the quality of education at his philanthropic monastic schools.

Most importantly, the principal is doing the educational and community work by willingly sacrificing his own comfort, time, and resources for the betterment of others. He believes that we should focus on fulfilling the needs of others. If we do, our needs will be automatically fulfilled. Nang Khin Htwe Naing shared her feelings on how the principal's values selflessness and service influence her:

> Venerable Razeinda Thiri is more than just our principal; he is a role model for all of us. His kindness, humility, and dedication to providing quality education to children and helping others inspire me to become a better person and do good things for my community.

Empowering

Venerable Razeinda Thiri actively empowers his monks, teachers, students, and community members. He provides opportunities for individuals to develop their skills, take on leadership roles, and contribute to the growth of the school and the community. As he has established over twelve monastic schools around Pa-O Self-Administered Zone to provide education to local children, he recognizes that empowering others is essential to build them

strong and sustainable. He regularly organizes training sessions and workshops to help his followers enhance their teaching and leadership skills. Khun Htay Aung shared an example of how the principal empowered him:

> When I first joined the school, he was lack of self-confidence. He was afraid of talking in front of people. I did not know how to teach, as well as how to lead. The principal saw my potential and gave me the opportunities to attend training such as self-awareness, teacher training, English and computer classes, and community organization. He also let me lead some projects and guided me through the process. Now, as a program coordinator and lead teacher, I am coordinating Naung Taung Green Class, a special program for middle school children at the school.

Furthermore, Venerable Razeinda Thiri empowers his students by creating an environment that fosters their personal and academic growth. He encourages them to take an active role in their education and provides platforms for them to express their ideas and opinions. He regularly organizes student-led initiatives and community service projects. Nang Khin Htwe Naing described that when she completed 12 months of academic study at Naung Taung – Social Development Program (NT-SDP), a social science and civic education curriculum-based English program, she and her classmates had to implement a three-month long service learning project in local villages. They had to reach out to the respective village abbots and headmen and discuss their project with them. They provided basic English classes, local ethnic language classes, and small community projects to the local school children and youth. They had an opportunity to apply what they had learned and practice their leadership skills.

The last example of the principal's empowerment can be seen in his relationship with Vulnerable Eaindaw. The principal recognized his potential, invited him to co-found the school, and encouraged him to take on community leadership responsibilities together. Venerable Eaindaw shared his story:

> Naung Taung Philanthropic Monastic School was founded in 2001. Venerable Razeinda Thiri invited me to establish the school and lead it. I was hesitant at first. However, he pleased me and provided me with the support I needed. I am currently overseeing the education department. My responsibilities include curriculum development, teacher training and development, student welfare and discipline, and other general duties assigned by the principal. Through his guidance and empowerment, I have grown as a leader and have been able to make a positive impact on the lives of our students and the community.

Inspirational Motivation

Another significant finding is the way Venerable Razeinda Thiri provides inspirational motivation to his followers. He understands the power of inspiration in driving his followers to reach their full potential and get involved in community work. He regularly communicates a clear and compelling vision for the school and the community, emphasizing the importance of education, personal growth, and social responsibility. His speeches and interactions with students, teachers, monks, and community members are filled with messages of hope, resilience, and the potential for positive change. Khun Htay Aung illustrated that:

> Every evening at 6:30, we, monks and teachers, have to pay respect to Buddha in the meeting room of the principal's office. After paying homage to Buddha and meditating

for about one hour, the principal usually gives educational and inspirational speeches to us. His speeches each evening cover a wide range of topics, such as school discipline, Buddha teachings, and the history of the Pa-O ethnicity. By highlighting the limited access to education for local children and the essential need to address it to avoid being left behind by other ethnic groups in the country, he motivates and encourages us to do our best in educating and empowering the students.

The principal also motivates his audiences by giving examples of himself and other ethnic groups' educational work and comparing them. For example, Venerable Eaindaw said that when the principal gives a motivational speech, he often mentions that he only completed grade (4) of government school and inspires his teachers by saying that they can do better as they have already completed their high school and are even attending university. By giving the example of how the Mon ethnic group is developing their own curriculum based on their ethnic culture, traditions, history, and language and establishing their Mon National Education Institution, the principal motivates his monks and teachers to implement Pa-O National Education in the Pa-O region. Rather than waiting for support from the central government and others, he invites and encourages his followers to join him in achieving this common goal with the available resources they already have.

The principal's inspirational motivation extends to the community as well. He actively engages with community members and encourages them to take an active role in community work. He organizes community events and initiatives that bring people together, fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose. Through his words and actions, he inspires community members to believe in their ability to create positive change and build a better future for

themselves and their children. Khun Kyaw Kham shared how the principal's inspiration has impacted his community engagement:

> Venerable Razeinda Thiri is very good at inspiring others and making them become more involved in community development projects. When he hosted the third national-level, Buddhist Priyatti education exam (Pāli) at his Naung Taung Philanthropic Monastic School, he needed to build a huge exam hall, specifically 300 x 100 Feet, within two months. He also needed several volunteers to help with hosting and caring for over 20,000 guests, including monks, novices, nuns, and laypeople from different parts of the country. His approach was impressive. He reached out to respective village abbots, stakeholders, and villagers, and communicated his objectives, plans, and vision. By saying this is our responsibility to promote Buddhist teachings and an opportunity to show the dignity of Pa-O ethnicity, and this cannot be implemented without individuals' volunteer workforce, financial support, and time, he inspires others to get involved. Inspired by the principal, I purposefully volunteered in building the hall, serving meals, and cleaning. During building the hall, the principal came and monitored our work. He also showed us his care and inspiration by providing us with drinking water, snacks, and acknowledgement. As a result, the exam was successfully held.

Recommendations for Local Leadership Development

Practice Self-Care for Sustainable Leadership.

The participants strongly recommended that local leaders, monks, village headmen, and emerging leaders practice self-care. Drawing from their experiences and observations, particularly in the context of Naung Taung Philanthropic Monastic School and the surrounding

community, the participants emphasized that self-care is essential for maintaining the physical, mental, and emotional well-being necessary to serve others effectively. Having to sacrifice time, workforce, and finances for the sake of community members' well-being and development, some village headmen get exhausted and even burn out. It can cause conflict in their families as they are not able to spend time with them. Khun Kyaw Kham gave an example of their village headman:

> Our village headman is an amazing leader. When there are community works coming up, such as repairing village streets, organizing annual pagoda festivals, regional headmen meetings, and other occasions, he willingly represents the village and serves the village. Despite receiving nothing in return, he is just happy and delighted to serve. However, I have observed that he forgets to take care of himself. There are many nights when he eats and sleeps very late. There are several days that he cannot help his family with farming. As a result, he sometimes gets sick, and there is a misunderstanding with his wife. Therefore, I believe a leader should prioritize self-care while also selflessly serving his community.

Khun Htay Aung also added that he is inspired by how local leaders are selflessly helping the community members grow and develop. However, they forget to take care of themselves. They think if they prioritized their self-care and well-being, they go against their religious and ethnic values. However, they cannot give what they do not have. It is essential to prioritize self-care practices like regular exercise, healthy eating, and sufficient sleep. Regarding mindfulness or meditation, they practice it quite often. These practices help them maintain the energy and resilience they need to serve our communities effectively over the long term. For that reason, he strongly recommended that the local leaders practice self-care.

Ensuring Honesty about Agreements

Another interesting leadership recommendation that emerged from the participants is local leaders should ensure that their followers are honest about agreements. One of the Buddhist teachings taught to local people is not to criticize or oppose the words of monks, parents, and teachers. If they do so, they will face negative consequences in their beliefs. Therefore, they tend to be nice, supportive, and agreeable, as it is a part of the local culture. However, this can lead them to say 'yes' to things with which they actually do not agree. Khun Htay Aung shared his insights:

> During meetings, many of us (the staff at Naung Taung Philanthropic Monastic School) easily say 'yes' to the points raised by the school principal, senior monks, and teachers. Some of us, especially female staff, often find it uncomfortable to disagree with their ideas or proposals. Some say 'yes' because they genuinely understand and agree with the points, but I am sure that many say 'yes' simply to be polite and nice to the monks and senior teachers. Agreeing without being honest about our level of agreement is unethical and can lead to unproductivity and ineffectiveness for both staff and the workplace. Therefore, it is essential for staff members to be honest about their level of agreement and have the confidence to express their opinions. Moreover, those in leadership positions should foster an environment that encourages their team members to freely offer diverse perspectives so that the most informed decisions can be made, and the organization will develop as a whole.

Venerable Eaindaw also added that both leaders and followers should be honest with each other. We should discuss our opinions frankly and clearly. We do not need to be shy or

afraid. Sharing our perspectives honestly is not being rude to others, even if they are different from others' opinions. It is useless to talk about our thoughts after the meeting or outside the meeting cycle. It can even create misunderstandings and conflicts between each other.

Chapter IV

Reflections

Conducting this field research project on the leadership practices of Venerable Razeinda Thiri was a transformative journey that developed my understanding of effective leadership and its potential to create positive change in the Pa-O region. Through designing and implementing this project, I gained valuable insights into effective leadership practices, navigating challenges, and the importance of self-reflection in leadership development.

Challenges and Adaptations

Throughout the project, I encountered several challenges that tested my leadership skills and required me to make adaptations to ensure the project's success. One of the significant challenges I faced during the project was the outbreak of civil war in the region, which impacted my ability to interview the principal himself. This unexpected situation required me to adapt and make changes to my original plan. With the advice of my advisor, I responded by focusing on interviewing other key participants who had closely worked with the principal and could provide valuable insights into his leadership. This experience taught me the importance of flexibility and adaptability in leadership, especially when faced with circumstances beyond my control.

Another challenge was the unstable internet connections and electricity issues faced by my participants in Myanmar, which led to frequent interruptions and the need to restart Zoom meetings. To overcome this, I had to remain patient, communicate clearly with my participants, and find alternative solutions, such as switching to audio-only or rescheduling meetings. This experience taught me the importance of adaptability and effective communication in leadership, especially when faced with technological constraints. The time zone difference between my

location and Myanmar was also a challenge because I had to stay up late, and sometimes wake up at 3 AM to conduct interviews. This was a great experience of practicing dedication to the project.

One of the most profound challenges I faced was a personal one. While implementing the project, my family back home in Myanmar had to flee and hide due to the outbreak of civil war in our region. This devastating news left me worried and emotionally weak, making it difficult to concentrate on my research and studies. As a leader, I had to learn to balance my personal concerns with my commitment to the project. This experience taught me the importance of emotional intelligence, self-care, and open communication in leadership, as well as the need to acknowledge and manage my own emotions while supporting others.

Looking back, I realize I made some mistakes in the initial stages of the project. I underestimated the time and effort required to transcribe the interviews conducted in local languages, which led to delays in the data analysis process. This taught me the importance of thorough planning, setting realistic timelines, and allocating sufficient resources for each phase of the project. Additionally, I spent a lot of time overthinking and figuring out what I was not sure about, such as the formats of writing and what specifically I needed to write in each section. Rather than reaching out to my advisor and asking questions, I felt uncomfortable and tried to understand the subjects on my own, which wasted my extra time and energy. In future endeavors, I would be more mindful of these factors and seek guidance from experienced researchers or mentors to avoid similar mistakes.

Strengths and Resources

Despite the challenges, I believe I did well in building relationships with the participants and creating a safe and trustworthy environment for them to share their stories. My personal background of growing up in Buddhist monastic schools and my familiarity with the local culture were important resources that helped me connect with the participants. I also leveraged my network within the school community to identify and reach out to potential participants who could provide rich insights. Moreover, I was able to draw upon the knowledge and skills I had acquired through my academic studies in leadership and social justice. This theoretical foundation provided me with a framework for analyzing the data and extracting meaningful insights that could inform leadership practices in the local context.

Engaging with Others and Future Leadership Practice

Engaging with diverse participants, including monks, teachers, students, and community members, provided me with valuable lessons in people management and leadership. I learned the importance of active listening, empathy, and adaptability when working with individuals from different backgrounds and experiences. I realized that effective leadership involves creating an inclusive environment where everyone feels valued and heard. This experience reinforced my commitment to fostering collaboration, empowering others, and building strong relationships in my future leadership roles. Furthermore, this project highlighted the importance of cultural sensitivity and context-specific leadership approaches. As a future leader, I would strive to understand and adapt my leadership style to the unique needs and expectations of the communities I serve, while also drawing upon universal principles of servant and transformational leadership.

Recommendations and Implications

Based on the findings of this project, I recommend that the local leaders in the Pa-O region and similar contexts embrace servant and transformational leadership principles, help the followers grow and succeed, embody healing and empathy, foster personalized communication and relationship building, be a good role model, empower the participants, inspire others, prioritize self-care for sustainable leadership, and ensure honesty about agreements of both leaders and followers. These recommendations can serve as a foundation for developing effective leadership practices that create positive change and empower communities.

The implications of this project extend beyond the immediate context of the Pa-O region in Myanmar. The insights gained from studying Venerable Razeinda Thiri's leadership and the challenges encountered during the research process highlight the importance of context-specific leadership, diverse leadership models, resilient and adaptive leaders, and the value of self-reflection and continuous learning in leadership development. These implications can inform leadership practices in various educational and community-based settings, contributing to the broader discourse on effective leadership for social justice.

Conclusion

Conducting this field research project has been a profound learning experience that has shaped my understanding of leadership and its potential to create positive change. Through navigating challenges, adapting to constraints, and engaging with diverse participants, I have gained valuable insights into the qualities and practices of effective leadership. This experience has reinforced my commitment to servant and transformational leadership principles, as well as the importance of self-reflection, resilience, adaptability, and continuous learning in leadership

development. As I move forward in my leadership journey, I will carry the lessons learned from this project and strive to apply them in my future roles. I am grateful for the opportunity to have conducted this research and for the insights, it has provided into the power of leadership to transform lives and communities. I am committed to continuing my growth as a leader and to using my skills and knowledge to create positive change in my community.

Appendix

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interview Questions

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. As I mentioned before, I am a master's candidate at the University of San Francisco, and my field project is on documenting the leadership practices of Venerable Razeinda Thiri, the Principal of Naung Taung Philanthropic Monastic School, and producing a leadership guide tailored specifically for other local monks and community leaders. I became interested in this work through studying various leadership approaches and discovering that there is a research gap on Buddhist monks' leadership. So, I wanted to learn how Buddhist monks lead their followers and develop their respective communities. Is it okay if I record this interview? I will use the recording to help me remember what you said, not what I think you said. You can stop the recording or the interview at any time. Do you have any questions for me?

Background

1. Can you share your personal journey and involvement with Naung Taung Philanthropic Monastic School? What inspired you to become part of this community?

2. In your current role or involvement, what specific responsibilities do you have, and how do they contribute to the overall objectives of the school and community development?

Venerable Razeinda Thiri's Leadership Practices

3. What leadership qualities or characteristics do you believe are most prominent in Venerable Razeinda Thiri's style?

4. What values or principles do you observe guiding Venerable Razeinda Thiri's decision-making and overall leadership philosophy?

5. Can you provide specific examples of instances where Venerable Razeinda Thiri demonstrated effective leadership in challenging situations?

6. How does Venerable Razeinda Thiri involve and empower teachers, students, and community members in the decision-making process and overall success of the school?

7. Can you share any experiences where Venerable Razeinda Thiri intentionally served the needs of individuals within the school or community?

8. Can you provide examples of how Venerable Razeinda Thiri encourages innovation and creativity among teachers, students, and community members?

9. From your perspective, how does Venerable Razeinda Thiri inspire and motivate others to actively participate in school projects and community development initiatives?

Leadership Recommendations

10. Considering the local context, are there specific leadership strategies or practices you find particularly effective in the school and community setting?

11. As someone actively engaged in the development of the school and community, what advice would you give to monks, village headmen, and emerging leaders in fostering positive change?

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