

Early Myanmar Literary Genres Concerned with Diplomacy

Khin Aye Thet^{*}

Abstract

This paper focuses selectively on diplomatic literary genres in the stream of Myanmar Literature developed during the period from Bagan era to Konbaung era. The records of domestic and foreign diplomatic affairs in Myanmar are found in Shin Disapamauxha's stone script in Bagan era, written by Ashin Zagyothumyat in Innwa era. Moreover, Loka Byuha (Worldly Strategies) treatise by Sri Uzana, the minister of In-Yon, in Konbaung era is analyzed. Therefore this paper puts an emphasis not only on the value of diplomatic Myanmar Literature but also on historical documents.

Key words: early Myanmar literature, the stream of Myanmar Literature, diplomatic Myanmar Literature, prose, analysis

Introduction

This paper emphasizes on the Myanmar Literary genres concerned with diplomacy developed with the stream of Myanmar Literature.

Literary texts in which diplomacy is found are two literary genres— prose and verse. Stone scripts, homily and diaries are found to be in the forms of prose and epics and records of significant events are in the form of verses.

Definitions of the term 'Diplomat'

Different tribes from different parts of the world set up their own nations and civilizations in accordance with their own customs, traditions, cultures and religious faiths. Since it is impossible to stand alone for a nation, every nation has to deal with its neighbouring countries so that diplomatic relationship was set up through diplomats. Therefore it is obvious that diplomats play an important role in a country. When studied about the definitions of such important persons, the Portable Myanmar dictionary defines 'diplomat' as-

“An officer sent by a king to another king to work for state affairs on behalf of his kingdom or country; an officer assigned to live and work for state affairs in another country on behalf of his country.”¹

In the Myanmar dictionary defines 'diplomat' means

“An officer who is given full authority to work for the state affairs overseas on behalf of the state.”²

The Genesis of Diplomatic Literature

There have already been diplomatic relationships since the age of 'Pyu'. It is the time, which can be regarded as the beginning of Myanmar history. Since the reign of Chinese king 'Yi Mu Shun' in AD 778, there have been friendly and diplomatic relationships between China and Pyu kingdom. In the article written by U Ye Sein in National History journal, it is expressed that

¹ The Portable Myanmar dictionary, 1999, 328

² The Myanmar Dictionary, 1991, 376

^{*} Lecturer, Department of Myanmar, Dagon University

“The group of Pyu diplomats who arrived at China in AD 802 is the first group and the group arrived at China in AD 807 is for the second one.”³

Thus, it can be guessed that diplomatic relationships have begun in the age of Pyu.

Myanmar Clan Prose written about Diplomacy

Among the prose written about diplomacy, Shin Disapamaukha's Stone script, Zagyathumyat homily and Loka Byuha (Worldly Strategies) are selected as the texts of study about diplomacy.

The ways used by diplomats in those days are recorded in the donation record of Shin Disapamaukha, the outstanding venerable Buddhist monk, who protected the country from the Chinese invasion by means of clever diplomatic ways. It took place in the year 642 of Myanmar Calendar which was in later Bagan era. In Myanmar Calendar year 647, Bagan era, during the reign of king Nara Siha Patei, the venerable Shin Disapamaukha was sent to the Chinese king as a diplomat in the mission of saving the kingdom from the danger of Chinese. For the sake of the people and the kingdom, the venerable monk started the long and difficult journey to China. The monk took a rest at Hanlin and then went on to a place called Yasei in China. When he arrived there, it was the beginning of Buddhist Lent. So the venerable monk stopped traveling and stayed there until the end of the Lent. After staying at Yasei, the monk went on the journey and reached the Chinese palace in the month of Pyatho (December). Such a long difficult journey to China indicates how the venerable monk has sacrificed his courage, diligence, and good will for the sake of the people and the nation.

The Chinese king told the venerable monk that he had sent twenty thousand warriors and respectable monks to Bagan for missionary reasons. Then the venerable monk, the diplomat of Myanmar king, initiated the diplomatic dialogue with the following points:

- that both the warriors and monks might survive only when there was enough paddy;
- that Bagan (Myanmar) could be compared to a garden and the Chinese king to a gardener so that a good gardener watered and nourished his plants and never cut off the sprouts but he ate the fruits only when what he had grown bears them;
- that although the fact that the Chinese kingdom is vast and Bagan kingdom is small, Bagan was flourished with Buddhism;

Then the venerable monk put up the following proposals to the Chinese king:

- (1) that the king should promote the development of Buddhism by taking care of Bagan kingdom where the religion has been flourishing;
- (2) that the king should order the warriors and monks to stay outside Bagan kingdom;
- (3) that the king should give Bagan enough time for the cultivation of paddy;
- (4) that the king should let the warriors and monks go into Bagan kingdom only after the harvest and when there is enough food for all of them, and then they will be able to do what they want.

In this way, the venerable monk, Shin Disapamaukha, attempted to reduce the tension of the foreign menace over the kingdom and brought forth peace and stability. According to this stone script, Ashin Disapamaukha successfully set up Sino-Myanmar peace milestone by means of diplomatic negotiation through peaceful words, without using any strategies in military. Therefore, this stone script can be regarded as a kind of national treasure in terms of both diplomatic literature and a historical document.

³ Ye Sein, U, (1979), 62

The homily written by Zagyothumyat stated the domestic diplomatic relationship between Mon and Myanmar. The war that broke out between King Rajadhirit of Hanthawadi kingdom and King Min Khaung of Innwa kingdom was one of the most remarkable wars in the history of Myanmar. It lasted for forty years. During this war, both sides sent diplomats to one another to make deals and negotiate over the conflict. In Myanmar calendar year 766, King Rajadhait and his great army marched to Innwa and reached in the vicinity of Innwa palace and camped at the surrounding of Innwa kingdom. In such situation, Myanmar venerable monk, Zagyothumyat practiced clever and dexterous diplomatic negotiation to bring peace and less tension between the two Kingdoms. The homily written by Zagyothumyat that was sent to King Rajadhirit, becomes historical documents.

King Rajadhirit and his great army camped at a place called Yewon. Near Innwa kingdom, King Min Khaung had a very weak army to defend the attack of Rajadhirit. Thus, it was the time of being weak for the defense. It was a critical situation as many people in Innwa kingdom would be in great trouble if the war broke out. Thus, King Min Khaung of Innwa kingdom held a seminar with his ministers and advisors to talk over the ways to overcome the crisis without applying the military strategies. However, his ministers and advisors were indecisive who would be skillful one to solve this problem. At such a critical moment, Zagyothumyat the venerable monk proclaimed bravely and confidently as follows-

“Even if all the Kings around the world came and surrounded Innwa, I can handle King Rajadhirit very easily.”

King Min Khaung was very pleased with his words and requested the monk to accomplish the diplomatic mission. So the monk went to King Rajadhirit together with royal presents from King Min Khaung. The meeting between King Rajadhirit and the venerable monk revealed the qualities of the good with the use of language. When the venerable monk asked why the king had travelled such a hard journey to Innwa, King Rajadhirit gave four reasons:

“To enjoy wonderful scenery, to expand the military power of the kingdom, to show off how mighty Hanthawadi kingdom is and to pay homage to a great number of Buddha images, statues and pagodas in Innwa.”⁴

Then, the venerable monk told the king as follows:

“Your Majesty, the noble donor, has no wise monks who can preach. According to the doctrine taught by Buddha, Your Majesty has neither wise and tactful ministers nor consultants.”⁵

When the king asked why the venerable monk gave such remark so, the monk continued as follows:

“In the four reasons Your Majesty gave, three of them intend to make other’s properties into yours. Since they are based on greed, it is the wrong way to get to Nirvana, the ultimate liberation. That’s why I said Your Majesty has no teachers. I also said Your Majesty has no wise ministers and advisors.

As for this remark, during the reigns of Your Majesty’s Late father, King Banya U, the master of white elephant, he sent diplomats to King Mingyi Swa of Innwa kingdom and set up diplomatic relationship; between the two kingdoms. As the result the two kingdoms were writed and both became prosperous. If

⁴ Kalar, U, (1960), 399

⁵ Kalar, U, (1960), 399

Your Majesty is a real noble sponsor for the development of Buddhism, Your Majesty should have followed the footsteps of the honorable predecessors so that all the people and monks can live peacefully and prosperously. However, no minister or advisor has ever suggested Your Majesty like this. That's why I said Your Majesty has no wise minister or advisor".⁶

Then, the venerable monk stated a presentation of the conditions of Innwa kingdom, its military power, tactics and strategies. After that the venerable monk preached on how people would be peaceful and prosperous and how Buddhism would flourish if no war broke out between the two kingdoms.

After preaching, King Rakahirit said, "My master has taught and guided me in accordance with the doctrines of Buddha. So, I am going back to my kingdom." The king donated the offertories to the venerable monk, gave back the slaves of Shwe Kyet Yet pagoda, built a rest house on a sacred premises and donated it to the pagoda, offered 'Soon' (lunch) to the Sangha (monks) and retracted back by water way. In this way, the venerable Zagyothumyat accomplished the mission for peace through clever diplomatic means between the two arrogant kings who wanted to show off their military power and might.

The document records the accomplishment of venerable Zagyothumyat and it reveals the diplomatic qualifications of a good diplomat.

In the fourth volume of 'Loka Byuha' (In Yon treatise) written by Sri Uzana, minister of 'In Yon', the protocol of Khasi/ krthe:/ diplomatic visits are recorded that the Khasi diplomats arrived at Myanmar as the fifth time and that the same protocol was practiced for them.

During the reign of King Man Aung Yadana Phayar Dayaka, in Myanmar year 1065, the Duke of Khasi sent four diplomats together with a letter of address royalty to Innwa. In that letter, the following is described.

"From time immemorial, the great Yadanapura Innwa kingdom has allied to Khasi kingdom through royal marriages just as two gold plates blended into one like water, which is not divided into two forever and all these matters are learned only when the diplomats arrived."⁷

This is an interesting piece of record included in the In Yon treatise. It also records how protocol was practiced when diplomats arrived at the kingdom.

Moreover, in Myanmar year 1070, during the reign of King Man Aung Yadana Phayar Dayaka, a group of diplomats sent by Khasiya egaba, arrived at Innwa together with a royal letter. It is found that the ceremony was held in accordance with the diplomatic protocol and thus the diplomats met with Myanmar king and offered the presents respectfully to the king.

In "Succession of diplomatic visits", volume four of 'Loka Byuha' (In Yon treatise), the detailed description of the attempt of Khan diplomats and Khasiya diplomats can be seen vividly and it is obvious that the missions of friendship and good will are carried out by diplomats, taking the presents the royal family. Even the princess was given to Innwa as a present. In all these events, the scholars or the religious icons were appointed as diplomats. This record points out that the same diplomatic protocol was typically practiced in various missions with diplomats.

⁶ Myanmar Encyclopedia, (1956), 321

⁷ Sri Unzana, **158**, 143-144

Overview

First of all, it is found that the Shin Disaamaukha stone script, which can be regarded as a kind of diplomatic literature of Bagan era, is the evidence of various diplomatic relationships, practiced in early Myanmar. This paper attempts to present the finding that early Myanmar diplomatic literary genres are found to be in the forms of stone script or of treatise on royal rituals and ornaments. The documents have been written in the form of prose which places more emphasis on knowledge.

In the history of the development of Myanmar literature, there has not been diplomatic literature exclusively. Nevertheless, this paper points out that the royal reports to the kings should be categorized as a form of diplomatic literature as these reports may have great essence of use Myanmar language in various ways. In forms of Myanmar literary genres, these diplomatic literary texts are found to be formal and serious. Moreover, due to the subject matter, it is mostly royal rituals and ornamentations, the lexical area is found to be heavily flavoured with royal and monarchical styles.

It is important that the diplomats, who have to work overseas representing the country, are always aware that they must accomplish the missions they have been assigned. This paper presents that such successful and qualified diplomats are found in early Myanmar diplomatic literary genres in the history of Myanmar literature.

Conclusion

In this paper, different early Myanmar diplomatic literary genres are sorted out and presented respectively. Since diplomatic relationships have been recorded in literary forms, it is apparent that Myanmar diplomatic literature results in the development of the clear-cut image of Myanmar in international community. Thus, it can be concluded that Myanmar diplomatic literature becomes literary heritage, and from historical, literary, religious or cultural points of view, it is a genre of Myanmar literature that can promote national image and heritage. It is also intended to impart some knowledge concerned with diplomacy in order to contribute to the promotion of the role of Myanmar diplomatic literature in the history of the development of Myanmar literature.

References

- Aung Thant, U. (1999). "Diplomats and Diplomacy", Vol. 1 & 2, Sarpay Beikmhan Press, Yangon
- Department of Myanmar Association. (1991). "Myanmar Dictionary", Ministry of Education, Yangon
- Htin, Maung. (1981). "Early Myanmar Literature on Travelling; Treatises on Travels", Sarpay Beikmhan Press, Yangon
- Kalar, U. (1960). "Grand History", Hanthawadi Pitaka Press, Yangon
- Maung Maung Tin, U. (1329). "The Grand History of Kon-Baung Dynasty", Vol. 2, Lei Di Man Dai Press, Yangon
- Maung Maung Tin, U. (1330). "The Grand History of Kon-Baung Dynasty", Vol.3, Yangon, Lei Di Man Dai Press, Yangon
- Myanmar Encyclopedia Vol. 13. (1973). Sarpay Beikmhan Press, Yangon
- Myanmar Association. (1999). "Portable Myanmar Dictionary", Okkar Kyaw Publishing House, Yangon
- Pe Maung Tin and Luce, G.H. (1928). "Shin Disapamaukha Stone Script", Anthology of Bagan Stone Scripts, Yangon
- Pe Maung Tin, U. (1977). "The History of Myanmar Literature", 3rd edition, Sabai U Publishing House, Yangon

Sri Uzana (Minister). (1958). "Loka Byuhar Treatise", Yangon

Yi Sein, U. (1979). "The Pyu diplomats arrived at China in 802", *National Historical Research Journal*, **3**,
Department of Historical Research, Yangon