

A Study on Features of Artistic works in Taung Ta Man Kyauk Taw Gyi Pagoda

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Abstract

In Taung Ta Man Kyauk Taw Gyi Pagoda, building techniques in accordance with the traditional rules and methods of building stupas, sculpturing of Buddha image in accordance with the great signs of Buddha from Pali canons, harmoniously creations of brick structures reveal the essence of Myanmar traditional arts techniques. Moreover, unlike the wall paintings of other periods, the wall paintings of this pagoda greatly emphasizes on the social life of ordinary people of that time instead of depicting life of Buddha and other Jatakas reflecting the life style of Amarapura people at that time. These artistic works are also descriptions of morality, social practice, religious practice and mental culture of Myanmar people with the representation of Amarapura period.

Introduction

Every nation has its own tradition and culture and these are the valuable things for it. In Myanmar, the traditions and culture are based on the Theravada Buddhism. Under the guidance of Buddhism, Myanmar people have been practicing the concepts on morality, sources of prosperity and blessing, the cardinal virtues or sublime states of mind, the rules of good social relations and the modesty as the basic norms for social life. Moreover, the vast abundance of pagodas, stupas, temples and other Buddhist buildings around the whole country reveal the greatness, glory and the high cultural value of Myanmar.

If, therefore, one wants to assess the value of culture in Myanmar, one must not miss the arts on Buddhism in Myanmar. Likewise, there will be no complete study the Arts on Buddhism in Myanmar if there is a miss on the period of Amarapura due to the presence of highly artistic works on Buddhism such as many temples and stupas, statues and images and other Buddhist religious buildings in that ancient place which is one of the capitals of Myanmar's last Kongboun Dynasty.

Among these many Buddhist artistic works, of ten traditional arts and crafts, the sculpture of the great Buddha image of the temple, the art of decorative work in relief with stucco of the Kyauk Taw Gyi Pagoda in Amarapura will be analyzed in this study.

Findings

Chapter (1)

Materials and Methodology

The study is carried out by direct observation of the artistic works of Kyauk Taw Gyi pagoda and the recording wall paintings and others. Taking photographs, some interviews with monks and trustees of that pagoda are also conducted and some scholarly works on Buddhist arts and architecture and Kyauk Taw Gyi pagoda are secondary sources for this study. Direct observation with fielding at the place of study and qualitative research methodology are main themes of research technique.

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The summarized history of Buddha Images

In relation to creation of Buddha images, there is no evidence that Buddha Himself preached the technique of crafting images of Him. Instead of them, Buddha permitted to worship the four main pilgrimage places on behalf of Him. Not only in the sermons of Buddha but also in the researches of archaeologists, it can be seen that the custom of crafting Buddha images cannot be found until the time of King Asoka (273-232 BC) and the evidence was the art works on the top of stone pillars erected by the king. The habit of sculpturing Buddha images started at the time of Gandhara and Mathura periods and reached its peak level in Gupta period. As the craft men of at that time had not seen the living Buddha about four hundred years before the passing away of Buddha, it seemed that they had created Buddha Images with thirty two great signs according to Pali canons such as Maha Padana Sutta of Dhigga Nikaya Mahavagga Pali, Lakkhana Sutta of Pahtika Vagga Pali and Majjima Pannasa Pali. In this way, from the Gandhara period, the art for creating Buddha Images had spread throughout India with Buddha Dhamma and, therefore, had spread to Myanmar.

The art of stone sculpture

It is the crafting of stones into various shapes and things and in Myanmar, creating a variety of artistic works on statues, images and relief with many types of stones found in Myanmar such as marble, quartz and laterite. In Burmese language, it can be called as Pann Tamo or Pan Ta Mo and the word “Pan” derived from the group of Tibeto-Burman language and means “the creator or maker” and “Tamo”, word of Mon, means “stone” from the Pyu period, this type of art had got improvement in its evolutionary development of Ava Period. The great Buddha image from Kyauk Taw Gyi Pagoda is also included in this theme.

The styles and crafting techniques of Buddha Images across time

Most of Buddhists had a practice of creating Buddha images dedicated to living Buddha. This practice is accordance with the great signs of Buddha in Pali canons. The changing styles of creating them can be understood in comparison with chronological order.

Pyu Period (6 century AD)

In Pyu period, the ear and shoulder of Buddha images are not in contact and the scared hair-knob between the spiral curl and scared hair is not on the shape of radiating sun and in clean-shaven head shape. The hairs are in spiral position and the robe was in the form of rope wearing across one shoulder and the nostril is slightly curved.

Bagan Period (12 century AD)

In the styles of Buddha images in Bagan period, there is also no contact between the ear and shoulder and the tip of ear slightly inclined into forward. The neck portion of images is long and had prominent jaws with a slight projection to the front. As a mark for wisdom of omniscience, the presence of Ushinsha (spiral curl) can be seen and it is flat with a little behind the head. The scared hair is in boss shape and Urna or hairy mole is present with the absence of a band across the forehead. The style of body portion is broad shoulder and narrow waist with three lines on the neck and the robe is thin and less in coil and roll while the fingers are not equal in length. The nose is pointed and slightly curved nostril can be seen whilst the face is in Indian style.

Ava Period (15 century AD)

Ava period is the one which the styles of Buddha images in Bagan period are Myanmarized with the presence of faintly created hairy mole and a band across the forehead and rest of features are same as previous style.

Nyaungyan Period (17 century AD)

The most prominent feature of Nyaungyan period style Buddha images is the creation of eye and eyebrow with clear gap between them in the face. The face and the jaws are flat and round. The forehead is round and spread out in shape with three lines of neck and round chin while the scared hairs are in the shapes of spines of jack fruit.

Amarapura Period (18 century AD)

The most distinctly Myanmarized styles of Buddha images can be seen in this period. The band across the forehead can be found clearly and the contact between ear and shoulder is also found. There are three lines on the neck and the hairs are sculptured in the boss shape coated with oleo-resin obtained from lacquer tree.

Yadanabon Period (19 century AD)

The distinct features of Yadanabon period are the absence of Spiral curl, the abundance of coils and rolls in robes, the increased width of band on forehead decorated with floral designs, the equal length of fingers and no contact between ear and shoulder with the support by a solid mass on the gap between them not to easily damage in Buddha images.

Wall Painting and Buddhist Arts

The origin of wall paintings rooted in the prehistoric period. Some cave arts as wall paintings can be found in historical records of prehistoric period more than ten thousand years ago. At the beginning of Christian era, natural caves had been used as monastic places and in the walls and roof or ceilings, colourful floral designs, Jatakas and the life of Buddha are drawn as artistic work. In drawing wall painting, yellow orpiment for yellow colour, mercuric sulphide for reddish brown colour, lead for dark red colour, chalk for white colour and for black are used and they had waited for the time of drying the walls to retain the painting dye.

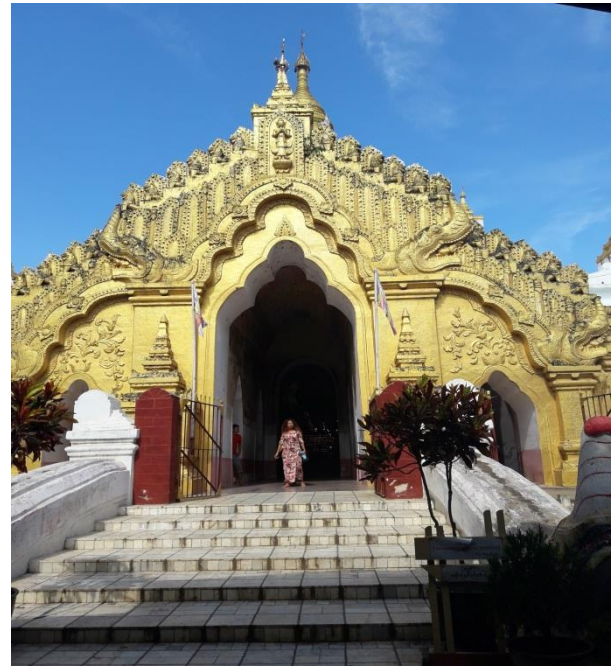
As the teachings of Buddha had been flourishing in Myanmar, there is enormous rise of religious building such as temples, stupas and others which represent the Buddhist culture and arts accompanying with wall paintings in the walls of these architectural works. These paintings are not only the decorations that enshrined Buddha but also the artistic works that describe the contemporary culture.

The location and structural design of Great Buddha Image

Kyauk Taw Gyi Pagoda is located at the Htan Taw (forest of Palm Tree) village on the eastern bank of Taung Ta Man Lake in Amarapura township of Mandalay Region. The great Buddha image is made up of marble and the measurements are twelve feet and ten inches from pedestal to the band on forehead, three feet from the band on forehead to spiral curl, the width of neck is six feet and ten inches, two feet and four inches from ear to shoulder, seven feet and nine inches from left proximity of shoulder to right side, the width of right arm is five feet and three inches, the width of right elbow is four feet and nine inches, the width of body is twelve feet and nine inches, one foot below the pedestal and the whole height of Buddha image is fifteen feet and ten inches.

This great Buddha image is showing that it is created in accordance with the great signs of Maha Purisa (great man) from Pali canons. The less curves and rolls in robe result the fullness of body of the great Buddha image and significance of the facial expression of it especially the presence of hairy mole at the center of two eyebrows. The presence of three lines of neck, reddish lips, broad and glorious forehead and long ear contribute the attributes of this great image.

Illustration



Wall Paintings from Kyauk Taw Gyi

The wall paintings can be found at the four entrance gate ways with ink inscriptions on stucco but only wall paintings is analyzed in this study.

2.1.1 the wall paintings in northern wall of eastern gateway

In the northern wall of eastern gateway, the designs of lotus flower, the foot prints of Buddha and ornamental motif in stucco depicting ogres clutching a garland with both hands are beautifully drawn in the network of floral arabesques can be found. The depiction of worshipping Buddha by Devas, personnel and alchemists who possess supernatural power can be seen under the ceiling and under this, the stupa with rectangle shaped compound, hall of monastic buildings, Buddha images and the ceremony of moving around the tree of plenty in novitiation period with scene of forest and hills.

2.1.2 the wall paintings in southern wall of eastern gateway

The forest of palm trees and the various pagodas of King Bagan all around the kingdom are depicted in the southern wall of eastern gateway.

2.1.3 the wall paintings in eastern wall of southern gateway

The most prominent pictures in this place are the ones that describing the festival of boat competition. Moreover, the pictures of monastery within the compound of Maha Vijayaransi Pagoda, Shwe Ze Gone Pagoda of Bagan, many tiered brick buildings from Ava and the ones that depicting the taking bath of elephants in the forests and lakes are drawn.

2.1.4 the wall paintings in western wall of southern gateway

In this place, the distinctly visible pictures are the multi-tiered brick building of Lokasaphu pagoda of Ava, Eaindawyar pagoda and Eaindawyar monastery of Ukkalapa, lakes, going around of novitiation ceremony and elephants that taking bath in water. Some strange pictures that can be found are the picture of two persons with supernatural power fighting for nymph-like beautiful girl and the picture of warship which carries canons.

2.1.5 the wall paintings in southern wall of western gateway

Some pictures are about stars and constellations, Devas, flying angels, persons with supernatural power and some are pictures of pagodas such as Shwe Bone Myint pagoda and Shwe Bone Pwint pagoda from Pyay, Ananda temple of Bagan and wayside public resthouse.

2.1.6 the wall paintings in northern wall of western gateway

The pictures in this place are stars and constellations, stairway of Kusodaw pagoda from Mandalay, Kusodaw pagoda from Thae Inn village of Kukhan and some scenes of religious buildings.

2.1.7 the wall paintings on the ceiling

In ceiling, pictures on stars and constellations, pictures of boat competition and elephants, tigers and buffalos can be found.

Illustrations



Conclusion

The wall paintings of Kyauk Taw Gyi Pagoda can be assumed that they are not based on single workmanship but multiple handiworks of expressional imaginations depicting many pagodas of King Bagan around the kingdom in the inner walls of temple. In association with these pagodas, forest of palm trees, mountain and hills, elephants, buffalos and pilgrims are clearly drawn and other pictures of Myanmar traditions such as novitiation ceremony, ceremony of moving around the tree of plenty.

The female musicians in the picture of these ceremonies show the types of careers of that time and boat competitions also indicates one of the traditional community customs in Taung Ta Man region. The foot print of Buddha on the wall of ceiling also describes one hundred and eight features of Buddha foot print. The pictures of stars and constellations, Devas, Brahma are showing the belief of Myanmar people and the figure of two tigers is assumed to be the concept of Myanmar art of painting that ignores the nature of distance.

The wall paintings in Kyauk Taw Gyi pagoda are unlike others in Bagan depicting the meritorious deeds of king Bagan with the descriptions of community traditional customs, cultural festivals, the styles of costumes of that time and other aspects of social life of indigenous people. In summary, these wall paintings can describe not only the economy, social and political condition but also the essence of Myanmar culture.

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