

Continuity in Novel Ways of Studying the *Paṭṭhāna*: the Development of the Study of *Paṭṭhāna* in Myanmar from the 18th century C.E. ¹

By Pyi Phyo Kyaw

In this volume, Venerable Atulañāṇa has written this work in order to provide a study guide to the *Kusalatika*, ‘Skilful Triplet’, of the *Paṭṭhāna*, the seventh book of the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, for students in Sri Lanka. Venerable Atulañāṇa has developed the expertise that underlies this book over the course of 5 years study in Myanmar. He has based his book on the methods of Abhidhamma experts in Myanmar such as Mūla-paṭṭhāna Sayadaw Venerable Nārada (1898–1983) and Pahtān-theīk-pan Sayadaw Venerable Indaka (1903–1988). I first met Venerable Atulañāṇa online in early 2023 when I, along with a few other Dhamma friends, attended a series of three *Paṭṭhāna* classes led by him in English medium. These classes have led to two significant things. Firstly, during the course of these classes, I was highly honoured to receive Venerable Atulañāṇa’s invitation to write an article on the methods of studying the *Paṭṭhāna* as taught by the Burmese Sayadaws, which has now become this foreword. Secondly, these classes, which at the outset were on the section of the *Paṭṭhāna* called the *Paccanīyuddhāra*, ‘Synopsis of Opposite Condition’ have now turned into regular online classes covering a range of Abhidhamma texts. This in turn has led to the formation of a lively Dhamma group on Viber where the recordings of the Abhidhamma classes and study materials are shared freely with generosity and kindness.

My own initiation to *Paṭṭhāna* studies also began in Myanmar, where I did my *Paṭṭhāna* training under esteemed teachers of *Paṭṭhāna* such as Inn-sein-ywama Sayadaw Venerable Tilokābhivaṃsa (1938- ; အင်းစိန်ရွာမဆရာတော် ဦးတိလောကာဘိဝံသ) and Venerable Ashin Dr. Nandamālābhivaṃsa (1940- ; အရှင်ဒေါက်တာနန္ဒမာလာဘိဝံသ) and where I conducted fieldwork at various monastic institutions and lay Abhidhamma associations from 2010 to 2012. I went on to write my doctorate on the subject at King’s College, London, completing in 2014. That thesis was the first presentation of the Burmese tradition of *Paṭṭhāna* study in English

¹ මෙම ලිපියෙහි සිංහල පරිවර්තනය "නව ක්‍රම යටතේ පථානාය අධ්‍යයනය කිරීම: 18 වැනි සියවසේ සිට මියන්මාරයේ පථානා අධ්‍යයනයේ ගොඩනැගීම" යනුවෙන් මතු දැක්වේ.

medium in Western academia, just as I believe Venerable Atulañāṇa's present volume is the first in Sri Lanka. To mark the significance of his volume, I would like to explain in this foreword how it was that the Burmese *Paṭṭhāna* tradition both relied on the commentarial tradition ascribed to Buddhaghosa and other esteemed commentators within the Sri Lankan Mahāvihāra tradition and developed their own exegetical methods. Here I explain those methods and their purpose and thereby contextualise Mūla-paṭṭhāna Sayadaw's novel ways of studying the *Paṭṭhāna*, which Venerable Atulañāṇa has in turn developed for you here.

The study of the *Paṭṭhāna* at monastic institutions and certain lay Abhidhamma associations since the 1940s in Myanmar follows a novel pedagogical approach invented and taught by the aforementioned Mūla-paṭṭhāna Sayadaw Venerable Nārada (မူလပဏ္ဍိတနိဗ္ဗာန်ဆရာတော် ဦးနုရဒ; henceforth Mūla-paṭṭhāna Sayadaw, 1898–1983). Mūla-paṭṭhāna Sayadaw's novel approach to the study of the *Paṭṭhāna* is shown in his extensive use of tables to summarise key aspects of Pali canonical texts as well as exegetical Abhidhamma texts. His work was comprehensive in that he is said to have studied and worked on the whole of the *Paṭṭhāna*, i.e., the five volumes in the Burmese sixth Buddhist council edition. His approach to the study of the *Paṭṭhāna* combines key features of the canonical texts with the exegetical texts taken from both the Mahāvihāra tradition of Sri Lanka and the Burmese Abhidhamma tradition.

Before turning to the Burmese pedagogical approaches, a few words on the phrase 'the Mahāvihāra tradition of Sri Lanka' would be helpful. By the exegetical texts from the Mahāvihāra tradition of Sri Lanka, I refer to the Pali commentaries and sub-commentaries on Abhidhamma, the topic under discussion, that have traditionally been attributed to the commentarial tradition of the Mahāvihāra fraternity. The Mahāvihāra monastery in Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka is where the famous commentator Buddhaghosa is understood to have resided in the 5th century C.E. In the 12th century C.E., it became the sole authorised fraternity recognised in the unification of the Sangha under Parākramabāhu I, a reform which also saw the sponsorship of the production of many sub-commentaries and manuals. The Pali commentaries ascribed to Buddhaghosa and the sub-commentaries on those that we have from Sri Lanka are thus those preserved within the Mahāvihāra lineage.

In this foreword, I refer to the Pali commentaries and sub-commentaries on the *Paṭṭhāna* within this Mahāvihāra lineage, namely, the *Pañcappakaraṇa-aṭṭhakathā*, the *Pañcappakaraṇa-mūlaṭīkā* and the *Pañcappakaraṇa-anuṭīkā*. These three texts are the exegetical texts on five of the seven canonical Abhidhamma texts, namely, the *Dhātukathā*, the *Puggalapaññatti*, the *Kathāvatthu*, the *Yamaka*, and the *Paṭṭhāna*. I use the phrase 'the *Paṭṭhāna*

commentary’ (Paṭṭh-a) to refer to the *aṭṭhakathā* on the *Paṭṭhāna* in the *Pañcappakaraṇa-aṭṭhakathā*. The phrase ‘the *Paṭṭhāna* sub-commentary’ (Paṭṭh-mṭ) refers to the *mūlaṭīkā* on the *Paṭṭhāna* in the *Pañcappakaraṇa-mūlaṭīkā*. The abbreviation ‘Paṭṭh’ refers to the canonical *Paṭṭhāna* in the Burmese sixth Buddhist council edition. The commentarial and pedagogical traditions that I am discussing here all developed through layers of exegesis, whereby each generation of commentator or teacher sought to explain, interpret, analyse, and justify words, phrases and sentences found in the canonical texts and in the commentarial texts to which they had access. For example, the *aṭṭhakathā* on the *Paṭṭhāna* explains, interprets, justifies, and analyses the canonical *Paṭṭhāna* through the deliberate, word-by-word and phrase-by-phrase consideration of the text. The *mūlaṭīkā* on the *Paṭṭhāna* does this in turn to the *aṭṭhakathā*, and the *anuṭīkā* to the *mūlaṭīkā*. The Burmese *Paṭṭhāna* tradition drew on the different layers of these exegetical texts and developed their own exegetical methods. Below we shall gradually unpick some of these developments in relation to the study of the *Paṭṭhāna*.

Let us now look at the development of the study of *Paṭṭhāna* in Myanmar. I begin with key features of the current pedagogical approaches and trace where these features come from and how they came to be important in the Burmese *Paṭṭhāna* tradition. As a student of the *Paṭṭhāna* in Myanmar in the 21st century CE, our first task is to memorise (1) the classifications of the twenty-four ‘conditions’ (*paccaya*) at the heart of causality in terms of nine main groups of *paccayas* and the subsidiary *paccayas* embraced within them, and (2) the recitation formulae of the ‘simple enumeration’ (*suddhasaṅkhyā*) of the *Pañhāvāra*, ‘Investigation Chapter’. We may wonder what the *Paṭṭhāna* is about, what these features of the study of *Paṭṭhāna* are and where they come from.

The *Paṭṭhāna* deals with the depth and breadth of conditionality, explicating conditional relations between *dhammas*, ‘ultimate realities’, related through the twenty-four conditions (*paccaya*). The *dhammas* in the *Paṭṭhāna* are the twenty-two triplets (*tika*) and the hundred duplets (*duka*) listed in the *Mātīkā*, which appears at the beginning of the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*. The twenty-four conditions can be considered as conditioning forces (*satti*) that act on the relationships between the *dhammas*. The structure of the *Paṭṭhāna* is complex and difficult to follow because there are many sections and sub-sections within the text.

The first feature of the Burmese pedagogical approaches, i.e., further classifications of the twenty-four *paccayas*, relates to the categories of *paccayas* in the section called the *Paccanīyuddhāra*, ‘Synopsis of Opposite Condition’. The *Paccanīyuddhāra* is included in the first

volume of the Burmese sixth council edition of the canonical *Paṭṭhāna* (Paṭṭh §527–531). It has been attributed to the elders of a Buddhist council (Paṭṭh-a §527; Nandamedhā 1973: 527). The *Paccanīyuddhāra* provides a summary of the conditional relations between ‘skilful states’ (*kusala-dhamma*), ‘unskilful states’ (*akusala-dhamma*) and ‘indeterminant states’ (*abyākata-dhamma*) that are related by the eight leading groups of *paccayas* and by combined (*missaka*) groups of *paccayas*. There are fifteen possible types of conditional relations in the ‘skilful triplet’ (*kusalatika*), which are regarded as ‘answers’ (*vissajjana*). They are the fifteen ways in which conditioning *dhammas* (*paccaya-dhamma*) are related to conditioned *dhammas* (*paccayuppana-dhamma*), where the conditioning and conditioned *dhammas* are any of the following *dhammas*: skilful, unskilful, and indeterminant *dhammas* singly or combined. For example, §527 of the *Paccanīyuddhāra* is as follows.

Kusalo dhammo kusalassa dhammassa ārammaṇapaccayena paccayo, saha-jātapaccayena paccayo, upanissayapaccayena paccayo.

Kusalo dhammo akusalassa dhammassa ārammaṇapaccayena paccayo, upanissayapaccayena paccayo.

Kusalo dhammo abyākatassa dhammassa ārammaṇapaccayena paccayo, saha-jātapaccayena paccayo, upanissayapaccayena paccayo, pacchā-jātapaccayena paccayo, kamma-paccayena paccayo.

Kusalo dhammo kusalassa ca abyākatassa ca dhammassa saha-jātapaccayena paccayo.

A skilful dhamma [is related to] a skilful dhamma by the object condition, by the co-nascence condition, by the decisive-support condition.

A skilful dhamma [is related to] an unskilful dhamma by the object condition, by the decisive-support condition.

A skilful dhamma [is related to] an indeterminant dhamma by the object condition, by the co-nascence condition, by the decisive-support condition, by the post-nascence condition, by the karma condition.

A skilful dhamma [is related to] skilful and indeterminant dhammas by co-nascence condition.

(Paṭṭh 1.189)

§527 shows the four conditional relations where conditioning *dhammas* are skilful *dhammas* and conditioned *dhammas* are skilful, unskilful, and indeterminate *dhammas* taken singly and in combination. These four conditional relations are possible answers (*vissajjana*) that we get in the skilful triplet. §527 also gives a summary of the conditioning forces (*paccaya-satti*) in these conditional relations, namely, the object condition, the co-nasence condition, the decisive-support condition, the post-nascence condition, and the karma condition. The

following paragraph, §528, is about the conditional relations where conditioning *dhammas* are unskilful *dhammas* and conditioned *dhammas* are skilful, unskilful, and indeterminate *dhammas* taken singly and in combination. The following paragraphs in the *Paccanīyuddhāra* follow the same pattern as that of in §527 and §528.

The *Paccanīyuddhāra* has three functions. Firstly, it can be regarded as a set of codes or abbreviations which can be expanded out to give the detailed analysis (*vibhaṅga*) of the conditional relations in the three major sections. These sections are the *Paccayapaccanīya*, the *Paccayānulomapaccanīya* and the *Paccayapaccanīyānuloma* of the skilful triplet of the *Paṭṭhāna*. Secondly, it gives a summary of all possible combinations of *dhammas* that can be related by the twenty-four *paccayas* in the skilful triplets. Thirdly, the *Paccanīyuddhāra* brings together the twenty-four *paccayas* and their subsidiary *paccayas* under leading groups of *paccayas*. If we were to collect and list the *paccayas* in the *Paccanīyuddhāra*, there are eight leading groups of *paccayas*, which relate the condition relations singly. They are: (1) object condition (*ārammaṇa-paccaya*), (2) co-nascence condition (*sahajāta-paccaya*), (3) decisive-support condition (*upanissaya-paccaya*), (4) pre-nascence condition (*purejāta-paccaya*), (5) post-nascence condition (*pacchājāta-paccaya*), (6) karma condition (*kamma-paccaya*), (7) nutriment condition (*āhāra-paccaya*), and (8) faculty condition (*indriya-paccaya*) (Paṭṭh §527-529). The main objective of the *Paccanīyuddhāra* is to present a condensed version of the twenty-four *paccayas* in terms of the leading groups of *paccayas*. Notice that I use the word ‘group’ to refer to the Burmese word *myò* (မျိုး), which literally means ‘kind’ or ‘type’. This means that the twenty-four *paccayas* are condensed into, or embraced within, these ‘groups’ of *paccayas*. An example of how this happens is as follows. The root condition (*hetu-paccaya*) is embraced in the co-nascence group of *paccayas* (သတဇာတမျိုး). Why is that? The root *paccaya* is a condition in which conditioning *dhammas* function as a firm foundation of the conditioned *dhammas*. It is compared to a taproot which gives firmness and support for the growth of a tree. The conditioning *dhammas* in this conditional relation are: the three unwholesome roots—greed, hatred, and delusion, and the three beautiful roots—non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion—which may be karmically wholesome or indeterminate. The conditioned *dhammas* are the mental states associated with each root and the materiality (*rūpa*) that arises simultaneously with them. Because the conditioned *dhammas* arise simultaneously with the conditioning *dhammas* in this conditional relation, the root *paccaya* is embraced in the co-nascence group of *paccayas*.

It is in the *Paṭṭhāna* commentary (*aṭṭhakathā*) on the *Paccanīyuddhāra* that we see a more detailed explanation of how the twenty-four *paccayas* and their subsidiary *paccayas* are collected and summarised (*saṅgaha*) under these eight groups of *paccayas* (*Paṭṭh-a* §527). We may wonder what ‘subsidiary *paccayas*’ are. In the first two major sections of the *Paṭṭhāna*—i.e., the *Paccayuddesa*, ‘List of the Conditions’, and the *Paccayaniddesa*, ‘Analytical Exposition of the Conditions’, we see a list of twenty-four *paccayas* and the conditional relations that are related by the twenty-four *paccayas* respectively. In other major sections in the later part of the *Paṭṭhāna*, we find that the twenty-four *paccayas* are analysed into what Karunadasa calls “subsidiary” (2010: 269) *paccayas*. For example, the ‘predominance condition’ (*adhipati-paccaya*) has two subsidiary *paccayas*: (i) object-predominance (*ārammaṇādhipati*) and (ii) co-nascence-predominance (*sahajātādhipati*) (*Paṭṭh* 1.157; Nārada 1981: 62; Karunadasa 2010: 267). The predominance *paccaya* is embraced under the two leading groups of *paccayas*, namely, the object (*ārammaṇa*) group and the co-nascence (*sahajāta*) group. The object-predominance *paccaya* refers to a conditional relation where an object (*ārammaṇa*), as a conditioning *dhamma*, dominates over the mental states that take it as their object. Because the conditioning *dhamma* as an object (*ārammaṇa*) dominates the conditioned *dhammas*, the object-predominance *paccaya* (*ārammaṇādhipati-paccaya*) is embraced in the object group. The co-nascence-predominance *paccaya* refers to a conditional relation where the conditioning *dhamma* exercises a dominant influence on the conditioned *dhammas*. In this conditional relation, the conditioning and conditioned *dhammas* arise together, and because of this co-nascent nature the co-nascence-predominance *paccaya* (*sahajātādhipati-paccaya*) is embraced in the co-nascence group. In this example of the predominance *paccaya*, the two subsidiary *paccayas* have their own specific qualitative nature, and they can be regarded as two varieties of the predominance *paccaya* (see Kyaw 2014: 210–212 for a detailed explanation of their nature).

In the Burmese *Paṭṭhāna* tradition, the eight leading groups of *paccayas* became important in the study of the *Paṭṭhāna*. In the Burmese language, the ‘eight leading groups of *paccayas*’ is called *hkaung-saung-pyít-sè-shít-myò* (ခေါင်းဆောင်ပစ္စည်းရှစ်မျိုး) (Tilokābhivamsa 2000: 10). As far as we know, the importance of the eight leading groups of *paccayas* in the Burmese pedagogical approaches can be dated at least as far back as the early 1910s. We know this because we find the eight leading groups of *paccayas* listed in the 1911 printed edition of the *Pahtàn-thòn-saung-twe*, ‘Three Volumes of the *Paṭṭhāna*’. This work was composed by Theinn-thathana-paing Sayadaw Venerable Sūriya (1764–1840; သဲအင်းသာသနာပိုင်ဆရာတော် ဦးသူရိယ). In

this work, we also find that the eight leading groups are expanded to include the subsidiary *paccayas* and a total of forty-seven varieties of *paccayas* is listed (Sūriya 1911: 11–12).

Turning to more modern Burmese pedagogical handbooks such as Myint Swe (1979: 300–315), we find nine main groups of *paccayas* and a total of forty-nine varieties of *paccayas*. Where do the additional classifications come from? These further classifications of *paccayas* are built on the eight leading groups and the forty-seven varieties of *paccayas* found in Sūriya's work. In the *Paṭṭhāna* commentary's passages that explain the nature of the conditional relation between skilful *dhamma* and unskilful *dhamma*, we find that one of the eight leading groups of *paccayas*, i.e., decisive-support (*upanissaya*) group, is analysed into two subsidiary types: (i) contiguity-decisive-support (*anantarūpanissaya*) and (ii) natural-decisive-support (*pakatūpanissaya*) (Paṭṭh-a §527). This means the eight leading groups of *paccayas* have been further categorised into nine groups in the *Paṭṭhāna* commentary (Kyaw 2014: 310–312). In the Burmese language, the nine groups of *paccayas* are referred to as *pyítsè-kòmyò* (ပုစ္ဆ်းကိုးမျိုး).

The important issue here is that the twenty-four *paccayas* are organised into nine main groups. When we compare Sūriya's list of forty-seven *paccayas* with the list in modern Burmese pedagogical handbooks on the *Paṭṭhāna*, the former does not include the two subsidiary *paccayas* in the ninth group, i.e., the natural-decisive-support (*pakatūpanissaya*) group. This is why it gives a total of forty-seven, not the total of forty-nine *paccayas*. Mūla-paṭṭhāna Sayadaw writes that the *Paṭṭhāna* commentary on the *Paccanīyuddhāra* gives a list of forty-nine *paccayas* and explains them in detail (Nārada 1981: 62–63). We here see that the Burmese Abhidhamma tradition goes a step further in classifying and spelling out the twenty-four *paccayas* in terms of the nine groups of *paccayas* and a longer list of subsidiary *paccayas*.

In Mūla-paṭṭhāna Sayadaw's approach to the study of the *Paṭṭhāna*, the list of *paccayas* that a student needs to memorise becomes longer, consisting of fifty-six *paccayas* in total. Where do additional seven *paccayas* come from? As we saw above, the *Paccanīyuddhāra* presents a summary of the conditional relations between skilful, unskilful, and indeterminant *dhammas* that are related by the eight leading groups of *paccayas* (Paṭṭh §527–529) and by combined (*missaka*) groups of *paccayas* (Paṭṭh §530–531). In the Burmese language, they are called *meikthaká-myò* (မိတ္ထကာမျိုး). The pedagogical approaches that developed before Mūla-paṭṭhāna Sayadaw's approach seem to have ignored the combined groups of *paccayas*. The *Paṭṭhāna* commentary does not provide a full explanation of the combined groups of

paccayas (Nārada 1981: 62–63). The *Paṭṭhāna* sub-commentary (*mūlaṭīkā*) explicates the nature of these combined groups in some detail (Paṭṭh-mṭ §530–531). There are three groups of combined *paccayas*, namely: (a) ‘combination of co-nascence and pre-nascence’ (*sahajāta-purejāta-missaka*), (b) ‘combination of post-nascence and nutriment’ (*pacchājātāhāra-missaka*), and (c) ‘combination of post-nascence and faculty’ (*pacchājātindriya-missaka*). The nature of these combined groups is about complex relationships between mental states (*citta*) and materiality (*rūpa*) within conditioning *dharmas* (*paccaya-dhamma*). Mūla-paṭṭhāna Sayadaw incorporates these combined groups of *paccayas* into the existing list of forty-nine *paccayas*, giving the total of fifty-six *paccayas* (Nārada 1951: 133; Nārada 1981: 62; Nārada 1995: 340–352). Here, we see how Mūla-paṭṭhāna Sayadaw’s approach draws on explanations and interpretations of the *paccayas* and of the conditional relations found in different layers of texts, i.e., from the canonical text to its commentary and sub-commentary.

Since Mūla-paṭṭhāna Sayadaw’s development of such a comprehensive approach, being able to remember the twenty-four *paccayas* in terms of the fifty-six *paccayas* has become important for the Burmese pedagogical approaches to the study of the *Paṭṭhāna*. Mūla-paṭṭhāna Sayadaw said that if we do not include the combined groups of *paccayas* in our study of the *Paṭṭhāna*, the study of the *Sanḅhyāvāra*, ‘Enumeration Section’, becomes incredibly difficult (Nārada 1981: 51). This is because only the *paccayas* in the same group, i.e., with the same nature, can be combined. In the enumeration section, the conditional relations between the conditioning *dharmas* and the conditioned *dharmas* that are related through a single condition and multiple *paccayas* are enumerated using numbers. The enumeration section is like a puzzle full of numbers or codes. One requires a wide range of information to be able to unravel and understand them. Therefore, the study of the enumeration section is regarded in the Burmese tradition as one of the most challenging aspects of the *Paṭṭhāna*. If a student can memorise and recall different groups of *paccayas* as well as the subsidiary *paccayas* within each group, they will then be able to delve into complex conditional relations that are related by multiple *paccayas*.

So far, we have seen how the twenty-four *paccayas* are condensed and summarised into nine main groups, and how the twenty-four *paccayas* and their subsidiary *paccayas* are expanded giving longer lists of *paccayas*. For instance, the predominance *paccaya* and its two subsidiary *paccayas* are subsumed under the object group of *paccayas* and the co-nascence group of *paccayas*. If we were to form a longer list of *paccayas*, i.e., expansion of the text, we would be writing out the subsidiary *paccayas* within each group of *paccayas*. In the Burmese

Abhidhamma tradition, one's ability to condense and expand the *paccayas* and the *dhammas* is an important part of mastering the study of the *Paṭṭhāna*. The two important exegetical features of the *Paṭṭhāna*, i.e., expansion and condensation of the text, can be traced through the canonical and commentarial layers. In the *Pañhāvāra* (Paṭṭh 1.132–164) of the canonical text, we find that the list of twenty-four *paccayas* are analysed further into the subsidiary types of *paccayas*, forming a longer list of *paccayas*. In the *Paṭṭhāna* commentary, as we saw above, the twenty-four *paccayas* are summarised in terms of the eight leading groups of *paccayas*, giving a more condensed list of *paccayas*. When we consider the *Paṭṭhāna* in its entirety, these two exegetical features are pervasive in other parts of the text (Kyaw 2025).

The second feature, i.e., the recitation formulae (*hsoyò*, ဆိုရိုး), is an innovation of the Burmese Abhidhamma tradition. It can be traced back to one of the earliest known exegetical texts on the *Paṭṭhāna*, *Pahtàn Ayakauk*, composed in the Burmese language by Htāntabin Sayadaw Venerable Nandamedhā (c. 1708; ထန်းတပင်ဆရာတော် ဦးနန္ဒမေဓာ) in the second half of the 18th century CE. Nandamedhā's *Pahtàn Ayakauk* has come down to us to the present day and is widely used in the study of the *Paṭṭhāna* in Myanmar. Nandamedhā wrote his *Pahtàn Ayakauk* in the style of 'recitation formulae' (*hsoyò*), which makes memorising key elements of the *Paṭṭhāna* easier. The recitation formulae in his *Pahtàn Ayakauk* explicate how the conditioning *dhammas* are related to the conditioned *dhammas* through a single condition (*paccaya*) and through multiple *paccayas*. These formulae also analyse the conditional relations in terms of the four ultimate realities, i.e., materiality (*rūpa*), mentality (*citta*), mental factors (*cetasika*) and *nibbāna*.

The Burmese word *ayakauk* in Nandamedhā's *Pahtàn Ayakauk* requires some explanation. The term *ayakauk* in the Burmese Abhidhamma tradition refers to a genre of *nissaya*, 'support', texts. There are some differences between *nissaya* texts and *ayakauk* texts in the Burmese tradition. The syntactical meaning and grammatical rules are usually maintained in most Pali-Burmese *nissaya* texts. We may think of the *nissaya* texts as word-by-word and phrase-by-phrase Pali-Burmese translations. In contrast, the phrase *ayakauk*, which literally means 'pickup essence', refers to a technique of analysing a text in terms of the four categories of ultimate realities, namely consciousness, mental factors, matter and *nibbāna*. In this sense, it is about picking up the essential meaning of the *dhammas*. In the *ayakauk* texts, the main purpose is to explain, interpret and analyse the Pali Abhidhamma texts in the Burmese language with reference to *abhidhammic* categories. These *ayakauk* texts are more than simple Pali-Burmese translations. The authors of such *ayakauk* texts seem to

have taken the deliberate word-by-word and phrase-by-phrase consideration of the text and provided detailed explanation and interpretation of the text. Therefore, the *ayakauk* texts are highly complex exegetical treatises. Secondly, Tin Lwin (1973: 298), writing on the history of Pali-Burmese *nissaya* texts, refers to *ayakauk* texts as *nan-pyout*, ‘lost meaning’, type of *nissaya*. In his seminal work on Pali-Burmese *nissayas*, Tin Lwin (1973: 270–307) explains that there are three types of *nissayas*. They are called *nan-kyae*, *nan-kyin*, and *nan-pyout* in Burmese. The word Burmese *nan* is abridged form of the word *a-nek*, ‘semantic meaning’. The first type of *nissaya*, *nan-kyae*, ‘broad meaning’, refers to the text that offers word-to-word translation from Pali into Burmese. In the *nan-kyin*, ‘narrow meaning’, key or difficult Pali words are translated, while other words may be expressed through abridged words or phrases (*peyyala*). The final type, *nan-pyout*, ‘lost meaning’, emphasizes the Abhidhamma and translates the text in terms of *abhidhammic* categories. Thus, it does not take the semantic meaning or the grammatical structure of the sentence into account. In this sense, the syntactical meaning may be lost in the *ayakauk* texts. Thirdly, the term *ayakauk* is used in relation to the *Mātikā*, the *Dhātukathā*, the *Yamaka* and the *Paṭṭhāna* in the Burmese Abhidhamma tradition, i.e., *Mātikā-ayakauk*, *Dhātukathā-ayakauk*, *Yamaka-ayakauk*, and *Paṭṭhāna-ayakauk*. Therefore, the term *ayakauk* has become a specialist term and is used to refer to the *nissaya* texts on these four Abhidhamma texts within the Burmese Abhidhamma tradition, and these *nissaya*, rather than provide a word-by-word translation, dig into the intended meaning in relation to making sense of Abhidhamma categories (Kyaw 2014: 153).

Nandamedhā’s *Pahtān Ayakauk* has become a crucial stepping stone for the study of the *Paṭṭhāna* in Myanmar. Mūla-paṭṭhāna Sayadaw draws on Nandamedhā’s *Pahtān Ayakauk*, especially the recitation formulae of the simple enumeration section, *thódáthinhkya-hsoyò* (သုဒ္ဓဿနိပုဒ်နိဂ္ဂဟိ) in Burmese (*ibid.*: 1–3). Mūla-paṭṭhāna Sayadaw emphasises the importance of the ‘simple enumeration’ (*suddhasaṅkhyā*) section, writing, “Without the simple enumeration section, the study of the *Paṭṭhāna* cannot be completed”. He also highlights that when we have memorised the recitation formulae of the simple enumeration section, we do not need to memorise other parts of the *Paṭṭhāna* to study complex parts of the enumeration section (1981: 1). Within the enumeration section, there are three parts: (1) the *suddhasaṅkhyā*, ‘simple enumeration’ (*suddha* literally means ‘pure’ or ‘simple’), (2) the *sabhāgasāṅkhyā*, ‘common enumeration’, and (3) the *ghaṭanāsāṅkhyā*, ‘complex enumeration’. The simple enumeration is when the conditioning *dhammas* and the conditioned *dhammas* are related by one condition (*ekapaccaya*). The common enumeration is when there are two *paccayas*

relating the conditioning *dhammas* and the conditioned *dhammas* (*dukapaccaya*). The complex enumeration deals with the conditional relations involving three or more, i.e., between 3 and 24, *paccayas*. If one can memorise and recall key elements of the ‘simple enumeration’ of the *Paṭṭhāna*, one should be able to apply this knowledge to complex parts of the *Paṭṭhāna* such as the enumeration section (*saṅkhyāvāra*) and decode the numbers.

In Mūla-paṭṭhāna Sayadaw’s approach, the recitation formulae of the simple enumeration, the *thódáthinhkya-hsoyò*, are organised according to the order of *paccayas* in the nine groups. This follows the classifications of the *paccayas* in the *Paccanīyuddhāra*. They are not organised in the order of the twenty-four *paccayas* as we find the first section *Paccayuddesa* of the *Paṭṭhāna*. With this slight change to arrangements of the recitation formulae, they become a key pedagogical tool for the study of the *Paṭṭhāna*. This is because when we try to find a combination of *paccayas* that can relate the conditioning *dhammas* and the conditioned *dhammas*, we need to know the *paccayas* in the same group as they have the same nature. Moreover, the recitation formulae of the main groups of *paccayas* are comprehensive. When we have memorised and know them by heart, we do not need to memorise additional recitation formulae or information for their subsidiary *paccayas*. For example, if we memorise the recitation formulae of the object *paccaya*, we do not need to memorise information for its subsidiary *paccayas* such as the object-predominance, the object-decisive-support, the object-post-nascence *paccayas* (*ibid.*: 4).

Mūla-paṭṭhāna Sayadaw first published his *Pahtàn Pāragu*, ‘*Perfected in the Paṭṭhāna*’, in 1951. It is a pedagogical text on the *Paṭṭhāna*, and its overall layout follows the sections as appear in the canonical *Paṭṭhāna*. He also includes direct references to the canonical *Paṭṭhāna* in the *Pahtàn Pāragu*. For example, the Pali text of the *Paccayaniddesa* is summarised in a table, and the students are encouraged to memorise it using the table. The visual representations of the texts in tables have come to be used not only as mnemonics, but also as shortcuts to the study of the *Paṭṭhāna* in contemporary Myanmar. Mūla-paṭṭhāna Sayadaw’s pedagogical approach substantially reduced the time it takes to complete the study of the skilful triplet. For instance, Pahtàn-theík-pan Sayadaw U Indaka (1903–1988; ပုဏ္ဏန်းသိပ္ပံဆရာတော် ဦးလှနွဲ့က) of Sagaing received the pedagogical approach from Mūla-paṭṭhāna Sayadaw himself between 1935 and 1937 in Khin-oo, near Shwebo. Pahtàn-theík-pan Sayadaw was a well-known *Paṭṭhāna* teacher amongst the monastics. When I interviewed Venerable U Paṇḍita, a close disciple of Pahtàn-theík-pan Sayadaw in 2011, he told me that it took only three months to

finish a course on the whole of the skilful triplet, halving the previous record from six months (Kyaw 2014: 224).

We may wonder why the study of the skilful triplet of the *Paṭṭhāna* used to take six months to complete, and whose pedagogical approaches were used before Mūla-paṭṭhāna Sayadaw's approach. In the early 1900s, Sayagyi U Òhn (1846–1925; ဆရာကြီး ဦးအုန်း), who was contemporary with Ledi Sayadaw U Ñāṇa (1846–1923; လယ်တီဆရာတော် ဦးဉာဏ), taught the Abhidhamma texts in Amarapura, attracting many monastic and lay students. In his work, *A-bída-ma-tàn-hkun-kyàn hnín yamaka-vihtimanzari-kyàn*, 'Banner of the Abhidhamma and Bouquet of the Yamaka', the third part is devoted to the *Paṭṭhāna*. Although Sayagyi U Òhn drew on Htāntabin Sayadaw's *Pahtàn Ayakaṅk*, his focus is on the 'enumeration section' (*saṅkhyāvāra*), which as mentioned above is one of the most difficult aspects of the study of the *Paṭṭhāna*. In Sayagyi U Òhn's work, we find that the first six chapters of the *Paṭṭhāna*—i.e., the *Paṭṭicavāra*, 'dependent chapter', (2) the *Sahajātavāra*, 'co-nascence chapter', (3) the *Paccayavāra*, 'condition chapter', (4) the *Nissayavāra*, 'support chapter', (5) the *Saṃsaṭṭhavāra*, 'conjoined chapter', (6) the *Sampayuttavāra*, 'association chapter'—are taken together as a group. The final chapter, the *Pañhāvāra*, 'investigation chapter', is in a separate section. The group of the first six chapters is referred to as *chavāra*, 'six chapters', in the Burmese Abhidhamma tradition. This classification, as far as I know, is based on the characteristics of the first six chapters in the canonical *Paṭṭhāna* and the explanations of them in the commentary of the *Paṭṭhāna*. Sayagyi U Òhn's work is the first to provide such a pedagogical approach in which the first six chapters are studied together, and the final chapter is studied separately. This approach is now a feature of the Burmese approach to the study of the *Paṭṭhāna*. We also observe this feature in the works by Mūla-paṭṭhāna Sayadaw. Here is an example of how a Burmese *abhidhammika* began to pay attention to specific aspects of the *Paṭṭhāna* with an aim to clarify and perhaps simplify the study of the *Paṭṭhāna*. Sayagyi U Òhn's approach is said to have reduced the time taken to study the skilful triplet of the *Paṭṭhāna* from one year down to six months (Ghosita 2002: 79).

We do not have a clear picture of the approaches to the study of the *Paṭṭhāna* before the time of Sayagyi U Òhn and his contemporaries. Nonetheless, we may suggest that the students had access to texts such as Theinṇ-thathana-paing Sayadaw's *Pahtàn-thòn-saung-twe*, Nandamedhā's *Pahtàn Ayakaṅk*, and the Pali-Burmese *nissayas* on the *Paṭṭhāna*. These *nissayas* are word-to-word translation of the *Paṭṭhāna* from Pali into Burmese. Of these texts, Theinṇ-thathana-paing Sayadaw's work was probably one of the earliest works that provided a

pedagogical approach to the study of the *Paṭṭhāna*. The printed edition that I have access to focuses only on the first section of the *Paṭṭhāna*, i.e., the *Paccayuddesa*, and consists of three parts. The first part is on the recitation formulae called *thòn-hkyát-su-hsoyò* (သုံးချက်စုဆိုရိုး). These recitation formulae identify and describe the three items of conditional relations, namely, the conditioning *dhammas*, the conditioned *dhammas*, and the not-conditioned *dhammas* (*paccanīya-dhamma*). The not-conditioned *dhammas* are the *dhammas* that are opposite of the conditioned *dhammas* in a conditional relation. The second part is about finding common conditions that can relate the conditioning *dhammas* and the conditioned *dhammas* of a specific relation, which is known in Burmese as *pyítsèpyaing* (ပစ္စည်းပြိုင်). In this part, the student studies the ‘enumeration section’, of the *Paṭṭhāna*. The final part focuses on the way in which a condition may influence the mental processes (*cittavīthi*) pertaining to different realms. When I interviewed the late Bamaw Sayadaw Venerable Kumārābhivamsa (1929–2023), the former Chairman of the State Saṅghamahānāyaka Committee of Myanmar, in 2009, he recalled how he had to memorise all three parts of the text. He remarked that while the *Pahtàn-thòn-saung-twe* is a great commentary on the *Paṭṭhāna* written in the Burmese language, the student does not have direct access to the canonical *Paṭṭhāna*. He also added that the *thòn-hkyát-su-hsoyò* serves as a basis for the pedagogical innovations to be developed by later Burmese *abhidhammikas*.

In sum, throughout the development of the study of the *Paṭṭhāna* in Myanmar, Burmese Abhidhamma experts combined key elements from the canonical texts with the exegetical features of the Pali commentarial tradition attributed to Buddhaghosa and other esteemed commentators within the Sri Lankan Mahāvihāra lineage. The Burmese experts also developed their own exegetical methods, as we have seen with the methods in Sūriya’s work and Sayagyi U Òhn’s work. By the 1930s and 1940s, the Burmese *Paṭṭhāna* tradition has developed a more coherent, sophisticated system of learning the text because of the effort and work done by Mūla-paṭṭhāna Sayadaw. His approach provides novel ways of studying the *Paṭṭhāna*. Mūla-paṭṭhāna Sayadaw’s work and approach are comprehensive because they cover the whole of skilful triplet (*kusalatika*) of the *Paṭṭhāna* in its entirety. As we saw above, Mūla-paṭṭhāna Sayadaw pays close attention to the *Paccanīyuddhāra* that has been attributed to elders at a Buddhist council. We also know that his approach pays close attention to the interpretations and methods in the commentary and sub-commentary of the *Paṭṭhāna*. Mūla-paṭṭhāna Sayadaw also incorporates key elements from the Burmese Abhidhamma tradition, especially from Nandamedhā’s *Pahtàn Ayakauk*, into his approach. They include, but are not

limited to, a novel modification of the arrangements of the conditional relations using tables, the use of the recitation formulae as mnemonics, and the emphasis on the nine groups of the *paccayas*. He carefully integrates a variety of elements from two exegetical traditions into a coherent system of study. This allows students to acquire basic, but crucial, knowledge of the *Paṭṭhāna* in a relatively short time. In this way, students of the *Paṭṭhāna* in the 21st century are equipped with crucial skills and knowledge and have full confidence to navigate in the “ocean of methods” (*nayasāgara*). I am sure this study guide by Venerable Atulañña will extend this tradition and make an invaluable contribution to the study of *Paṭṭhāna* in Sri Lanka, the native land of Theravada Abhidhamma tradition.

References

Sources in Pali

- Caṭṭhasaṅgīti Piṭakaṃ Abhidhammapiṭake Paṭṭhāna (Paṭhamo bhāgo)*. 1999. Chaṭṭhasaṅgīti Piṭaka series. Vol. 1. Yangon: Ministry of Religious Affairs.
- Abhidhammapiṭake Pañcapakaraṇa'tṭhakathā*. 1957. Chaṭṭhasaṅgīti Piṭaka series. Yangon: Ministry of Religious Affairs.
- Abhidhammapiṭake Pañcapakaraṇamūlaṭīkā Pañcapakaraṇaanuṭīkā*. 1960. Chaṭṭhasaṅgīti Piṭaka series. Yangon: Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Sources in Burmese

- Ghosita, Ashin. 2002. *Mogok Sayadaw Hpayagyì eí Tabhava Thathána (Biography of Mogok Sayadaw: One life in a Sāsana)*. Yangon: Than-htaík-yatana Pon-hneík-taík. (5th reprint).
- Myint Swe, U. 1979. *Pa-htàn-maha (The Great Paṭṭhāna)*. Yangon: Nha-lone-hla Sa-pay.
- Nandamedhā, Ashin. 1973. *Pahtàn Ayakauk (Analytical work of the Paṭṭhāna)*. Yangon: Ka-ba-aye Sa-pon-hneík-taík. (1st published 1958).
- Nārada, Ashin. 1951. *Pahtàn Paragu (Perfected in the Paṭṭhāna)*. Yangon: Jambu Mate-swe Pítakat Pon-hneík-taík. (1st published 1951).
- Nārada, Ashin. 1981. *A-than-hpàn Pa-htàn Póhkyázin-kyàm: Pa-hnya-wará-thinhkya (Pahtamá-twe) (Recording of Paṭṭhāna Lectures: Enumeration of the Investigation Chapter: Vol. 1)*. Yangon: Soe-moe-maík-set Pon-hneík-taík.
- Nārada, Ashin. 1995. *A-than-hpàn Pa-htàn Póhkyázin-kyàm: Pa-hnya-wará-víbangá (Recording of Paṭṭhāna Lectures: Investigation Chapter)*. Yangon: Abídama pyánpwàyei athigyi.

- Òhn, Sayakyì U. 1936. *A-bída-ma-tàn-hkun-kyàn hnín yamaka-vihtimanzari-kyàn* (Banner of the Abhidhamma and Bouquet of the Yamaka). Mandalay: Han-tha-wa-ti Píta-kat Sa-pon-hneík-taík. (4th reprint).
- Sūriya, Ashin (Theinn-thathana-paing Sayadaw). 1911. *Pahtàn-thòn-saung-twe* (Three volumes of the Paṭṭhāna). Yangon: Han-tha-wa-ti Pítakát Sa-pon-hneík-taík.
- Tilokābhivaṃsa, Ashin. 2000. *Pahtàn-let-saung* (The Gift of the Paṭṭhāna). Yangon: Taìnglìn Sa-pay.
- Tin Lwin, U. 1973. 'Palí-myanmar-níthayá-kyàm-myà (Pāli-Myanmar Nissayas)' in *Lú-mate-swei-sa-ok*. Mandalay: Lu-htu Pon-hneík-taík. pp. 270–307.

Sources in English

- Karunadasa, Y. 2010. *The Theravāda Abhidhamma: Its Inquiry into the Nature of Conditioned Reality*. Hong Kong: The University of Hong Kong.
- Kyaw, P. P. 2014. 'Paṭṭhāna (Conditional Relations) in Burmese Buddhism.' PhD thesis. King's College London.
- Kyaw, P. P. 2025. 'Calculating the Total Number of Questions in the Paṭṭhāna: the 'sata' problem in the Abhidhamma tradition of Myanmar'. Available from https://abhidhamma.com/incl.php?aw=abhidhamma_texts.txt#P.

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

You may:

Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format

Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material.

Under the following terms:

Attribution — You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.

NonCommercial — You may not use the material for commercial purposes.

No additional restrictions — You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.

How to cite this work (a suggested style): Kyaw, P. P. 'Continuity in Novel Ways of Studying the Paṭṭhāna: the Development of the Study of Paṭṭhāna in Myanmar from the 18th century C.E.', 3 June 2025, https://abhidhamma.com/incl.php?aw=abhidhamma_texts.txt#P.

This work was first published in 2024 as a foreword in *The Paṭṭhāna Study Guide* by Bhikkhu Atulañña, Anuradhapura: Theravada Publications Society.

CONTACT: Pyi Phyto Kyaw — ssbu.pyi.p.kyaw@gmail.com.